

The Scriptures and Salvation

To those who say that the Scriptures are inessential to our salvation

Let me, in opening, delineate what clarity our Lord has granted me: The power of our Lord is over all and He has the power to touch all in His creation. He yearns after them and calls them, whether or not they have ever had the opportunity to receive the Scriptures or had the great grace to explore them. Those who make an idol of the Bible, calling it the Word of God, giving it the title of our living and present Lord, do miss the mark. (*John Chapter 1, ¹Revelation 19:11-16²*) It is Christ Jesus our Lord whose grace gifts us with salvation, if we will but seek Him, wait upon Him, and do His will. It is not scripture that brings grace, but Christ Jesus, though He most often and most easily utilizes the scriptures to bring people along. This is certainly the understanding of our early Quaker forbearers, the holy men and women of God in scripture, and many today.

That said, I feel it upon my heart from our Lord to offer caution in the discussion of scripture and salvation:

First, we can too easily become centered on our *individual* experiences with scripture and our own experiences of being drawn to Christ Jesus. While our witness to our own rescue from the World can be useful to a point, it can also lead us inadvertently to equate our experience as the common or even universal experience of men and women today. Yes, some do find that early on in their lives they're turned off by Scripture or have no significant acquaintance with it and yet Christ Jesus leads them along until they are finally open to Him, engaged with Him, and have passages of the Bible opened to them by His Spirit. Yet many others have grown up with an appreciation and love of the Scriptures. For these many the use of a word like "inessential" to describe the Scriptures will simply move them to reject what we have to say, because they are aware of how significant (this is not to say "sufficient") the Scriptures have been in their own salvation and sanctification.

Second, we must be sensitive to how others than ourselves may read and respond to the words we are using. We live in a time in which the World denigrates Scripture, ridicules it, and seeks to dismiss it. After all, its words from God stand too often as a judgment against the World's evil actions, destructive politics, lack of responsibility and self-control. If we say that the Scriptures are "inessential" to salvation, the ready response of fallen human nature is "Good! I don't have to deal with them. They're not important. Anyway they're full of falsehood, myths and violence, and are very difficult to read and understand. Good riddance!" One Friend has noted: "if not resisted, the Spirit will guide us all individually, and will provide a personal relationship with God based on direct experience of His presence, guidance, and love." *If not resisted*, but the World and our own selfishness resist mightily and Christ's people must be careful not to feed that resistance. Ill considered statements on our part will simply feed their rejection of both Christ and Scripture and make it far more difficult for them to find the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

While our first Friends and Barclay witnessed and testified to God's ability to reach all men and women, whatever their circumstances, they in no way dismissed the importance, usefulness, and efficacy of the Scriptures in the

work of salvation and sanctification. We must be most careful in the words we use, because we should not imply that the gospels and the words of our Lord "inessential;" that our Lord's life, crucifixion, sacrifice, and resurrection are "not required;" that, if such knowledge is "not required" and "insufficient" for our salvation, we may ignore them completely and consign them to the ash heap of history. Certainly these are the easy spins the World can put on our words, spins that point out where our words might lead others.

Fourth, ill chosen words may not only encourage those in the World to continue to resist our Lord's calls, but it may also retard the salvation and sanctification of those who might be richly helped by contact with us. Those who love the Scriptures, but are stuck and stalled in Bibliolatry will hardly be helped by the way a declaration that the Scriptures are "inessential." In our haste to point to what is essential to salvation, we risk inadvertently throwing into the negative much of what the Lord has given us to assist us in finding and walking on the straight and narrow Way: His witness in the lives and counsel of others (the authority of the Body of Christ: that authority comes from Christ the Head of His Body), the Scriptures, and that cloud of witnesses from the ages that have left the testimony of their lives, exhortations, and admonitions. These gifts are given us to aid us and ease us on the Way. Would it not be far better to give these gifts their positive due, rather than declaring them "not essential," thus inadvertently encouraging our brothers and sisters to ignore and neglect them as unimportant?

Finally, I see a common danger in emphasizing too much our *individual* experience and our *personal* beliefs. Consider the observation that "If not resisted the Spirit will guide all of us *individually*, and will provide a *personal relationship* with God based on direct experience of His presence" [italics mine]. We live in a culture that has made an idol out of individualism. The over-emphasis of the *personal* and *individual* in salvation language is both typically American (a reflection of our mania for rugged individualism and self-reliance) and the ground of much trouble, sorrow, and lost community today. It is essential that we recognize our Lord's call to be His people and His power to gather us. Our first Friends found that their spiritual unity in the faith was their most impressive witness to the dying World around them. They had given up themselves to be His people and to do His will in all things. Becoming God's people - not just our personal salvation - is the hard work of sanctification, because it requires us to yield up ourselves and see others as better than ourselves. Yet, to allow ourselves to be truly gathered into God's people becomes one of the most precious and strengthening events of our life in Him and one of the strongest witnesses to others of the reality of our Lord's power and presence.

Know that I put forward these comments only that we all may be drawn more completely into our Lord's precious Kingdom and strengthened in our labor to call our dying World to His salvation.

*A Friend of Christ,
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1. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in*

darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. . . John 1:1-5 and continuing

2. And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horse, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. Revelation 19:11-16