

I'm still grappling with how to approach the Scriptures, and in doing so I turned to a well-known passage: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work* (2 Tim 3:16,17).

The Bible I'm using is an NIV Study Bible that I bought in August 1991, so I've had my moneysworth out of it, and have often found the notes very helpful. Referring to the note on *All Scripture*, it says that it means primarily the Old Testament, but that some of the other NT books would have been in circulation at the time of writing and were 'equal in authority' to the OT.

The note on *God-breathed* says, "Paul affirms God's active involvement in the writing of Scripture, an involvement so powerful and pervasive that what is written is the infallible and authoritative word of God." Really? Is that what 'God-breathed' means?

OK, but I'd like to ask the writers of that note, "What do you mean by 'infallible'?" I can see how a person, like a Pope, might claim to be infallible because if we don't know what he (or she?!) means by some statement, we can ask for clarification, and ask how it applies in this or that situation.

But how can a book be infallible? And in any case, which book(s) are they referring to? I'm guessing that they don't mean that the NIV translation is infallible, but is even the Hebrew (and Greek if we include the NT) version infallible? And if so, how do I, as a non-Hebrew(Greek)-speaker know what's 'right'? So even if the Hebrew books were infallible, I would still have to trust a human being's interpretation + translation; and I say 'interpretation' because you can't translate something without some degree of interpreting. (The JW's have a very high view of Scripture – in some ways, they take it more seriously than we do – and I guess they use the same Hebrew and Greek sources as we do, but they come up with a **very** different translation!)

So, as much as I might like to have an 'infallible and authoritative word of God' I do have to rely on other people's interpretations.

But if we could have an 'infallible and authoritative word of God', would that be helpful? Oh, yes! It would enable me to know what's right and what's wrong. I could pronounce on whether divorce was right or wrong (or in what circumstances it's right or wrong). And abortion. And gay relationships. And...

Do you see the blind alley I'm trying to lead you into?

For my first 48 years, I was pretty sure that, by and large, I was 'right'. But knowing (or thinking you know) what's right and wrong can be very, very dangerous. What did Jesus spend much of his ministry doing? Apart from associating with, and caring for, the poor and marginalised, he spent much of his time giving the Scribes and Pharisees what for: "You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean." and "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?" Why was he getting so cross with them?!

They (and Saul – a.k.a. Paul – was chief among them!) were people who took the Scriptures very, very seriously. They studied them carefully and worked out what was right and what was wrong,

and they took the time and trouble to do “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”. So what’s wrong with that?! Where did the Pharisees go so horribly wrong? And how did I go so badly wrong for all those years?

They misunderstood the **purpose** of the Scriptures (to draw people into a covenant relationship with God and one another) and **therefore** they misinterpreted them – massively.

For years I’ve struggled with my own faith, feeling that it was wrong in some way, but not being able to articulate my unhappiness. I would say that I’m now beginning to find a way of interpreting the Scriptures that (I hope and believe) is a bit more like the way Jesus interpreted them, and less like the Pharisees.

(This has been a bit negative, sorry, but I’ve tried to express the positive side of this in essay (5) Interpreting scripture.)

Paul Bev. 16.9.18