

# Excerpt from Today's Sermon, Cut For Time

*“All Scripture is given by God. And all Scripture is useful for teaching and for showing people what is wrong in their lives. It is useful for correcting faults and teaching the right way to live. Using the Scriptures, those who serve God will be prepared and will have everything they need to do every good work.”*

*-2 Timothy 3:16-17 (Easy-to-Read Version)*

But doesn't 2 Timothy say, “*every scripture is inspired by God?*” Yes, that's true. But for the author of 2 Timothy, “scripture” could only have meant the documents (or scrolls) making up the Old Testament, since the New was not around yet.

In the days of 2 Timothy, Sadducees and Samaritans considered only the first five Books of Hebrew Bible (called the “Pentateuch”) to be authoritative, giving not much weight to the Prophets and other Writings. But the Pharisees *did* count the Prophets and Writings as equally authoritative. So, when 2 Timothy says, “*every scripture is inspired by God,*” it was just agreeing with the Pharisees.

*But how are these sacred writings influenced by God? We can only speculate; but we do know that these Jewish sacred writings, from early on, were considered “useful for teaching, showing mistakes, correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good.”*

And so it is for us today: We return to the Bible again and again to help form and shape our understanding of who God is and what God's will is for our lives, so that we can be equipped to do what is good in the world. If it doesn't equip us to do good, but to do harm, then we are not treating it as God's Word.

We do not need to make the people in the Bible, including its authors, compilers, editors, and scribes, out to be superhumans on a once-only special wavelength with God – Who was mystically speaking in their ears and moving their hands to write.

Most of the writers in the Bible did not claim to be transcribing divine dictation and neither should we superimpose this belief where it doesn't belong. Like today, God's Word (Truth) is filtered through humans, and what comes out “on paper” is nothing more than a symbol of our divine-human relationship: Divinely imperfect yet humanly inspiring.

The Bible never calls itself the “Word of God.” We know very well that the opening passage from the Gospel of John says, “*The Word was God . . . and dwelled among us*” (John 1). It’s not even helpful to try to distinguish Jesus as the “*Living Word of God*” and the Bible as the “*Written Word of God*,” as if the two are equal in essence and equally worthy of worship (to worship the Bible is called “bibliolatry” – a form of idolism.) This is only forcing a designation upon the Bible which the Bible, nor even God or Jesus, said about the Bible.

As Mainline Protestants, we have never officially believed that the Bible was **inerrant**, which means ‘incapable of being wrong,’ nor that it was **infallible**, meaning it ‘never fails to be truthful.’ These terms were first used in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in 1978 from a conference of evangelical leaders. We also do not believe the Bible is 100% consistent within itself or is a word-for-word dictation from/by God. For instance, Matthew and Luke present two different genealogies of Jesus that are compatible. The giant, Goliath, is killed in two different ways by two different men, whether you are reading 1 Samuel or 1 Chronicles. And, for goodness’ sake, who was really at the empty tomb and what really took place that morning?

To force all verses into an assumption that they are all without contradiction is to make ridiculous mental gymnastics and dubious re-interpretations that shift the meaning further way from its original intention just for it all to “fit.” Instead, the consistency is not found in the minutiae but found in its overarching message:

*God is faithful to us even we are not faithful back to God.*

*In the end, God’s will will be done!*