

115 Good news! Good news!

In the faith tradition I come from, the Bible is central. Has that changed for me? Well, yes and no. I would say that I don't so much have faith in the Bible, but rather in the God who is portrayed in the Bible.

In the first days of my faith, I realised that, while it all sounded like really good news, I sussed that it all depended on the Bible; and how could I know whether it was reliable?! A wise elderly gentleman I met (he was probably 50 or 60!) didn't try to defend it, rather he asked me, "Would the God that you have come to know and love give you a document that was **not** reliable?!"

So, 50 years on, what would I say to that enquiring 20-year-old? Just a few thoughts...

- **It's not an infallible document.** It was written by fallible humans. For example, Mark, who said, "As Isaiah wrote", and then quoted Malachi [109], and yesterday I spotted Mt 2:23 *So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene,"* yet no biblical – or other – prophecy exists, as far as anyone can find out, talking about a Nazarene!)

Saying that the Bible is infallible makes it like cast iron – one tiny crack and the whole thing can shatter. To me, though, the Bible is more like steel, i.e. because it's flexible, not rigid, it stays solid when it's subjected to a range of different forces from different directions.

- **It's not a scientific document.** Treat the Bible as if it were, and you can bring it into disrepute. If we don't allow our growing scientific understanding of the world to influence how we understand the message of the Bible, we can cause people to reject it. It's made of steel; it is perfectly well able to withstand challenges from evolution, quantum physics, cosmology, neuroscience, developmental psychology (e.g. physical chastisement [77] and gender issues [101]) – but it can only withstand pressure if we're willing to be flexible.

- **It's not an immutable guide to behavioural ethics.** (That was the Pharisees' mistake.) Yes, it provides wonderful guidelines for interpersonal and inter-creational behaviour, but trying to tie that down to specifics turns it from steel to cast iron.

OK, enough of your 'not's, Paul. What IS the Bible? Why is it so strong and flexible like steel?

- **See the Person behind it.** In Jesus' teaching, he always looked behind the teaching of the Old Testament to the nature of the Person it portrayed – the prodigal Father – the Exodus-shaped God. Jesus pointed always to the loving Father seeking to rescue, redeem, release, restore, recover, regather, rehabilitate, renovate, rebuild. (Sorry, I got a bit carried away there!)

- **See the different writing styles.** Why is there so much of a variety of types of literature, so many different types of author? We all learn in different ways, and at different times in our lives, so God has gone to great lengths in the Bible to communicate his love in all sorts of different ways. God is desperate that we should appreciate his love, and will do whatever it takes to communicate it.

- **See that it's mainly in narrative form.** But we don't like that! Maybe that's the spirit of the age? We want facts. "*Just give me the facts!*" But that's not how God communicates, sorry. It's not about giving us facts; God wants to change our hearts (how else can sin be defeated?!) and narrative is a very powerful means. A story doesn't have to be true literally factually true in order to communicate truth. (Are parables literally true?!)

- **Study it for relationship.** If we study the Bible in order to *understand* God, we're bound to fail. Rather, study is as a means to find the Person behind it. Then we'll be able to give God our worth-ship; we'll love God for all he's worth.

Paul Bev. 1.3.20