

Publishing Editor's column

THE FOUNDATION clause of our Statement of Faith is that we believe the whole Bible to be the inspired Word of God and therefore correct. Since we believe this to be true, the Bible can be cited as the authority for the remaining tenets of our faith. This belief requires us to be careful as to how we refer to Scripture; since its various authors are not simply writing of their own volition, it is best to avoid forms of expression implying that those who penned the Scriptures were expressing their own thoughts. It is better, for example, to say that someone 'said' or 'wrote' or 'stated' something than that they 'thought' or 'chose to say' it.

Some, wishing to stress the inspiration of Scripture, use expressions such as 'the Apostle Paul, writing under the Spirit' or 'the Holy Spirit through Paul'. However, unless such expressions are used every time a Biblical writer is mentioned, they can backfire, for the implication when they are not used is that the writer was not then speaking under inspiration. Yet if they are used every time then the result looks pedantic, and can be irritating to read. The fact that we accept the inspiration of Scripture as our foundation teaching should make it unnecessary to state the fact of inspiration when Scripture is quoted; it is taken for granted when we quote Scripture that it is inspired.

We know, of course, that not everything that is stated in the Bible is correct, for it sometimes records the wrong things that people say. It is the record that is correct, and not always everything to be found in that record. The most obvious example of this is the book of Job, which records the wrong things that Job's three friends said, and we must be careful about what we quote from it to support something. A less obvious place where wrong things are recorded is the two epistles to Corinth, where the Apostle Paul at times records what his opponents said. It was not Paul who said, "All things are lawful unto me", and, "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats" (1 Cor. 6:12,13), but members of the Corinthian ecclesia with slack moral standards. When the Apostle Paul writes, "I caught you with guile" (2 Cor. 12:16), he was referring to a false accusation made against him; there is no justification here for being crafty in preaching.

Another question is the extent to which Scripture reflects the circumstances and background of its writers. Scripture varies considerably in style and vocabulary, and it seems that God has chosen to work with the style and vocabulary which those who penned the Scriptures had acquired. Thus it is sometimes pointed out that the letters to Timothy and Titus contain various medical terms, and this is attributed to the fact that Luke the physician was with Paul at the time (2 Tim. 4:11). But medical matters relate to the human body, and Paul refers to the ecclesia as the body of Christ (Eph. 4:4-16). When Paul wrote these letters the ecclesial body was ailing and needing attention, hence the appropriateness in the medical language used. So where language in Scripture reflects a writer's circumstances and background there may well be a good reason for it.

Tony Benson

Publication of articles in The Testimony does not presume editorial endorsement except on matters of fundamental doctrine, as defined in the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith.