

## 116 Taking the Bible more seriously

I decided that, for Lent, I would give up reading Christian books and only read the Bible. For starters, I took off on a drone flight over Luke's Gospel – as I did with Romans, and which I found so helpful for getting the bigger picture. But it didn't quite work...

Day 1: The first 25 verses of Luke 1 (i.e. less than half a chapter)

Day 2: Half a verse! – I followed up 'Nazareth', found the 'Nazarene' error and wrote [114,115]

Day 3: Almost three chapters! Yay!

Day 4: Half a sentence (Luke 5:1), and here we are again, with an article about it!

“One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding round him and **listening to the word of God**, ...”

Knowing what most people mean when they say 'the Word of God', I then decided to check out the NT's use of this phrase (38 times) and also 'the Word of the Lord' (10 times). What ideas do they convey? How long have you got?! It carries a breadth of meaning in different contexts.

But of those 48 occurrences, I couldn't actually see any that referred to the written words that we now call 'the Bible'! So where did the idea come from that 'the Word of God' means 'the Bible'?

With a strong 'I want to know why!' urge, I broke my Lenten fast and went to internet to find out what Christians say about this. At the end of the article is the second item that Google offered me, and it starts,

**Word of God – The Bible** *so called because the writers of its several books were God's organs in communicating his will to men.*

The definition then goes on to explain that '*Whatever the inspired writers here declare to be true and binding upon us, God declares to be true and binding*' and '*therefore free from all error of fact or doctrine or precept.*'

As you can imagine, I have real problems accepting that, for various reasons:

- 1) There clearly **are** errors, e.g. the two I found, so it's not inerrant, well not unless you say it's inerrant except for certain passages that are ... errant.
- 2) How do we know exactly what the 'truth' is that is 'binding upon us' (always assuming that we **can** know what 'true' is exactly)? Answer: we have to interpret the meaning of the words.
- 3) In any case, which version of the Bible are we talking about? i.e. which set of books do we accept as being canonical?

I'm more than happy that the Bible is both inspired and inspiring, but I don't understand how we get away from the human element in the process of searching for God's truth.

- 1) One set of humans (OK, inspired by God) wrote the books that we now call 'the Bible'.

2) Other humans decided (but some disagreed) which books should make up ‘the Bible’.

3) Another set of humans (interpret, in order to) translate the Bible into English.

3) Another set of humans (you and me) interpret it to apply it to our lives.

And yet despite all these human factors some Christians want us to accept that ‘the Word of God’ is infallible and inerrant.

But let’s look at this from a different perspective. Why did God inspire people to write the Bible in the first place? It was to communicate to us the wonderful unending love that we see in Jesus.

And when we agree with Paul that ‘all scripture’ was inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16,17), which scriptures did he include? (It was partly a prophetic statement because some of the books that we now insist are in ‘the Scriptures’ hadn’t been written at that stage!)

Can God **only** speak to us through those 66 books (+ the Apocrypha if your church allows it). Did God **only** inspire those few books? Does God not also inspire other humans to communicate that amazing love to us in written and other ways – poets, hymn writers, song writers, artists, banner makers(!), architects, sculptors? No, God will use any and every way to help us to appreciate what Jesus has done in dying for us, so that sin might be conquered, and we can live to praise of God.

Why then do we get so precious about those 66 particular ‘sacred’ books? Here are a couple of suggestions.

1) **Fear of sliding into error.** But I did a pretty good job of sliding into error while still only using the required 66 books! “Yes, but you got your interpretation wrong.” OK, but who’s to say that my views now are any less in error than they were then?!

And the Pharisees were expert at interpreting Scripture to work out what was true, but just look at what Jesus thought of them!

2) **Control.** While (1) is at least a good motive, this one is a bit suspect. We can all see how the church has manipulated people by insisting that they had a monopoly of truth, and that if people didn’t pay money, behave in a particular way, etc., then they would suffer the consequences.

Think of the trouble that Wycliffe and others faced for translating the Bible into a language that people could actually understand. The clergy were worried they would no longer be in control.

No! “Perfect love casts out fear...” If we sincerely study our Bibles, will God not help us to build up our relationship with each other and with God? We actually take our Bibles **more** seriously by **not** trying to turn it into the Divine Word of God. And we also enable people outside the church to take us and our faith more seriously if we **don’t** try to say that we have all the answers.

A negative start, sorry, but now I can study the kaleidoscope of meaning in: ‘the word of God’.

*Dictionaries – Easton's Bible Dictionary – Word of God*

**Word of God [N]**

(Hebrews 4:12 , etc.). The Bible, so called because the writers of its several books were God's organs in communicating his will to men. It is his "word" because he speaks to us in its sacred pages. Whatever the inspired writers here declare to be true and binding upon us, God declares to be true and binding. This word is infallible, because written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and therefore free from all error of fact or doctrine or precept. (See INSPIRATION; BIBLE.) All saving knowledge is obtained from the word of God. In the case of adults it is an indispensable means of salvation, and is efficacious thereunto by the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit (John 17:17; 2 Tim John 3:15; John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:23).

[I'm guessing the bit I highlighted should have said: 2 Tim 3:16.17.]