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PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

Is the Bible infallible?

QUESTION: I am fairly new to your ministry. I'm pleased with what I see, but you seem to make disparaging remarks about the Bible's infallibility—you seem to devalue it. That concerns me.

Can you help me have a better perception of the Bible?

RESPONSE: We believe the Bible to be profitable for teaching, instruction, encouragement and inspiration. We believe the Bible is inspired of God, so we certainly don't "devalue" it but we do "devalue" false assertions about it, such as the idea that the Bible itself is infallible.

The Bible, some say, is the Word of God. That is a false supposition, according to the Bible. Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1-14). ***Jesus is the Word of God.*** He alone occupies the throne of authority. He does not share his throne with a book.

Bible publishers have long titled the Bible as "holy." God alone is holy. God alone is infallible and inerrant. Humans are created, mortal and less than perfect—all that we touch and produce falls short of perfection and holiness.

Humans have determined the Bible to be holy, infallible and inerrant. Neither God nor the Bible makes any such claim.

We believe in the Old

Testament just as we do the New Testament. Most of all, we believe that all biblical passages, teachings, and accounts, properly understood, should be interpreted in light of the birth, life, teachings, cross and resurrection of Jesus. The entire Bible is relevant and significant as it is read and understood through a Christ-centered filter.

Not every passage in the Bible holds equal importance. The parables of Jesus should be given greater weight than an Old Testament genealogy. The Sermon on the Mount is of greater import to Christians than the law given on Mt. Sinai. The epistles of the New Testament explain and interpret the Old Testament prophets, not the other way around.

The Bible is an unfolding revelation of God, so when we read Old Testament accounts that God directed the genocide of a city-state—including the murder of all men, women, children and animals—we balance the claim that God directed such actions against the final authority of Christ as the Word of God. We interpret the Old Testament in the light of the ultimate revelation of God as love, rather than the other way around, for the God we read about in the New Testament, incarnate in Jesus, is not an angry, vengeful, murderous God.

We understand the Bible in light of its historical milieu and

literary genres. Some of the Bible was written before Jesus, some after Jesus. Some parts were written within the boundaries and purview of the old covenant—others within the perspective of the new covenant.

When we read a newspaper, we intuitively allow for many genres. The front page is different from the sports page. Classified ads are written in a different style than the comics or an editorial opinion.

So too, the Psalms are not the same as the book of Galatians. Deuteronomy is different than Isaiah's prophecies, just as Matthew is different than the book of Revelation.

The Bible is also filled with symbols, metaphors, wise sayings and parables that, if read literally, rob those teachings of their deep and profound meaning. And the Bible must be understood in context—reading a text out of its context results in pretexts and proof-texts that torture the meaning of the Scriptures (Scrip-torture, if you will) with the beliefs of those who torture it.

Thus, many read the Bible in order to discover what they already believe to be true and reinforce their religious faith. In so doing, they abuse the Bible to serve their own interests.

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