

# THE LAST WORD



Jamie Buckingham is author of 30 books, serves as senior pastor of the Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, Florida, is editor-at-large of *Charisma*.

## Bibles Bound in Shoe Leather

I thought the fighting had died down, but it seems the evangelicals are still shooting at each other over the question of whether the Bible is "inerrant" or merely "inspired." It seems to me, though, that unless the Word of God is transferred from book to heart, the question of inerrancy is meaningless. It all came to mind this last week when I was cleaning out my bookcase and found an old Bible with the pages half-missing and the cover chewed away by roaches. The sensible thing was to throw it away, but somehow it didn't seem right to drop a Bible in the trash can.

Everyone knows how to get rid of an old flag. But so far no one has come up with a set of rules on how to dispose of an old Bible. A different man, one whose roots do not extend back into a Baptist Sunday school, probably could have tossed it into the trash can without a second thought. But this was the Bible I received when I was promoted from the primary department to the junior department. Besides, it was a genuine King James Version — the "inerrant" one. I wound up putting it back on the shelf — tattered cover and all. I just couldn't bring myself to tossing it into the garbage compactor along with the used coffee grounds.

Last fall when a former running back with the Miami Dolphins was arrested for selling cocaine, the TV cameras showed him entering the courtroom holding a Bible in his handcuffed hands. I never did find out whether he believed in errancy, plenary inspiration, or just plain good luck. But none of that seemed to impress the judge. It seems the sale of dope to kids spoke louder than a man carrying a Bible to court. The unfortunate man wound up being sentenced to prison for more than 20 years — Bible and all.

Back when I was involved in pastoral counseling there were always certain people who, when they came to my office, brought their Bible. They never opened it during the counseling session, but sitting there with the Bible in their lap seemed to make them feel better.

A friend of mine means it when he says he never goes out of the house without his "sword." Lately he's been coming down hard on his wife because she only carries a New Testament. Even though it has an olive wood cover and was purchased in the Holy Land, he's still not satisfied. "That's not a sword. It's only a dagger."

Yet when Paul speaks of the "sword of the Spirit" which he says is the "word of God," I don't think he was talking about a *Thompson Chain Reference Bible*. After all, his letter to the Ephesians was written 337 years before the Council of Carthage ratified the New Testament canon.

A lot of us grew up equating "thy word have I hid in my heart" with scripture memorization. While all

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the Scripture is God's Word — God's Word is certainly more than Scripture — and was here long before it appeared on paper. When David wrote about God's Word being a lamp to his feet he was not talking about the Bible — but about Jesus Christ. The same is true with Isaiah, who said the grass withers and the flower fades but the Word of the Lord abides forever — and that's more than a brown calfskin book published by A.J. Holman. The need today is not more Bibles in top-grained cowhide, but Bibles in shoe leather. Too many of us have been left bleeding after having been thumped over the head with a Bible — carried by some argumentative representative of sectarian religion who knows the words but has never had an experience with the Word. These religious terrorists prowl the world with their quivers full of sharpened proof texts, shooting at all who disagree — in the holy name of Jesus.

Frankly, I'd rather be around some illiterate who never will be able to pronounce "Mephibosheth" and spends half the sermon time trying to look up the Book of Paul — but has a heart full of Godly love — than some Bible-quoting scribe who never has let the words of God become the Word of God.

I love my Bible. I am grateful for those who teach it, envious of those who memorize it and respectful of those who translate it and spread its good news of salvation. But there is a tendency—whenever we write "holy" on a thing—to venerate it. The Bible is holy in that it is different; but it is to be used, not worshiped.

We have friends who won't allow their grandchildren in the house because they might dirty the carpets. We have other friends who treat the Bible like the Israelites treated the Ark of the Covenant. Like the sons of Eli, they are unable to transfer holy Scripture into holy living. They, too, are Ichabod.

The Bible is not a lucky rabbit's foot. Carrying it to church—or to court—is not enough. It must be translated into our lives. Having written this, I returned to my bookcase. I took that battered old Bible and dropped it, tenderly, into the trash can. Bookcase Bibles — even if they are inerrant — are worthless. Only the Word of the Lord abides forever. ↵