

2. The Final Word

Biblical material: Matt. 4:4-10; 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; Gal. 1:11, 12; James 2; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 3:16.

Quotes:

- The Good Book—one of the most remarkable euphemisms ever copied. *Ashley Montagu*
- If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today. *Mahatma Gandhi*
- It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand. *Mark Twain*
- The faith will totter if the authority of the Holy Scriptures loses its hold on men. We must surrender ourselves to the authority of the Holy Scripture, for it can neither mislead nor be misled. *Augustine*

Questions

In what way is the Bible “the final word”? How does the assertion that the Bible is “God-breathed” sound to modern ears? How do we explain the concept of inspiration? What was the process through which the Bible came into being? Can we trust the different translations? In what way is the Bible authoritative? How do we share our ideas about the Bible with others?

Discussion/ Comment

As the lesson makes clear, Jesus validates Scripture. And yet Scripture also validates Jesus. What is going on here? While this mutual validation is undeniable, we have to step back and ask ourselves how all this is true. We are not told to believe in the Bible or in Jesus without examining the evidence. In fact we do well to examine all the evidence so that we can be sure it makes sense and is consistent.

If the Bible is God's final word, as the title for this week's study suggests, does this mean that God no longer speaks? Or is it final in the sense of being the ultimate authority? In which case, does this mean that nothing in the Bible should be investigated, that everything should be accepted on the basis of unquestioned authority?

That God still speaks to us, and in many ways, is surely true. And it is the same God of the Bible who invites us to reason together with him. He gives us the Bible to read and understand, which means we are meant to use our minds. We need to do all in our power to gain the correct understanding, and not read causally and trivially, assuming that what the Bible writer set down in his time is always obvious to us today. The language of the Bible is human language, with all its deficiencies, so we do well to pay close attention to what is actually being said. Only then can we derive God's word for us today.

The question of inspiration is often misunderstood, and can lead to many mistaken ideas. The concept that the Bible was given by dictation from God is not endorsed by the Biblical evidence. Nor is the idea that the Bible is infallible in its human aspects—like the sun “standing still” and so on, based on old ideas of astronomy. Human writers write using their own human language, and try best to communicate God's ideas. The Holy Spirit guides, so that there is no error in delivery of spiritual issues. But there is an advancing of truth, and deepening of understanding, a growing in meaning. Especially is this true as we compare the New with the Old Testament. We do not say that previous writings are deficient, rather that each writer wrote

only that which he could understand. With the coming of Jesus, things become so much plainer, wider, deeper, so that we are the most fortunate, living with the benefit of the accumulated explanations of so many of God's penmen.

Text comments

Matt. 4:4-10; 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56. Jesus' Biblical response to temptations is an example for us; he also makes it clear that there can be no debate on the good intentions of God. Replying to the chief priests and elders, Jesus also quoted Scripture that they should have known. His reference to the fulfillment of Scripture also demonstrate how seriously he took it, and how he saw himself as fulfilling God's promises.

Gal. 1:11, 12. Paul identifies his message as not made up, but directly from Jesus.

James 2. James shows how the Old Testament applies in New Testament times

2 Peter 1:19-21; 3:16. Prophecy comes from God, says Peter, not from prophets.

Ellen White Comments

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers. It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.-- Manuscript 24, 1886 (written in Europe in 1886). {1SM 21}

At Berea Paul found Jews who were willing to investigate the truths he taught. Luke's record declares of them: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few."

The minds of the Bereans were not narrowed by prejudice. They were willing to investigate the truthfulness of the doctrines preached by the apostles. They studied the Bible, not from curiosity, but in order that they might learn what had been written concerning the promised Messiah. Daily they searched the inspired records, and as they compared scripture with scripture, heavenly angels were beside them, enlightening their minds and impressing their hearts.

Wherever the truths of the gospel are proclaimed, those who honestly desire to do right are led to a diligent searching of the Scriptures. If, in the closing scenes of this earth's history, those to whom testing truths are proclaimed would follow the example of the Bereans, searching the Scriptures daily, and comparing with God's word the messages brought them, there would today be a large number loyal to the precepts of God's law, where now there are comparatively few. But when unpopular Bible truths are presented, many refuse to make this investigation. Though unable to controvert the plain teachings of Scripture, they yet manifest the utmost reluctance to study the evidences offered. Some assume that even if these doctrines are indeed true, it matters little whether or not they accept the new light, and they cling to pleasing fables which the enemy uses to lead souls astray. Thus their minds are blinded by error, and they become separated from heaven. {AA 231-2}

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