
The Authority of the Bible

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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2 Timothy 3:16, which is part of our lectionary this coming Sunday, says that "All scripture is inspired by God." Does it mean that the Bible should always be taken literally? Does it mean that the Bible is always inerrant?

You all remember the story of the young fool, who thought he knew what the authority of the Bible meant. It meant that all of the Bible is the literal and inerrant Word of God, no matter what culture or context. He could turn to any page for guidance. So, he thought, "I'll just turn to any page in the Bible and do what it says!" The first verse he turned to was Matthew 27:5. It said, "Judas went out and hanged himself."

"Wait a minute!" he cried out. "This could not be right. I'll try again." He opened the book and let the pages fall again. This time his fingers came to Luke 10:37. It said, "Go thou and do likewise."

"No!" He tried a third time. This time, the Bible, the holy Word of God opened to John 13:27: "What you must do, do quickly."

The Bible does not come out well when it is interpreted by folks who do not use their heads. Like someone once said (including William Sloane Coffin), "The Bible is something like a mirror. If an ass looks in, you cannot expect an apostle to look out."

But the Bible does not come out well even when people do use their heads!

When Henry VIII struggled to have an heir to the throne of England, he thought his wife's miscarriages were a result of God's judgment. After all, that wife (Catherine of Aragon) had been, first, his brother's wife! When his brother had died, Henry had married his deceased brother's wife, Catherine. Folks had used the bible to justify that marriage.

It is right there at Deuteronomy 25:5: "If brethren dwell together and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry unto a stranger; her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him as wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her." (That is certainly a scriptural injunction if I have ever heard one.)

But when Catherine did not have a male child, Henry began to sense that another section of scripture took precedence. Maybe Leviticus 20:21 was correct. Leviticus 20:21 says that "if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing; he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; and they shall be childless." Maybe, thought Henry, that was why he was childless.

You know, as well as I, the rest of the story. Furthermore, you know how often certain verses of the Bible have been used to justify arguments, in almost every generation since the first century. How, then, does the Bible interpret itself? Join us this Sunday at the Dean's Forum for further investigation of that question!

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