

BATTLE ABOUT THE BIBLE

BY GREG ALBRECHT

What role does the Bible play in our faith? Is it accurate, for instance, to say that the Bible is infallible? Is it accurate to say that the Bible is holy? You might say, well, of course the Bible is holy—that's what it says right there on the front cover of my Bible. It says "Holy Bible."

As we consider the battle about the Bible, we're going to study John 5:39-40. Fasten your seat belts. You may feel that some of your cherished notions about the Bible might be questioned as we examine a few sacred cows in the light of John 5:39-40.

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life (John 5:39-40).

You diligently study the Scriptures, Jesus says. He's speaking to the religious leaders of his day with whom, in this chapter, he had come into conflict. For that matter, he came into conflict with them almost every day of his ministry, and in almost



harder to kill Jesus. Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Then later, in verses 31-40, we read that Jesus confronted them about the attitudes they had about this healing. They were not at all happy with this healing—they were offended because their religion was being turned upside down. Their religion was being attacked. Never mind the healing of this man.

The Jewish religious leaders of that day had huge problems with Jesus. But, let's not put all the blame on them, for that's just a snapshot in the album of history. Let's turn the pages

The Jewish religious leaders of that day had huge problems with Jesus.

of the album of history. One of the problems that religion has always had with Jesus, whatever kind of religion it may have been or is today, is that Jesus often doesn't conform with their Bible, or at least their interpretation of the Bible.

"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life"—John 5:39-40



man who had been waiting to be healed for 38 years, because he healed him on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, my Father is always at his work to this very day and I, too, am working. For this reason the Jews tried all the

One of the problems that religion has always had with Jesus...is that Jesus often doesn't conform with their Bible, or at least their interpretation of the Bible.

That's happening today. There are many religious people who have a specific detailed interpretation of the Bible which includes their belief about what the Bible itself is and is not, and anyone who appears to differ with them, well, let's just say those people are not welcome in those churches.

So what is the Bible, exactly? Is it *holy*? What does *holy* mean? We need to define that word, don't we? *Infallible*. What does that mean? *Inerrant* is another word people use which actually ratchets up the discussion beyond the word "infallible" because "inerrant" means without any error of any kind anywhere.



You might say, well, of course the Bible is holy—that’s what it says right there on the front cover of my Bible. It says “Holy Bible.”

fallible in its original manuscripts. Well, you know what? There are no original manuscripts available, so we don’t know whether that statement is true or false.

Imagine me saying to my wife, “You know, before you first met me, and then married me, I was perfect. I had no sin whatsoever. Then you met me and eventually we married. Since the time you first met me, now after four decades you know most of my imperfections. You now know, of course, that I am far from perfect. But, before you met me I was actually perfect. You just didn’t know it because you didn’t know me then, but it’s only since I met you that I became imperfect.”

The reasoning about the Bible being infallible, without any error in the original, unavailable manuscripts is as illogical as me saying to my wife that I was perfect before she met me.

Let’s explore what the Bible is and is not. Let’s suppose that God had wanted the Bible as a book of paper and ink, to be absolutely perfect, and truly worthy of the word “holy.”

“Holy” means spiritually perfect—absolutely without any spiritual error. Holy actually means without any humanity. It means “untouched by human hands.” Holy means completely spiritually perfect.

If God wanted the Bible to be completely holy as we just defined it, why did he use human beings in

the production, translation and transmission of the Bible? Why use human authors at all? He didn’t have to do it that way.

Why not just give us the perfect holy, infallible, inerrant Bible produced, written and printed on the printing presses of heaven? Why not use the millions of angels at God’s disposal to write, edit, copy and then print gazillions of copies of the Bible in every language known to man?

Why do humans have to produce all these translations, with missionaries going over and living in foreign countries for 20 years, learning the language, and then translating the Bible? Why didn’t God just go ahead and do all that for us and then dispatch all the angels like storks or like Santa Claus and simply drop the Bible down to us in heavenly parachutes? God could have airlifted the Bible “down” to us from heaven. But God didn’t give us the Bible that way.

Why did God allow humans to have Bible publishing houses with what we now call Study Bibles which generally inflict a particular interpretation on the text of the Bible? Why wouldn’t God have thought this whole thing through?

After all, he is God. God could have decided this whole Bible writing, editing, production, publishing, translating business would just be confusing and do it all himself in heaven with heavenly printing presses and heavenly translators and heavenly publishing houses. But he didn’t do that, did he?

When God determined that humans would write, edit, copy and translate the Bible, he realized that humanity would be included in the process. He didn’t, as I understand it,

If God wanted [the Bible] to be completely holy as we just defined it, why did he use human beings in the production, translation and transmission of the Bible? Why use human authors at all? He didn’t have to do it that way.



One of the issues [of the Protestant Reformation] was the supposed infallibility of the Pope. Protestants said, rightfully so, no human being is infallible. But the Protestants then claimed that the Bible is infallible.

build imperfection into the Bible. Having determined that humans would write, copy, translate and print the Bible, he knew beforehand that imperfection would exist because humans were involved.

When God founded the church,

silent in church. The Bible says *holy days of the Jews should be kept forever.* The Bible says *forbidding to marry is a doctrine of demons.*

We interpret those statements, don't we? And we Christians interpret them in a wide variety of ways, and

erly baptized and they probably need to do it again so they can get it right, so that God will truly forgive them, redeem them and love them because God is not going to truly redeem, forgive and love anybody until they go all the way under the water. None of this sprinkling or pouring stuff.



Some say the Protestants replaced a human Pope with a paper Pope.... Some also say that some Protestants are guilty of bibliolatry, worship of a book.

Now I happen to believe that, in practice, when people are baptized, that total immersion is probably to be favored. But, you know what? I was sprinkled as an infant and I know many other people who were, and I am not going to say that God doesn't honor that form of baptism because he doesn't tell me that he doesn't.

There are some who teach the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are the body and blood of Jesus, symbolically. Others teach that these elements, the bread and wine, literally become—in what is known as *transubstantiation* and *consubstantiation* (depending if you're Catholic or Lutheran)—the actual body and blood of Jesus.

Many, if not most, of those who teach the bread and wine (or grape juice) given during Communion, the Lord's Supper or Eucharist is literally the body and blood of Jesus, will not allow anyone who happens to be visiting their church and does not accept their interpretation of the Bible on this matter to come to the Lord's table with them.

Back to our discussion of the Bible.

We must not confuse Jesus with the Bible! The word of God (the Bible) is not divine, though the Bible has divine origins. Jesus doesn't merely have divine origins. He is God!

with Jesus Christ as head of the church, God knew from the very beginning that the church would have huge problems because he was going to invite humans to be a part of the church. And as soon as you invite humans to be a part of anything, you've got a big spiritual mess. If God had wanted a holy and infallible and inerrant church, he would have refused to allow human beings to be a part of it.

When humans give the Bible honor, glory and worship they are in effect, as Paul says in Romans 1:25, worshipping the created rather than the Creator.

Let's remember just a few of the things the Bible says. The Bible says *if your hand offends you, cut it off.* The Bible says *greet each other with a holy kiss.* The Bible says *women should keep*

everyone who interprets them believes their interpretation is best. Some of the people who interpret those statements believe their way is not only best—they believe it is the only way and all other interpretations are, well, forgive the analogy, doggie-poo-poo (spiritually speaking, of course).

There are some who teach baptism means complete, bodily immersion and that anyone who is not fully immersed under the water, completely, when they get baptized, is not prop-

...the Bible...is the most important book you will ever read. It reveals God and his nature. It helps us comprehend the gospel, but the Bible is not the gospel. It contains the gospel. It can reveal the gospel as God the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of those who read the Bible.



People will sit and study the Bible, with their nose in it for hour after hour, and have a relationship with a book... but fail to have a relationship with the Lord of their life revealed in the Bible.

Bible then it should appear in the lowercase—the Bible is the word of God. Jesus, as John 1:1 explains, is the Word of God.

We must not confuse Jesus with the Bible! The

word of God (the Bible) is not divine, though the Bible has divine origins. Jesus doesn't merely have divine origins. He is God! The Bible has divine origins, but unlike Jesus, who is uncreated and eternal, there was a time when the Bible did not exist.

The 66 books codified as the Bible, a written revelation from God, came into existence over a period of time. Human beings were intimately involved with the writing, editing, copying and translating of the word of God, the written revelation of

Word of God. You can know almost everything there is to know about the book of paper and ink, and not know the Lord of your life.

Now am I saying that we should disrespect the Bible? By no means. I'm simply saying it should not be worshipped. We should have no other gods before God, and that includes the Bible. The Bible is not holy in the sense that some people believe it's holy. It may be holy in the sense that it was inspired by God.

We can understand God and God can be revealed to us through its pages, but the Bible is not the only place and only way and only experience through which we might come to know God.

Approach the Bible carefully, in such a way that you understand that it is the most important book you will ever read. It reveals God and his nature. It helps us comprehend the gospel, but the Bible is not the gospel. It contains the gospel. It can reveal the gospel as God the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of those who read the Bible. But people who are not illuminated through the Holy Spirit, whose eyes have not been opened by God, can read the Bible and not understand it.

As my friend Jim Fowler has written, "Christianity is not a book religion. Christianity is not even a religion. Christianity is a relationship."

God alone is holy. God alone—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is holy and perfect and worthy of worship. In his mercy and grace he's gifted us with a book we call the Bible, a collection of 66 books. It helps us understand and come to know him.

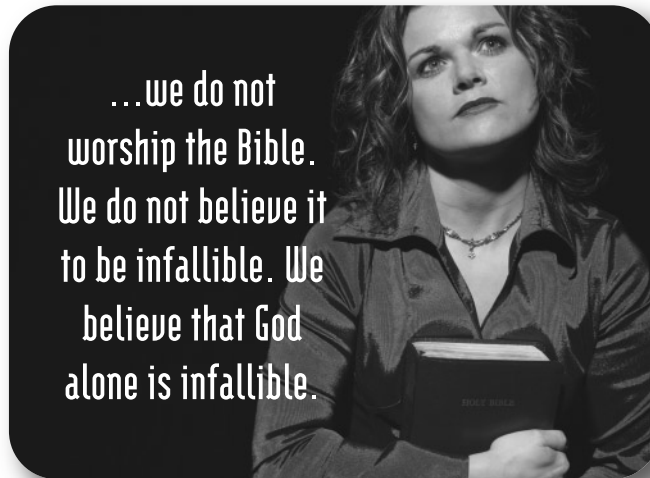
But we do not worship the Bible. We do not believe it to be infallible. We believe that God alone is infallible. No human or human product is infallible. The Bible helps us to know God as God reveals himself to us through its pages. □

It's possible to study and learn the Bible backwards and forwards in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic and not come to know Jesus, the true Word of God.

Some say the Protestants replaced a human Pope with a paper Pope. Some say the Catholics were and perhaps some today still are, guilty of idolatry—worshipping and praying to stone and wooden idols. Some also say that the Protestants are guilty of bibliolatry—worship of a book.

Many are fond of calling the Bible the word of God, and I understand what they're trying to say, but you know what? If you look at John 1:1, the Word of God is most specifically Jesus. The Word of God is the second person of the triune Godhead. The eternal son of God. That's who the Bible says the Word of God is.

Again, I realize that the generic term the "Word of God" is popularly used as a synonym for the Bible. However, at the very least, if we insist on using that term to describe the



...we do not worship the Bible. We do not believe it to be infallible. We believe that God alone is infallible.

God. The Bible is not divine.

People will sit and study the Bible, with their nose in it for hour after hour, and have a relationship with a book. People can memorize many of the passages of the Bible, they can know all kinds of facts and all kinds of trivia about the Bible, but fail to have a relationship with the Lord of their life revealed in the Bible.

It's possible to study and learn the Bible backwards and forwards in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic and yet not come to know Jesus, the true