

With the Word

We are **Biblical** – not **worldly**

A Biblical church:

- Scripture is our first and final authority
- We value preaching, teaching and the correct use of the word
- We train ourselves and others to think and act biblically

The Bible: What is it, and what do we do with it? 2 Timothy 3 v 16

All scripture is God breathed – known as the “Inspiration” of scripture.

“An activity of the Spirit of God working upon the minds of men so that their writings are an accurate account of divine revelation”. Arnold Bell

We all have some level of personal revelation and experience of God, but if our theology was based wholly on this it would be very subjective, and our view of who God is would change with our moods.

Q: If all scripture is God breathed, what is meant by “scripture”? 1 Timothy 5 v 18

Here Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 24 v 4 and Luke 10 v 7 and calls both Scripture.

Peter refers to Paul’s letters as scripture. 2 Peter 3 v 15, 16

The Bible in its entirety is scripture – the “inspired” word of God.

The Old Testament was originally grouped in three sections:

- the Law or “Torah” (meaning guiding principles) [Genesis – Deuteronomy]
- the Prophets [Isaiah, Jeremiah etc.]
- the Writings [Psalms, Proverbs, Chronicles etc.]

This formed the Hebrew bible and had exactly the same books as we have today in the Old Testament, but in a different order. In Luke 11 v 51 when Jesus says “from Abel to Zechariah” he is referring to the beginning (Genesis) and the end (2 Chronicles) of scripture as it was then, i.e. the story so far!

The New Testament developed as the early church began to “devote themselves to the apostles teachings” (Acts 2 v 42) and recognise Paul’s teachings as the word of God (1 Thes 2 v 13). The writings we know as the New Testament were the teachings that laid the foundations for the early church and were widely accepted as scripture. They were formally recognised as such in AD397 when the “Canon” of scripture was established. That is the bible as we know it today (Canon meaning “measuring rod”).

Our belief that the bible is “God-breathed” means we give it authority over our own experience, traditions and world views. This belief also has implications for us, that we take it seriously, get to know it and conform our lives to its truths.

Q: How do we use the bible correctly?

2 Timothy 3 v 16 - for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

See how Jesus uses scripture for correction in Matt 15 v 1-9. The Pharisees appeared to be doing good by getting people to give money to the church, but in doing so they were dishonouring their parents, and so going against scripture.

Correct handling of scripture means we must make every effort to find the correct meaning of what we read. When studying the Bible, ask three questions:

- what does it say?
- what does it mean?
- how does it apply today?

Difficulties can arise if we fail to recognise the context, culture and genre of the writing.

Context: “Dave is very green”

Could mean he is environmentally aware, he is sick, he is naive or he is jealous. We only know the true meaning if we look at the context in which the words were said. Similarly when we read the bible we cannot take isolated verses out of context or we are in danger of changing their meaning, and so losing the truth.

Revelation 3 v 15, 16 Hot or cold? The context of this verse is not talking to us as an individual about our relationship with God. It is to a people who had allowed false teaching and idolatry to creep into the church, just as impurities dirtied the hot and cold water supplies brought to the city making them luke warm and dirty.

Culture: Why don't we wash each other's feet? John 13 v 12-14

Jesus instructs us to follow his example and wash each other's feet, just before he instructs us to remember him with bread and wine. But washing feet is not something that we do in our culture today, because we don't walk around dusty roads with open sandals on. However, we must not ignore the underlying principle of this verse. Jesus is teaching us about humility, and we need to see how we can apply these principles in today's culture.

Genre: There are many styles of writing in the Bible:

Narrative, Law, Poetry, Prophecy, Wisdom, Letters, Gospel and Apocalyptic.

We need to be aware of the style we are reading to fully understand meaning. For example, we wouldn't take literally the language used in poetry or apocalyptic writing as this is

figurative and is used to create an image in our minds. Also, Paul's letters are written to specific people and can contain personal instructions for them, e.g. 2 Tim 4 v 11-13. So we don't all need to bring a cloak to church!

A study Bible, concordance or Bible commentary can be very useful in helping us understand the context, culture and genre of what we are reading, and therefore help us grasp the true meaning of the word of God.

John 16 v 13 *“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth”*

The same Spirit who worked upon the minds of the original Bible writers to enable them to record and accurate revelation of God is at work in us to reveal the truth to us!