

People of the Book

Each one defined as monotheistic, the three great world religions hold to one God, each believing they have the message from God in the form of a holy book. Jews believe Jehovah has given them his words in what Christians call the Old Testament; Muslims believe Allah has given them his words in the Qur'an, and Christians believe they have the Word of God in the entire Bible, Old and New Testament. All of the followers of these three religions define themselves as a People of the Book.

But what does it mean to be a People of the Book? Each of these religions believe their book has come directly from God and is authoritative both for life and the practice of their religion. The Jews hold to the same Old Testament writings as do Christians, and Muslims accept portions of both the Old and New Testament as being forms of communication from God in a time previous to the writing of the Quran.

So, what is the difference for Christians? How does our view differ from a Jewish or Muslim view? The first and most important difference comes from the fact that we, fundamental Christians, believe we have the true Book, the Bible, and that it is the inspired Word of God. This belief is based on II Tim. 3:16-17 "All Scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

We believe that this inspired Word of God is the means whereby God has communicated His truth to the world and the avenue through which He works in the lives of His children to bring us into conformity to our Savior Jesus Christ. We also believe the Word of God is powerful and will accomplish its intended goal when it is read and applied to a life, Heb. 4:12 "For the word of God [is] living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

But, a very important question which we must address is this, "What does this mean in the lives of the followers of this Book, our Bible?" How is it different from the followers of the Quran? It is easy for us to say, "They are following a false book, and even while they call themselves People of the Book, they do not have the right book, the Bible." But, is that all there is to the issue? We call ourselves a People of the Book, and we stand up and hold our Bibles high and fight for the doctrine of divine inspiration. But, an essential question is this, "Did God give us His Book so we could defend it against other religious beliefs and argue concerning its validity and value over other books? Or, did God give us His Book, the Bible, because He wanted to communicate with us who He was, how a person can become a Child of God, and what being a follower of God really means in our daily lives?" The answer to this question is the fact that God has communicated His will to us because He desires that we might truly be a People of the Book. It is important to note that while this means more than to simply argue for the validity of our Book, it does not diminish our stand and battle for the inspiration and inerrancy of the Word of God. But we must understand that battle is not the end of the matter.

One of the major arguments Muslim peoples have against Christians concerning the validity of our Bible and our faith is that they do not see consistency between what we say the Bible commands and how we live out our faith before a watching world. I fear in some instances that many Christians, while they call themselves People of the Book are not truly living out in their own lives what God has intended and should more accurately be called a People who have a Book. Being a People of the Book means more than simply holding to the belief that the Bible is

the Word of God. It also means that we follow the teachings of the Book in our lives. It means that the Words of God are to be the driving force in our entire lives, our decision making process, our evaluation of right and wrong, our interpretation of culture, and our standard for all relationships. Being a People of the Book means our Bible reproves us when we make wrong decisions, corrects us when we err from the truth and instructs us in righteousness.

The Christian world has been confronted with the world of Islam which has claimed to be following a book from God, and it has forced us to evaluate what our faith means in daily life and activities. We have been confronted with the fact that the Muslim followers have been willing to die because they feel this is in keeping with the dictates of their book, the Qur'an.

Should we say we have the true Book from God, the Bible? Does our argument seem valid to those watching the debate? Are we willing not only to die as martyrs for the Word of God; but more importantly, are we willing to live according to the Word of God?

Can we stand up and say to the world, we are the true People of the Book? Can we say we have the living, inspired, inerrant Word of God passed down to us from God through the individual writers of the inspired text? While I think we would readily give a resounding YES to these questions there still remains the question being posed by the world around us. Are we a People of the Book, or are we a People who have a Book? It is imperative that we, as born-again believers be able to say to the World of Islam, and to the watching world around us that we are truly a People of the Book.