



## It's All on Rails

**T**he beginning of 2025 is a big deal as it relates to my commute to and from work each business day. Early 2025 is the date set for a brand-new train station to open close to my home. This means that no longer will I need half-an-hour to get from my front door to the station stop I use. Rather, all I'll need is ten minutes, with a convenient Starbucks Coffee positioned smartly along the way. I'll board the train with a hot cup of coffee in hand, and ride the rails to work a bit more quickly than I do now.

*It's all on rails for me*, which is to say, it's all quite easy. In an urban sprawl the size of Los Angeles County, to leave the driving to someone else is a real treat. Not that I have much of a choice with my eyesight as it is, still, I appreciate the work someone else is doing on my behalf. I simply board the train, sit down, sip on my coffee and look out my window as I move from Point A to Point B along the tracks someone else has laid down.

As I do, I see the same sights each day. The townhomes, retail storefronts, public schools and train stations are predictable and routine. Sometimes, I realize they are so familiar to me that I don't really see them anymore. Everything just blends into the background scenery as I pass quickly by.

We can approach our study of the Bible, especially in a religious setting, in much the same way. We walk into a church building for biblical teaching (we climb on board). We sit down. Often, we are presented with an immediate hot cup of coffee as we do. As we listen,

we move from Point A to Point B, from a question to an answer on any given topic, based on that particular denomination's doctrinal stance and biblical orientation. We are transported through the Bible as if **on rails**, their rails, in a way that they hope will lead to the listener's ultimate spiritual formation and full participation in the life of that religious entity.

**Too often... we travel from the questions to the answers as the denomination intends—all the thinking has been done for us.**

The established tracks then continue as the listener is invited, if not pressured, to plunge into *friendship circles* that teach the spiritual disciplines, discipleship classes, small groups, men's and women's groups, mid-week Bible studies, potlucks, and church sponsored community outreach opportunities.

All of this is done in the context of how that particular church interprets the Bible, and believes we should demonstrate our faith their way in *living it out*. **It's all on rails**, packaged so smartly and conveniently; ready to use and pass on to the next new listener.

As I ride the rails in such denominational settings, I often wonder, is there room for critical thinking in how we approach the Bible? Is there room for the asking of the tough questions, questions that may indeed muddy the waters of the simplistic answers I listen to? Is there harm in letting my Bible study time become so familiar that I don't see new insights or possibilities within Scripture? Sadly, too often **it's all on rails**, and we

travel from the questions to the answers as the denomination intends—all the thinking has been done for us.

As I ride the rails, I listen closely for the tools of sound biblical interpretation. Does the teacher understand the Testament (Old or New, and hence, the Covenant) from which she or he is teaching? Is the Scripture being expounded set in its context, genre, language and culture of the day in which it was written? Does the pastor understand the issue being addressed, and the audience to whom the original author was writing? Most importantly, does the teaching come from a Christ-centered perspective? Is the lens being used to open-up the passage the lens of Christ Jesus himself?

I like riding the rails. I like the ease and simplicity of getting wherever I need to go without much trouble or thought. Truth is, I like the predictable and the routine. Call it part of my human nature. However, when it comes to time in the Bible, these truths of my human nature work against me. And many such denominational settings do not help. Although I can appreciate the ease and simplicity of many of the station stops taught along the way, I need to ask the tough questions of Scripture. It cannot be on rails. I need to look for new insights and possibilities in each verse. Whether I am reading the Old or the New Testament, I must do so through the lens of Christ. **Christ Jesus is the whole point of the Bible.** He alone must be the rails, the station stops, the train and the scenery outside my window. □

—Ed Dunn