

Keith Ward

**What the Bible Really Teaches:  
*A challenge for fundamentalists***

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'I am a born-again Christian. But I do not believe what born-again Christians are supposed to believe . . .'

Professor Ward has had a distinguished career in academic theology but this book emerges from something much simpler. He seems to have become aware from his earliest days as a committed Christian that the Bible simply doesn't say what many of his friends told him it said, and as he explores that theme here he distinguishes beliefs which are 'properly evangelical' from those fundamentalist views that he argues are not really Bible-based at all. He admits that this is an adversarial book, and attacks Christian fundamentalism for being highly selective in its emphasis on a few favourite biblical texts which are then often distorted or given a very implausible meaning in order to fit a set of beliefs already held.

So, in this readable and engaging book Ward challenges the reader to look again at what the Bible says. Sometimes this can be quite provocative, as when he establishes quite clearly that either what Matthew says is false - that Jesus taught the Torah should be kept in the fullest rigour - so there are definitely false statements in the New Testament, or else, if Matthew is accurate, then 'Christians do, and should, disobey the clear moral teaching of Jesus', which is exactly what he forces the reader to acknowledge that we all do. Either way it follows that some moral injunctions in the Bible, even if they are said to be issued by Jesus himself, are in fact not binding upon Christians!

Here, as in other chapters, Ward finds a way forward through the principle of sublation, the cancelling of an obvious or literal meaning of a text by a later teaching which leads us to discover a deeper spiritual interpretation. This is one of six principles of interpretation that he outlines very clearly in a helpful early chapter. What follows in later chapters are concrete examples of these principles in action, as he interprets biblical teaching about the Coming of Christ in Glory, about Salvation, about Judgement, Heaven and Hell - eight such themes in all.

My own reactions varied. On some points I rejoiced when Ward crystallized conclusions that I had been tentatively reaching towards myself for some time, and there are other moments when I've been delighted to find satisfactory solutions to problems that have previously perplexed me. The whole thrust is towards optimistic, inclusive and positive interpretations that really do sound more like Good News than do most fundamentalist teachings! In places though, I found myself thinking, 'Yes, but what about . . .?' as other passages of scripture came to mind, and there are times when what he regards as fundamentalist might be seen by many as mainstream, or at least to have been so in the fairly recent past. In the end, on each particular matter, readers will have to judge for themselves whether Ward succeeds in his aim of being more biblical than those he disagrees with, but to acknowledge that is perhaps to concede one of his main points, that there is not 'just one correct interpretation, which is obvious by just reading the Bible ... the Bible contains some shocking facts for fundamentalists.'

Desmond Alban SSF