



Handle the Word with Honor

A publisher's products demonstrate whether he or she respects or disregards the Bible.

by Kim Pettit

At a meeting with a missionary, he shared how his experiences with the people he was trying to evangelize influenced his attitude toward the Bible. For example, when he first began his work, he carried a small New Testament in his back pocket. Muslims felt this was not appropriate. If he really had reverence for God's Word, they argued, he would not sit on it every time he rode his bicycle. The missionary immediately installed a basket on his bicycle. Now, as he rides, the Bible has a position of honor. By his actions, he demonstrates that he cares for, and respects, God's Word.

The Bible may not be your company's primary product. In fact, most Christian publishing companies print other books. But even if you do not publish Bibles, you must consider whether you are handling God's Word with honor.

I recently purchased a book from one of the largest and most profitable Christian publishing houses in the United States. The book was written by a motivational speaker who has had great success. The chapters were genuinely funny stories about the experiences of Christian families. Each chapter ended with a verse from the Bible. However, that verse did not necessarily relate to the content of the chapter. There was no explanation to tie God's Word to the content that preceded it. In fact, that content was not very religious. It was as if the editor had suddenly remembered, once the book was finished, that the intended market was Christian, and that the book might sell better if the content were "spiced" with a little Scripture. God's Word was treated as a marketing device.

Not long after my disappointment with that book, I received a Christian magazine. I read it eagerly and was disappointed again. The magazine did not use the Bible as a marketing ploy. On the contrary, the feature article used Bible characters to inspire

women in their faith. Still, I cringed when I read it. Why?

The writer had selected a Bible passage to illustrate her points, but the passage did not support her teaching. She was misusing the Scripture and providing an unnecessary erroneous view. Her points could have been better made with other verses.

To make matters worse, the editor had selected the most egregious exegetical error as a callout with 24 point bold type in bright colors. The editor responsible for the magazine had not made certain that God's Word was correctly interpreted. Perhaps the writer's celebrity status had intimidated the editor, or temporarily disabled his critical faculties in assessing the original work. Perhaps pressures at work were a contributing factor—a very tight deadline hastened the editing process. Perhaps the editor lacked knowledge of the Scriptures and was therefore unable to recognize the error.

Does it matter?

Christians show their reverence for God's Word through their actions. How does your publishing firm handle Bible content in its publications? Do you use or abuse Scripture? Do you encourage your writers and your editors to use sound hermeneutical principles? Do you ask your proofreaders to double and triple check every Bible reference? Does your marketing staff treat the Bible as just one more aid to reach the religious market?

Take full stock of your responsibility in handling God's Word. As a publisher, you have the opportunity to reach many people with the Gospel and to strengthen the faith of the church. Make sure the way you treat the Scriptures is consistent with your mission. Handle the Bible with honor. ❖