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The Bible and the Gullible (May 2000)

by [William Edelen](#)

I receive questions through email and regular mail, either at my address or through the newspapers that carry my column. A recent letter from a woman said this: *“I attend the largest fundamentalist church in the Coachella Valley. The pastor is constantly preaching that the bible is reliable, without error and without contradiction. He loves the phrase ‘the bible is reliable.’ Do you believe this? Would you please do a column on this subject?”*

No, I do not believe that. There is not one major theological seminary, nor one Department of Religion in any major university, that teaches that nonsense. Anyone who tries to tell you that the bible is without error or contradiction is a biblical and historical illiterate. It is ignorance at the most pathetic point.

Can you believe that in the year 2000, with distinguished biblical scholarship available in every bookstore, we still hear the stupid remark that *“the bible is without error”*?

There has never been found an original manuscript of any book in the bible. All anyone has ever had are copies of copies of copies of copies, translations of translation of translations. Before the printing press was invented in the 15th century, no two translations were ever alike. The production of books, or translations, was exceedingly slow and inevitably erroneous. Translators made many, many mistakes. In addition to the mistakes, translators would often change the text to conform to their own views, or their own theology.

To have an *“infallible”* bible, the 1300 years of oral tradition would have had to be passed down *“infallibly”* after having been *“infallibly”* started. Then after 1300 years of an *“infallible”* oral tradition, you would have needed thousands and thousands of *“infallible”* translators. Then after thousands of *“infallible”* translators, you would still need an *“infallible”* interpreter, or *“infallible”* reader to *“infallibly”* interpret the *“infallible”* translations.

Then, of course, considering the dozens and dozens of various translations in bookstores today, you would have to ask which one is the infallible translation today, assuming you can read *“infallibly.”*

You see, words are only symbols and different words mean different things to different people. How you

read or respond to any word depends on your own background, education, experiences, gene pool and so forth. No two people will respond to words, or ideas, in the same way or find in the words the same meaning... So you see, an *“infallible”* bible would be worthless without *“infallible”* readers who could *“infallibly”* read an *“infallible”* translation.

All of the dozens and dozens of biblical translations cannot all be *“infallible.”* So, which one? Ask the clerk this the next time you go into a bible bookstore.

Anyone who believes today in the year 2000 that the bible is *“reliable”* and *“infallible,”* without error or contradiction, is approaching insanity.

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