

Theology 1.4

I. The Inspired Word of God

The West Minister Confession puts it this way: ‘that the word of God wherein he providentially inspired and moved the human authors enabling them to receive and communicate according to their individual personalities and situations the truth that he would have his church know for his glory and human salvation.’ This is a classic definition of inspiration.

The Holy Scripture is very God’s Word, his speaking to us today.

The center of God’s revelation is Jesus. And he is called the Word of God incarnate. And he said Scripture cannot be broken. He said, “Until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot” — not the littlest of dots in an iota — “will pass away from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18).

So the Word of God incarnate validated the word of God written in the Old Testament and then he commissioned apostles to speak his word as the foundation of the church. And he promised, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

So Jesus stands at the center as the Word of God incarnate, and looking back, he validates the word of God written, and looking forward, he validates the word of God written. And the apostles took it that way because they said amazing things about their authority.

For example, Paul said, for example, in 1 Corinthians 14:37–38, “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”

So there is the reason why the whole issue of inerrancy even arises. We have a book in front of us that claims to be the inspired word of God. And since God doesn’t lie and doesn’t make mistakes, we say the Bible doesn’t lie, doesn’t make mistakes.

II. Characteristics of Biblical Inspiration

Characteristics of Scripture include a term inerrant.

This is a strange term somewhat of a double negative, ‘not with error’.

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To make sense out of the word “inerrant” — no error —we have to define “error” in terms of the author’s intention.

Since God inspired the Bible, God’s intention mediated through the intention of human authors and going beyond them — We would say always going beyond them — because he sees all the innumerable, necessary implications of what they can’t see. This include in meaning or intention the necessary implications of what an author says, some of which he can see, and some of which he can’t. And God can see them all. And, therefore, when I think of the intention of the author, I am thinking of all that the human author intended to teach and all that God intended to teach, which is always bigger than what humans can see in their implications of what God inspired them to write.

Attention to Intention

Now, the reason intention is crucial is because there are all kinds of ways that we say things that could be taken as error which aren’t error if people didn’t pay attention to our intention.

The Bible speaks in ordinary language most of the time. For example, Jesus feeds 5,000 people the first time. What would happen if I went back and counted that crowd and I discovered that there were 4,912 people there? Would I say that Bible made a mistake? No, of course not; five thousand by its nature is a round number. However if the Bible listed it as 4,913 people, then there would be a mistake because 4,913 is an exact number. It talks about the four corners of the world in the Old Testament; this doesn’t mean that the world has four corners. This is an idiomatic way of saying ‘to the end of the world’. So this brings to mind the level of precision of Biblical statements. And some of these can be difficult to understand exactly in that is it may be a scientific statement.

Inerrancy doesn’t mean everything in the Bible is true. We have the record of men lying (e.g., Joshua 9) and even the words of the devil himself. But we can be sure these are accurate records of what took place.

Inerrancy doesn’t mean apparent contradictions are not in the text, but these can be resolved. At times different words may be used in recounting what appears to be the same incident. For example, Matthew 3:11 refers to John the Baptist carrying the sandals of the Messiah, whereas John 1:27 refers to him untying them. John preached over a period of time, and he would repeat himself; like any preacher he would use different ways of expressing the same thing.

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Inerrancy doesn't mean every extant copy is inerrant. It is important to understand that the doctrine of inerrancy only applies to the original manuscripts.

The term inerrant is not in the Bible; what it says in the Bible in a number of different places is that the Bible is holy true. For example, Psalm 119 is to meditate on the Word of God and specifically verse 142 says that your righteousness is righteous forever, and your law is true. Again further in 151 the theme continues, but you are near O Lord, and all your commandments are true. In verse 160 it says that the sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

J. I. Packer, summarized inerrancy as being an advanced commitment to receive his truth from God with all Scripture as found on inspection actually to teach. So because of inerrancy I come to the Bible already committed to the idea that whatever it teaches is truth from God is utterly reliable. But it does not short circuit the hard work of doing the inspection of what the Bible actually teaches.

How Much Is Inerrant?

If "inspired" really means "God-breathed," then the claim of 2 Timothy 3:16 is that all Scripture, being God-breathed, is without error and therefore can be trusted completely. Since God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18), He would cease to be God if He breathed out errors and contradictions, even in the smallest part. So long as we give theopneustos its real meaning, we shall not find it hard to understand the full inerrancy of the Bible.

Two words are sometimes used to explain the extent of biblical inerrancy: plenary and verbal. "Plenary" comes from the Latin plenus, which means "full," and refers to the fact that the whole of Scripture in every part is God-given. "Verbal" comes from the Latin verbum, which means "word," and emphasizes that even the words of Scripture are God-given. Plenary and verbal inspiration means the Bible is God-given (and therefore without error) in every part (doctrine, history, geography, dates, names) and in every single word.

When we talk about inerrancy, we refer to the original writings of Scripture. We do not have any of the original "autographs," as they are called, but only copies, including many copies of each book. There are small differences here and there, but in reality they are amazingly similar. One eighteenth century New Testament

scholar claimed that not one thousandth part of the text was affected by these differences.

Does It Matter?

Is the debate about whether or not the Bible can be trusted merely a theological quibble? Certainly not! The question of ultimate authority is of tremendous importance for the Christian.

- Inerrancy Governs Our Belief in the Trustworthy Character of God
- Inerrancy Governs Our Confidence in the Truth of the Gospel
- Inerrancy Governs Our Faith in the Value of Christ
- Inerrancy Governs Our Attitude to God's instruction

A church without the authority of Scripture is like a crocodile without teeth; it can open its mouth as wide and as often as it likes—but who cares? Thankfully, God has given us His inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word. His people can speak with authority and boldness, and we can be confident we have His instructions for our lives.