

Loaded Bibles and made-up minds

By Mike Feazell

All of us bring our biases, prejudices and preconceived ideas to the Bible, like it or not.

Not long ago, I was listening to a smartly dressed Christian lady seeking recruits in a Sunday School class for a new Bible study program she had helped launch.

"We don't push any agenda," she explained. That sounded good, I thought. It would be nice to study the Bible with people who have nothing to prove, no agenda to push. I kept listening.

"You've probably been in Bible studies where people argue over this biblical interpretation or that biblical interpretation. Well, as you know, that's how heresies get in. So we just study the Bible and don't get into any arguments or controversies over doctrine."

That's a noble approach, I thought. Maybe they agree ahead of time that when a point of disagreement comes up, they will just identify it, move on and focus only on non-controversial issues. I kept listening.

"We just let the Bible lead, and that settles all the arguments and prevents heresy," she explained.

Well, after that, all I could hear was, "There are no cats in America, and the streets are paved with

independent churches, reformed churches and reorganized churches—all split—neatly, or not so neatly, categorized somewhere within mainline Protestantism, mainstream Christianity, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Evangelicalism, Fundamentalism, et al., and sporting theologies ranging from conservative to liberal to orthodox to neo-orthodox to liberation to natural, et cetera.

So we speak of the Methodist "family" of churches, or the Baptist "family" of churches, or the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Adventist, Reformed or Congregational "families" of churches. There is even a Mennonite "family" of churches. (And we're only talking about North American churches!) And what do all these "families" have in common? You guessed it. They can't get along. They disagree over some point or points that have convinced them that they are the faithful ones, in distinction to the rest of the "family," not to mention in distinction to the rest of Christianity.

The real essentials

We hope, of course, that we all agree on the real essentials of the faith: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for our sins and rose again for our salvation. After that, it gets sticky as to exactly what the essentials

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cheese" (from Papa Mouse's song in the animated film, *An American Tail*), because I happen to know that there is no such thing as a Bible study that "just lets the Bible lead." All of us bring our biases, prejudices and pre-conceived ideas to the Bible, like it or not. We might do our best to control them, but we cannot entirely eliminate them, so we do well to at least be aware of them.

Feuding families

There are many things that Christians do not agree about. That is, after all, why there are denominations, sects, non-denominational churches,

are, and worse, exactly how they should be worded. I'm sure some will take great exception to my wording two sentences back.

In my experience, "We stand on the Bible" is just another way of saying, "We use the Bible to promote and defend our sectarian views." People who want to learn from the Bible don't come together with loaded Bibles and made-up minds. They come together with open hearts and humble spirits, not to argue, but to listen. Regardless of what church family we might be signed up with, we can still learn from one another in healthy, respectful discussion, under the word of God, as loved children in God's family. •

