

CCH 19th Jan 2020 Why the Bible #2: The Author(ity) of the Bible

Reading: 2 Peter 1:12-21. I'd like to start today with a verse from [Isaiah 66:2](#) "These are the ones I look on with favour: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word". Let's pray.

We thought last [time](#) in our new series on the Bible about how even though the Bible is **weird** in parts, it's **wonderful** because it's **personal**: personal in the sense that it introduces us to Jesus, and speaks personally right to our lives. So far so good... but it raises a problem.

Ok. So there are loads of books that are wonderful, moving, personal even inspiring. But is there anything different about the Bible? You see if the Bible is just a book like any other (albeit one that has stayed at the top of the best seller charts), does it really need to tell us how to live?

To go back to the question we asked last week from our "grill a Christian" friend, "[Why](#) should I let my life be dictated by a **weird** (wonderful), often misused book, written by people from so long ago".... And it's the last part of that question that we are going to focus on today. Who it's written by.

American, Randy Newman has written a [book](#) which helps Christians to think through how they answer their friends' questions. It's got some great chapters like "[If](#) Jesus is so great, why are some of his followers such jerks?", and on the Bible there's a chapter called "[Why](#) should we believe an ancient book written by dead Jewish males?"¹

It puts the issue rather well. The first writers of the Bible were very human, and yes they were all blokes from a Jewish background who have all since died. To give some examples, you've got [David](#) who wrote many of the Psalms around 2900 years ago, [Amos](#) 140 years later was a Shepherd. [Nehemiah](#) was around 440BC, and he was a kind of civil servant (we'll come onto him later in the term), and [Peter](#) (who dictated the gospel to Mark and wrote a couple of NT letters) was a fisherman.

Very human authors. Sometimes we know a lot about them, sometimes we know very little. Now already that may put you off reading the Bible. But don't let it do that! But here's what I want to show us today, Christians believe that **what they wrote were the exact words God wanted them to write**. Some people call it the dual authorship of the Bible. Human writers and behind them the Divine author. It's the first of two headings today.

1) DUAL AUTHORSHIP. Let's look at a couple of verses in the passage which Linda read – p1222. 2 Peter 1:20-21. It's a really helpful section about the two authors involved in writing the Bible. God and people. Both were involved all the way. Look first at the [human author](#). V21 "**Prophets, though human, spoke!**" Joel 700 years BC writing about the locust plague and the lessons for God's people from it. So as Peter says, humans spoke about things and their words were written down.

Occasionally in the bible we have the words of God dictated and written down- like the 10 commandments. But most of the time, these prophets used their own faculties and their own language to write about the things of God. Specific people in specific times in history, using specific words. He's talking about the OT, but it applies to the New Testament too: other specific people in specific times in history using specific words. So Paul wrote letters with his own vocabulary and arguments. Sometimes getting so carried away that he doesn't finish a sentence he started. Luke the Doctor using certain phrases in a specific kind of Greek. John writing in colourful apocalyptic imagery in the book of Revelation.

But read the rest of the verse, and we see God behind what they wrote: v20,21 "*You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophets' own interpretation of things. Prophecy never had its origin in the human will, **but prophets, though human spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.***" Here's the [divine author](#). God superintending every word that they wrote so that it is God speaking through them.

¹ "Questioning Evangelism"- Randy Newman (Kregel publications) p 123

I happen to know that we have a few sailors in our congregation, and who knows, maybe in the summer we can organise a day on boats. In a sailing boat, the engine isn't inside the boat, it's outside the boat, because the engine that drives you forward is the wind. No wind, no movement I'm afraid. Sometimes that can be pretty frustrating, other times, it can be nice moving very slowly chatting to your friends on board, while you wait for the wind on Grafham Water or the Norfolk broads to blow you along.

That's the imagery in v21, people spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The same word is used in the book of Acts (27:15) of a ship Paul was in getting caught in a storm and being driven across the Mediterranean by the wind.

So Amos, Moses, Paul, Luke got their pen (or their quills out!) and wrote as it were what they wanted to write. But behind what they wrote, God was supervising so that they wrote exactly what HE wanted them to write- they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Dual Authorship. Now just to be clear, the split is not 50% human work and 50% divine. I had to read this guy, [Austin Farrer](#), for one of my essays in vicar factory². But don't listen to everything someone says just because he has thick glasses. He wrote this in an essay on the Inspiration of Scripture broadcast on BBC radio many years ago *"I take up the Bible and I read. Here are a million or so printed words, in which divine gold and human clay are mixed, and I have to take the gold and leave the clay"*³.

Do you see what he's saying? There's human clay and divine gold mixed, and you sometimes have to sieve out one from the other. Some is from humanity, some is from God.

No it's 100% human. All written on the page by frail human beings like you and me, **but 100% divine.** God carried them along by his Spirit to make sure they wrote his Word.

² I'm happy to email this essay to anyone who wants to read it as his position is quite nuanced (but he still does not treat the Bible as the "pure word of God"- p16).

³ "The Truth Seeking Heart" (Canterbury Press), p18.

It's not divine **dictation**, as Muslims believe regarding the Koran. That would underplay *humans as authors*. It's not **full of errors** as if the human writers sometimes misunderstood what God was telling them, as one previous archbishop has got close to saying⁴. That would underplay God as the *Divine author*.

Every word. Writer JI Packer put it clearly when he wrote: *"What Scripture says, God says; for, in a manner comparable only to the deeper mystery of the Incarnation, so the Bible is both fully human and fully divine"*⁵. (His picture also has thick old glasses, but he was sound!)

Having both means we can grapple with the Bible like any other book, using our brains, and being careful to pay attention to its language history and so on. But we also read it with our hearts, because there is a living God who made us and who loves us, and is speaking to us!

So Dual Authorship. As the song that we heard earlier (All about Jesus-Sovereign Grace) put it... *"Every word of Your Word is true They were all breathed out by You Your Spirit wrote through men Like a pen in the hand of a God who knew"*.

And that leads us onto our second part and our second passage.

2) DIVINE AUTHORITY. And what we are saying here is that because God spoke every word, this book has authority. It has permission to call the shots.

If the words you read are a parking fine from a parking warden, or a summons from a lawyer, or a warrant from a police officer, then you have to obey. The words are spoken by someone with authority, so you are obliged to act. In fact it would be serious not to. Now if the Bible originates from God, even if he used human words in the process, then we are obliged to act. Not to do so would be serious.

⁴ "We read with a sense of our own benighted savagery in receiving God's gift, and our solidarity with those writers of Scripture caught up in the blazing fire of God's gift who yet struggle with it, misapprehend it, and misread it", *Rowan Williams, Open to Judgement, (DLT)* p159

⁵ JI Packer, *Concise Theology (IVP)*, p5.

If the Bible is spoken by God, then we should put it into practice. And that's what brings us to one of the most famous passages about the Bible in the Bible: 2 Timothy 3:16,17 ([p1196](#)).

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”.

Paul, right towards the end of his life, is writing to a younger pastor called Timothy as it were to “hand on the baton” of Christian ministry to the next generation (We'll come back to this in week 4). And at the heart of Timothy's experience and ministry is the Bible... what Paul calls the Scriptures⁶. It's lovely that Timothy had got used to the bible since being a kid thanks to his mother Eunice, and his grandmother Lois. What a privilege to be able to raise up the next generation to know and love the Lord through the Bible (as we prayed for Jacob last week).

But look carefully at v16. “God breathed”. This book is breathed out by God. It is not just inspired, in the sense that it's an inspiring read, it's ‘expired’ by God- it comes on his breath or Spirit. There's the divine authorship again.

Well because of that, it's powerful to act in our lives:

- +vely: teaching
- -vely: rebuking (or telling off)
- -vely: correcting
- +vely: training in righteousness (how we live).

So Paul is saying that it is binding on our belief and our behaviour.

⁶ This would have been the Old Testament Scriptures at the time, but the writings of the apostles - what became our New Testament - were being put alongside the Old Testament with equal authority as well. See 2 Peter 3:16.

The authority of the Bible. We really should let it direct our lives... But I don't need to tell you that in life in general, and even in the church today, people look to other places.

We've covered some quite heavy ground, let's do a quick quiz to check you are all still awake. A cheese board quiz. Name the cheese on the pic....

- Stilton/ Camembert/ Pule (Serbian Donkey cheese!).....Brie!

OK this last cheese is really helpful for our topic today. There are 4 places that people turn to listen to God today. They spell BRIE.

1. B- Bible – this book.
2. R- Reason – what people think
3. I- Institution – what religious leaders tell people
4. E- Experience – what people feel and go through in life.

So let me give you an example. It's a controversial one, but it illustrates the options well... Should a Christian who is deeply attracted to a member of the same sex be able to be in a permanent, faithful and stable sexual relationship with them?

Those who listen to REASON, like some so called “liberals”⁷ would say, well I cannot believe that in today's age that anyone could say that gay sex is wrong. If two people love each other why would we say otherwise?

Others, for example Roman Catholics take very seriously the traditions of the church INSTITUTION, for example the dogmas of the Pope, who they believe to be infallible (= unable to get make mistakes when it comes to declaring the teaching of the church). And if he says it's wrong, it's wrong.

Those who listen to EXPERIENCE, say that the ultimate touchstone of truth is what we feel. I really feel that God wouldn't want me to be unhappy. It just feels wrong not to express myself in this way, or to discourage anyone else from doing so. I feel it can't be wrong.

⁷ See Jeffery John's “Permanent, Faithful, Stable”.

But the evangelical position looks at what the **BIBLE** says. And that's the position of this church, and what I've been arguing for today. In fact I believe it's the true *Christian* position, because Jesus himself though he was God, submitted to the Scriptures as the Word of God, letting them direct his life and ministry. We don't ignore those other things (RIE), and we always read the Bible with certain lenses, which is why we have to be careful. But ultimately the Bible is our authority.

So going back to homosexuality- what does the Bible say about this topic? It says that all of us, are created in His image and dearly loved by God; all of us are broken; all are able to come to Jesus and all are welcome in church whatever their sexual orientation and background, that there is no place for any form of injustice or prejudice towards LGBTI people. But it does also say that the God given place sex is for heterosexual marriage, and so sexual activity outside of marriage, whether homosexual or heterosexual (such as between boyfriend/girlfriend or in engagement) is wrong and needs to be turned from⁸. I'm happy to talk more with anyone about this, because there's much more to say, and it's very personal, and it's easy to be misunderstood and misquoted!

I have friends who are gay and Christian, and who gladly seek to avoid same sex sexual activity, as difficult as it is for them, seeking to stay pure because they know that this book is their Heavenly Father's loving word to them and it is good news⁹. God's ways are always for our good.

I get such encouragement every time I see someone trying to put the Bible into practice, especially when it's hard for them. Like the brother who changes his bank card to avoid gambling, like the sister who is hanging in there in her marriage even though it's hard, like the young student that carries a brick for a phone because he doesn't want the temptation of sexual images on his phone, because he wants to stay pure.

All of these people help me to love my God, because they so clearly love their God who gave them Bibles, and having tasted and seen the Lord is good, and having found freedom and friendship in the Lord Jesus Christ,

⁸ Some passages: Gen 2:24; Lev 18:22; Rom 1:26,27; 1 Cor 6:11; 1 Tim 1:10

they now trust him enough to let him lead their lives through this wonderful book. And they open up its pages each day to see how God wants them to live.

So these verses speak of the **authority** of the Bible, and in fact the **completeness** of the Bible, because you don't need to add to it with insights from archaeology, psychology or the results of modern Biblical scholarship. All we need is in there. "Thoroughly equipped for every good work" (v17).

So as we conclude 1) 2). I'm sure you still have plenty of questions, and we'll try and leave some time next week for that, or grab me afterwards.

But as we wrap up, what should we do?

Well if the Bible is really God speaking to us, we need to **trust it and obey it**. We need to put the Bible into practice. It will be good for us, because God is a loving Father, and he wants the best for his children.

Maybe we are conscious of not trusting and obeying Jesus' Word in some area lately. Well in a moment we are going to take the Lord's supper. It's a chance to remember the cross where Jesus died to forgive our sins. We are not excluded from God for our Bible disobedience, but those who turn to Jesus find forgiveness and help to change. Weary Christian, return to Jesus and recommit yourself to Him, and to obeying his Word with the Spirit's help. Is there a problem in your life? Is there joy or happiness or celebration? Is there a sadness, a worry or a puzzle? You will find all that you need life and godliness in this book. Trust it and Obey it!

As we sung at the beginning, "*How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent word, what more can he say than he has said, you who unto Jesus for refuge have fled*".

Let's finish with the verse we started with. **Isaiah 66:2** "*These are the ones I look on with favour: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word*". **Let's pray.**

⁹ See www.livingout.org and also the explanation there for not using the word gay.