

# Infallibility

## What is it? Who has it? Who does not have it?

*We could find solutions to many of our problems, if we were able to get it settled in our minds as to what and who is infallible.*

*Then, distrusting of the fallible, we could, in fullest trust, turn to the infallible sources for the help we so much need.*

*If we can but settle it in our hearts as to what should be our source of strength, hope, and wisdom, it will make an infinite difference in the path we take from this point onward to the end of our earthly days.*

### 1 - ARE MEN AND WOMEN INFALLIBLE?

Men in positions of authority frequently speak and act as though they are infallible. Frankly, you are I are also tempted to think we are! In fact, as we look about, we find that all kinds of people act like they are infallible! But, unless it is true, that is a dangerous position to assume. We dare not trust ourselves to those who are not infallible. But we can definitely trust that which is.

Mankind seems to have a craving to find a human being to rely on for guidance. People hope to find it in neighbors, magazines, books, papers, politicians, and TV evangelists.

But we cannot even rely on the words of religious leaders as necessarily accurate or true. They are only fallible humans, like ourselves. Speaking of leaders in the church, we are told:

“If they still persist in clinging to their own opinions, they will find that God will not sustain their action. Do they take the position that all they advance is infallible? that there is not a shadow of an error or mistake in their productions?”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 295.

“We are not to think, as did the Jews, that our own ideas and opinions are infallible; nor with the papists, that certain individuals are the sole guardians of truth and knowledge, that men have no right to search the Scriptures for themselves, but must accept the explanations given by the fathers of the church.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 105.

We hinder the work of God in our lives, in the church, and in the world, when we rely upon men instead of upon God.

“Many who profess to know Him have turned

from the One in whom our hope of eternal life is centered, and have educated themselves to depend upon their erring and fallible fellow men. They are crippled spiritually when they do this; for no man is infallible, and his influence may be misleading.

“He who trusts in man not only leans upon a broken reed and gives Satan an opportunity to introduce himself, but he hurts the one in whom the trust is placed; he becomes lifted up in his estimation of himself, and loses the sense of his dependence upon God. Just as soon as man is placed where God should be, he loses his purity, his vigor, and his confidence in God’s power. Moral confusion results, because his powers become unsanctified and perverted.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 376.

A man’s position, office, or influence does not make him infallible. Oh, that mankind would learn that lesson!

“I must speak to my brethren nigh and afar off. I cannot hold my peace. They are not working on correct principles. Those who stand in responsible positions must not feel that their position of importance makes them men of infallible judgment.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 347.

Position or authority does not make the man. It does not perfect him, nor does it render him infallible.

“All who occupy responsible positions need to learn the lesson that is taught in Solomon’s humble prayer [in *1 Kings 3:7*]. They are ever to remember that position will never change the character or render man infallible . . . Position never will give holiness and excellence of character.”—*9 Testimonies*, 282-283.

### 2 - ARE CHURCHES INFALLIBLE?

Have you ever noticed that organizations and governments try to give the impression they are infallible? Although many churches tacitly assume it, there is one which has claimed it openly,—and has even declared it to be a solemn doctrine which the faithful must accept, on pain of divine punishment if they fail to do so.

“The pope has been given the very titles of Deity. He has been styled ‘Lord God the Pope,’ and has been declared infallible. He demands the homage of all men.”—*Great Controversy*, 50.

“The defenders of the papacy declare that the church has been maligned . . . Have these persons

forgotten the claim of infallibility put forth for eight hundred years by this haughty power?

“So far from being relinquished, this claim was affirmed in the nineteenth century with greater positiveness than ever before. As Rome asserts that the ‘church never erred; nor will it, according to the Scriptures, ever err,’ how can she renounce the principles which governed her course in past ages?”—*Great Controversy*, 563 564.

“The papal church will never relinquish her claim to infallibility. All that she has done in her persecution of those who reject her dogmas she holds to be right; and would she not repeat the same acts, should the opportunity be presented?”—*Great Controversy*, 564.

This issue of whether it is God—or created beings—which have this infallibility is very important.

Indeed, if it be true that the pope is infallible, then he can counterwork the work of God! He sets himself up as a second god, working a second will in the universe.

“Another step in papal assumption was taken, when, in the eleventh century, Pope Gregory VII proclaimed the perfection of the Roman Church. Among the propositions which he put forth was one declaring that the church had never erred, nor would it ever err . . . The proud pontiff also . . . declared that no sentence which he pronounced could be reversed by anyone, but that it was his prerogative to reverse the decisions of all others.”—*Great Controversy*, 57.

“Professing infallibility, he [the man of sin] claims the right to change the law of God to suit his own purposes. By so doing, he exalts himself above God, and leaves the world to infer that God is fallible. If it were indeed true that God had made a rule of government that needed to be changed, it would certainly show fallibility.”—*7 Bible Commentary*, 910.

Because God is infallible, it is impossible to improve on anything He says or does. Because man is fallible, it is unsafe to rely on him, instead of on God, for anything vital to our eternal interests.

### 3 - ARE TRADITIONS INFALLIBLE?

Ideas and suppositions which have been believed for a long period of time, are generally considered to be correct—simply because they have been around so long. But we cannot rely on ancient theories, any more than we can trust new ones. They are all man-made.

“The Jews refused to receive Christ, because He did not come in accordance with their expectations. The ideas of finite men were held as infallible, because hoary with age.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 64.

### 4 - ARE COMMITTEES INFALLIBLE?

Are committees infallible? This would include legislative bodies, and courts of law. We could also

include here the decisions of the “great men,” the rulers, business executives, military generals, and all the rest.

Well, there was one committee in the Bible which produced a decision which was recorded as Scripture,—yet even that committee was fallible! And those on it were the leaders of the General Conference in the years just after the death of Christ, when the church was at its purest:

“The council which decided this case was composed of the founders of the Jewish and Gentile Christian churches. Elders from Jerusalem and deputies from Antioch were present, and the most influential churches were represented. The council did not claim infallibility in their deliberations, but moved from the dictates of enlightened judgment and with the dignity of a church established by the divine will.”—*Story of Redemption*, 308.

Surely, we would expect that the men sitting at that Acts 15 Jerusalem council were be unerring, since their decision was recorded in Scripture. But the truth is that nothing, in this present world—nothing that man ever thinks, says, or does is unerring! Everything is subject to mistakes and errors. This would even include such godly individuals as Enoch, Abraham, Moses, David, and John the Baptist.

Is nothing then infallible in our world?

### 5 - IS GOD INFALLIBLE?

God is infallible; always infallible. He never has erred. He never will err. He is perfect, kind, just, and accurate in everything He does.

And—very important—only God has infallibility; no one else has it.

“We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 30.

“There is One who is infallible—He who is the way, the truth, and the life.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 105.

Well, then are God’s inspired prophets infallible; surely they must be!

### 6 - ARE HIS INSPIRED PROPHETS INFALLIBLE?

No they are not. The only individuals who are infallible are the members of the Godhead.

It is for this reason that neither the Bible writers nor Ellen White ever claimed infallibility. They did not have it.

“In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible. His Word is true, and in Him is no variableness, or shadow of turning.”—*1 Selected Messages*, 37.

### 7 - ARE THE INSPIRED WRITINGS INFALLIBLE?

The Word of God is infallible. Why? because it is His Word. “Infallibility” applies to thoughts and words. If God is infallible, His thoughts and words are infallible also. The Word of God is always infal-

lible, simply because it is God's Word.

"Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible."—*1 Selected Messages*, 416.

"In this, the most important period of their lives, they [the young people] need an unerring counselor, and infallible guide. This they will find in the Word of God."—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 100.

Inerrancy is equivalent to infallibility.

"God's Word sheds an unerring light upon the pathway of man's life. Notwithstanding the many influences which arise to divert and distract the mind, those who honestly seek God for wisdom will be guided into the right course."—*5 Testimonies*, 247.

Thus we find that only God and His Word is infallible, or unerring. They alone can be fully trusted. We can safely go to God for accurate counsel, reproof, and guidance. And God speaks to us through His Written Word. Let us not presume to go by impressions, emotions, theories, or the ideas of other men. We must cling to God and His Word, if we would make it safely to heaven.

God's infallible Word is found alone in the writings which He has inspired certain individuals to pen. This is a basic tenet of true Protestantism.

"Wycliffe now taught the distinctive doctrines of Protestantism—salvation through faith in Christ, and the sole infallibility of the scriptures."—*Story of Redemption*, 337; *Great Controversy*, 89.

It was never a church or people who are infallible; it is only God and His Written Word.

Here is how Zwingli, the Swiss Reformer, approached the Word of God:

"The more he searched the Scriptures, the clearer appeared the contrast between their truths and the heresies of Rome. He submitted himself to the Bible as the Word of God, the only sufficient, infallible rule."—*Great Controversy*, 173.

"He presented the Word of God as the only infallible authority and the death of Christ as the only complete sacrifice."—*Great Controversy*, 177.

We all know that God gives His messages to His prophets, who then write it down. That is how it becomes the Written Word of God.

"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John. Who bare [wrote a] record of the Word of God."—*Revelation 1:1-2*.

So the prophets were inspired, but were they infallible? They were given inspired concepts to write down. Those concepts were infallible, and that which they wrote down was guided by the Holy Spirit so that it was the infallible, Written Word of God. But the penmen were not infallible. They only relayed that which was infallible.

It is for this reason that Peter could err at Antioch and Paul found it necessary to rebuke him. It was for this reason that Moses could, after writing Genesis, Job, and Exodus, strike the rock at Horeb twice. It was for this reason that Ellen White could be convinced, by the arguments of our leaders, that Southern Publishing Association, in Nashville, should be closed down,—and then, just after they departed, was shown, by God, that doing so would be a mistake, and that it must remain open. It was only as she was writing out the Word of God, as the Holy Spirit revealed it to her, that she was producing that which was infallible.

(A.L. White noticed, in her letters, that she always separated items of personal interest (the family, weather, gardening, etc.) from the special messages which she delivered in them. There was no mixing of the two.)

Always remember the principle: Mankind is not infallible; only the Godhead and the Word of God is.

But then we turn our attention to those Inspired Writings,—and how very important they become to us!

There is nothing else that we can rely upon! Only the Godhead is holy and unerring, and the Holy Spirit guides men through the study of the Written Word. So how utterly vital it is that we place our fullest confidence in those writings!

*Thus we have learned that it is the Inspired Writings which are infallible, not the prophets who wrote them. They were not infallible but, in the act of writing out the messages given them of God, they were guided by the Holy Spirit to produce infallible writings. But they themselves did not possess infallibility.*

This brings us to the question: Is the Spirit of Prophecy writings of equal authority with that of the Bible? Yes; both are equally inspired of God, and so they are equal in authority and accuracy.

There is no such thing as "partly inspired." The prophet is either fully inspired, or not at all. There are true prophets and false prophets; there are no half-way prophets.

Can we then study the Spirit of Prophecy writings as intently as we study the Bible? Yes, it is our privilege to do so.

Should we study them instead of the Bible? Oh, no! Both are vital. Never underestimate the importance of any of the Scriptures! They are all important, for they are all infallible, Inspired Writings from Heaven.

Can we use them in the same way? No, and for a very special reason.

Although both are fully inspired, God in His wisdom guided Ellen White to instruct us not to use the

Spirit of Prophecy to prove points of doctrine to unbelievers or new converts. (1T, 119-120). Only the Bible should be used for that purpose. This is wise, since there are so many false prophets in her day and ours.

For example, Joseph Smith, a notorious and greatly disliked false prophet at the time, was alive when Ellen White lived. He advocated polygamy and urged his followers to use rifles to eliminate opposition. He also taught that slaying opponents was "blood atonement." In view of all this, Ellen White was instructed to not make an issue of her role as an inspired prophet.

As a rule, each passage in which Ellen White says to use the Bible in place of the Spirit of Prophecy, is referring to giving Bible studies or evangelistic sermons to unbelievers. In all such cases, we should begin with the Bible!

However, we are told that it is good to give Spirit of Prophecy books to unbelievers. In this way, they can read themselves into the truth. Keep in mind that, in the process, no one is attempting to prove doctrine by the Spirit of Prophecy instead of the Bible! Her books are also full of Bible quotations in support of her statements. If you hand someone a copy of my book, *Beyond Pitcairn*, he may—as many have—read himself into a knowledge and acceptance of the Bible Sabbath. But no one would say my writings were placed ahead of Scripture, in the process! If we said that, we would have to ban giving away anything but the Bible.

We were told that it would be well to loan *Christ's Object Lessons* to our neighbors (9T, 35), as well as the *Testimonies* (4T, 390). Of course, there are many, many statements about the importance of sharing copies of *Great Controversy* with those not of our faith. Other books, papers, and pamphlets of various kinds should also be given to them (CH, 435).

So we should not be afraid to read the Spirit of Prophecy to those not of our faith, or share those precious books with them.

*But, when it comes to believers, the situation is far different.*

We know the importance and inspiration of those books, and we have a responsibility to read, and uphold, the beliefs and standards found therein. How thankful we can be that all the Word of God is in agreement!

Study the Word for yourself, and share it with your loved ones. We are so close to the end, and there is so much to be done.

To close this brief study, here are several interesting passages to consider:

"Repeatedly the word has come, Write the things

that I have given you to confirm the faith of My people in the position they have taken. Time and trial have not made void the instruction given, but through years of suffering and self-sacrifice have established the truth of the testimony given. The instruction that was given in the early days of the message is to be held as safe instruction to follow in this its closing days. Those who are indifferent to this light and instruction must not expect to escape the snares which we have been plainly told will cause the rejecters of light to stumble, and fall, and be snared, and be taken."—1 *Selected Messages*, 41.

"[In the vision] I took the precious Bible and surrounded it with the several *Testimonies for the Church*, given for the people of God. Here, said I, the cases of nearly all are met."—5 *Testimonies*, 664.

"Soon every possible effort will be made to discount and pervert the truth of the testimonies of God's Spirit. We must have in readiness the clear, straight messages that since 1846 have been coming to God's people.

"There will be those once united with us in the faith who will search for new, strange doctrines, for something odd and sensational to present to the people. They will bring in all conceivable fallacies, and will present them as coming from Mrs. White, that they may beguile souls."—1 *Selected Messages*, 41.

"One stood by my side and said: 'God has raised you up and has given you words to speak to the people and to reach hearts as He has given to no other one. He has shaped your testimonies to meet cases that are in need of help.'—2 *Testimonies*, 607-608.

"Satan is . . . constantly pressing in the spurious—to lead away from the truth. The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.' Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony."—1 *Selected Messages*, 48.

"If you lose confidence in the *Testimonies*, you will drift away from Bible truth."—5 *Testimonies*, 674.

"It is Satan's plan to weaken the faith of God's people in the *Testimonies*."—5 *Testimonies*, 672.

"Unbelief in the testimonies of warning, encouragement, and reproof is shutting away the light from God's people."—5 *Testimonies*, 674.

"We must follow the directions given through the Spirit of Prophecy. We must love and obey the truth for this time. This will save us from accepting strong delusions."—8 *Testimonies*, 298.