



CAPITOL COMMISSION

A Word About The Word--Inerrant

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¹In the last study, the statement concerning inspiration was written: “Without changing the author's personality, style, and vocabulary, the Holy Spirit supernaturally ‘guided the authors of Scripture as to enable them to write exactly the words which convey His truth to men, and in doing so preserved their judgments from error in the original manuscripts (emphasis mine).”²

Inerrancy is this week’s “Word About the Word.” Not only is it a logical implication of Scripture’s divine character, but it is also declared throughout the Scripture itself. In this lesson, we will give a detailed definition on inerrancy, examine the Biblical argument for inerrancy, and discuss the problems with the popular idea of “limited inerrancy.”

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 19:7-9 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.

Psalm 12:6 The words of the LORD are pure words;

Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

A DEFINITION

Defining inerrancy is relatively easy. As the above passages indicate, the Bible claims to be perfect, pure, sure, right, clean, truth and tested.

Inerrancy is the “idea that Scripture is completely free from error.”³

Wayne Grudem takes it a step farther and writes, “*The inerrancy of Scripture means that the Scripture does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.*”⁴ He

continues by stating “...*the Bible always tells the truth*, and that it always tells the truth *concerning everything it talks about*” (emphasis his).⁵

Even though the definition is easy, there is a need to qualify this definition. First of all, inerrancy is only applied to the original autographs and not to copies and translations. The original writings are not available in the 21st century, but through the science of textual criticism, the church today can be confident that what it has is what was written. It would be beyond the Scripture’s teaching to assume inerrancy on future copies and translations.

Secondly, inerrancy allows for variety in writing styles and the use of non-standard grammar. In today’s languages, word plays and “bad grammar” are used at times to make a point; the same is true in the biblical languages. It is the meaning and teaching of these sentences and phrases, not the grammar or style, that is free from errors. This also applies to loose quotations or paraphrases of the Old Testament by New Testament writers.

Inerrancy also allows for a variety in details in reporting or explaining events. Matthew, Mark and Luke record many of the same events in each of their gospels, but not all record the same details. As long as the details do not contradict, inerrancy permits each writer to emphasize the details he desires to highlight to accomplish his purpose for reporting the event.

Fourthly, inerrancy does not demand the technical language and understanding of modern science. When the Scripture talks of the sun “rising” and other similar statements, it comes from the standpoint of the speaker. A lack of scientific understanding on the part of a 15th century B.C. writer does not undermine the truthfulness of God’s Word.

The Bible’s claim to be inerrant demands it to be free from teaching errors or contradictions. Granted, there are some problem passages that are hard to understand or comprehend. But just because we who live in the 21st century cannot connect all the dots does not mean the Bible is erroneous; it means we need to further examine the text and its background.

THE BIBLICAL ARGUMENT

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: WEDNESDAYS @ 12NOON, HEARING ROOM #1
ATTORNEY GENERAL’S OFFICE: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, BROADWAY BUILDING 3RD FLOOR CAFETERIA

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

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There are two central teachings from Scripture which uphold the purity, truth or inerrancy of its proclamations. The first is the discussion that “Every Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16; cf. 2 Pet. 1:19-21). The fact that God created this Word and that the Holy Spirit moved men to write, as a ship is moved by the wind, implies and gives assurance that there are no errors to be found.⁶

The second teaching is the Bible’s declaration on the character of God.

- God the Father, who breathed out the Scripture, is Truth. Titus 1:2 says “God, which cannot lie” (cf. Heb. 6:18).
- God the Son, who brought the truth to the New Testament writers, is Truth. Jesus states “I am the Way, the Truth...” (John 14:6).
- God the Spirit, who was the agent of inspiration, is Truth. The Apostle John writes, “because the Spirit is the Truth” (1 John 5:6).

The other attributes of God lend to this doctrine. Since God is all-knowing, He will know if any errors have been recorded. Since God is all-powerful, He can make sure errors are kept from His written word. And since God is good, He can be relied upon to always present the truth to His people.

An argument within Scripture which shows its inerrancy is the simple fact that there are *no* demonstrable errors in the Bible. There may be errors in translation. There may be errors in understanding which lead to apparent errors in Scripture. But when properly interpreted, the Bible has no contradictions or errors. Opponents claim to have found a number, but these have been reasonable explained over the centuries.⁷

THE BIBLE ALWAYS TELLS THE TRUTH...CONCERNING
EVERYTHING IT TALKS ABOUT. --WAYNE
GRUDEM

One may ask about archaeology’s role in proving or disproving the truth of Scripture. Even though archaeology has not shown any evidence that disproves the Scripture (although there are claims of this type of evidence), it is beyond the scope of archaeology to “prove” the Bible to be true. Archaeology is helpful in giving understanding to the backgrounds of biblical events and it has shown agreement with biblical data, but so little of it has been dug up and less has been examined. To use it as a pillar to support the truth of Scripture, it is not acceptable. Besides, “even if every historical statement in the Bible could be proven

true—confirmed—this would still not prove the theological message of the Bible.”⁸

For some these answers are incomplete, simplistic and naïve. They desire more evidence and want a “fool-proof” case. To this person, if you are reading this, I ask what kind of proof or how much evidence would convince you? The Bible has reasonably proven itself to its truth—the real question is “do you believe it?” As noted in the last study:

The bottom line is that it comes down to faith. Belief in the inspiration of Scripture is an issue of faith; faith in its claims and trusting in its truth. Non-belief is also an issue of faith; faith in one’s own ability to reason properly and trust in one’s own conclusions.

The same is true for inerrancy. There is enough evidence given by Scripture to support its claims. Do you trust it or trust in your own ability to properly reason? Have you fully examined every piece of evidence and fact? Are you sure that you are correctly evaluating every piece of evidence? Are you confident that you are able to reason clearly and properly? The truth is that these questions can be asked of everyone; including those who hold to inerrancy. Thus, it brings us around to faith—faith in Scripture’s claim and clear evidence or faith in your own research and abilities.

WHAT ABOUT “LIMITED INERRANCY”?

A popular compromise concerning the doctrine of inerrancy is “limited inerrancy.” Charles C. Ryrie describes this belief in two ways. The first is the idea that inerrancy does not require “Cape Kennedy standards of accuracy (and thus may include errors by ordinary mortals’ standards).”⁹ In other words, some errors are to be expected concerning the details of the book since it was written by men.

The second understanding is “that inerrancy is limited to parts of the Bible that pertain to its saving message (and thus other parts may and do in fact contain errors).”¹⁰ This idea can also be seen in the statement that the Bible is “*the only infallible rule of faith and practice.*”¹¹ An example of this thinking would be the thought that since neither Jonah in the belly of the fish nor the walls of Jericho miraculously falling down affect our salvation or daily living as believers, it is not necessary to hold these stories as historical truth. We are not saved by the parting of the Red Sea, therefore its historicity is not vital.

Several problems arise with “limited inerrancy.” The first problem is what does one do with the passages listed above (along with others) that claim

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God's Words as true, pure, and right. Do these verses would not fall in the "rule of faith and practice" and therefore, not expected to be true? Except, Jesus made one of the above comments and implied it in others; so are we to conclude He was mistaken? If so, a whole other set of issues has just been opened concerning the sinlessness of Christ, His deity and His work for our salvation.

The second problem involves questions concerning the idea of "the rule of faith and practice." What qualifies as "the rule of faith and practice" and who has the authority to decide? The Bible itself does not instruct what is or isn't "the rule," so where does one turn to find this designation? Another question is if the contents of the Bible outside of "the rule of faith and practice" contain errors, how can one be sure of the truth and reliability of the "rule" since they are all contained in the same book? It eventually comes down to a subjective decision of "what is right in one's own eyes." And thus, there is no real reliable authority to the Scripture, including the "rule" which instructs on how one is to be saved (and that is quite dangerous and scary).

Another problem involves drawing the line that separates permissible errors and those that are not. For example, if a bill is brought to the House and the proof for the passing of that bill contains one error, will it still be considered? What if that proof was filled with multiple errors and it errs concerning vitally important components of the bill, would it still be considered? This same logic should be applied to the Bible. How many errors in Scripture are permissible before it is tossed out as fiction? One, ten, a hundred? And as asked before, who is authorized to make that decision?

The questions and problems that surround the view of "limited inerrancy" make the position untenable. Besides, it also implies the conclusion that truth can be taught from error. It teaches that one can understand and know the truth about God and His Son by weeding through the untruths. But this seems "to require more faith to believe that God-permitted errors do not affect the teaching of the Bible than to believe that God-guarded authors were kept from writing errors."¹²

"Limited inerrancy" is not an acceptable compromise. It opens up the door to everything being questioned and discounted. Ultimately, it undermines the authority of Jesus Christ because each teaching, command, and miracle can be dismissed as something not necessary for salvation or Christian living. Vern Poythress wrote, "If we have no words that are beyond challenge, there is no rule that we must obey, and the Lordship of Christ becomes a sounding gong and a clanging symbol."¹³

CONCLUSION

Seminaries, pastors, and teachers who promote this erroneous teaching are doing a great disservice to their people. Only the proclamation that the Bible is wholly true brings honor to God. Only when God's Word is seen as as perfect, true, pure and right will it bring restoration, wisdom, rejoicing and understanding (Psa. 19:7-9).

The Scripture itself gives no other option. Therefore, to stand elsewhere is to stand on false ground. The Bible is "God-breathed" and since He is a God of truth, knowledge and power, we can be assured it is a faithful and true word.

And from its truth, we can know that He is a God who forgives when men repent (1 John 1:9) and that He has provided the sacrifice we need for that salvation and forgiveness (Rom. 5:6-21).

¹ This study was originally written while the author served with Capitol Ministries™.

² K.S. Krantzer, "The Communication of Revelation," in *The Bible: The Living Word of Revelation*, ed. by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 180.

³ Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 66.

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 90. We will examine the role of archaeology in biblical studies at a further date.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶ This was our discussion in our last study. See our Capitol Commission study "A Word About The Word—Inspired" found at www.capitolcom.org/ministries/Missouri/Studies.aspx.

⁷ See Charles C. Ryrie, "The Importance of Inerrancy" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120.478 (Apr/June 1963): 137-44.

⁸ Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology & the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 20.

⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, "Some Important Aspects of Biblical Inerrancy" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136.541 (Jan/Mar 1979): 18. Note: Dr. Ryrie does not hold to the position of "limited inerrancy."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ An explanation of this line of thinking can be found on Fuller Seminary's web-site (www.fuller.edu/provost/aboutfuller/believe_teach.asp --as found on February 22, 2008). Fuller Seminary believes "Scripture is an essential part and trustworthy record of divine self-disclosure. All the books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, are the written Word of God, *the only infallible rule of faith and practice*" (emphasis mine). They go on to distance themselves from theological liberals who toss out the truth of the Bible completely, while at the same time admonishing those who hold and teach full inerrancy.

¹² Ryrie, 18.

¹³ Vern S. Poythress, "Problems for Limited Inerrancy" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18.2 (Spring 1975): 101.