

“The Doctrine of Inerrancy”

Introduction

The Doctrine of Inerrancy was held by Early Christianity. Without any theological works to refer to, early Christians confidently applied the teachings of scripture to their personal lives. Believing the Word of God at face value, Early Christians ‘fleshed out’ their complete trust in the Word of God. After theological questions and pagan opposition began to arise, the Early Church penned their common teaching and faith into formal propositions. Through these formal propositions of the Early Church Fathers, Second Century Apologist, and Church Councils, the belief in Inerrancy became increasingly apparent.

With the passing of the Pre-modern Age and the ushering in of modernism and postmodernism, the doctrine of inerrancy became the object of debate. Contemporary theologians and skeptics alike questioned the validity of Inerrancy. Today the argument over Inerrancy continues among theologians. Since this doctrine holds such a prominent place in history and theological discussion, Inerrancy is a necessary study for any student of the Bible.

Defining Inerrancy

Before attempting to define inerrancy as it pertains to scripture, there are a couple of observations that need addressing. First, the word inerrancy is a theological term. In other words, the word inerrancy is not found in the Bible. The doctrine of inerrancy comes from a collection of scriptures. Secondly, many theologians have forwarded other terms to describe the

teaching of the Bible. Since inerrancy is not found in scripture and because many theologians have forwarded various ideas concerning the doctrine, the word inerrancy is difficult to define. First, this section will consider various views concerning Inerrancy. Lastly, this section will present two conservative definitions of the doctrine.

Millard Erickson's book "Christian Theology" provides the following seven views of Inerrancy.¹ 'Absolute Inerrancy' views the scripture as without any error in any area of study. This view also notes that the authors *intended to speak scientifically and historically with test-tube accuracy*. After consideration of this view it becomes apparent that 'Absolute Inerrancy' has a weakness in explaining the 'problem' passages of scripture (2 Sam. 10:18 cf. 1 Chr. 18:14 etc.). 'Full Inerrancy' holds to the belief that the scriptures are without error in every area of study. 'Full Inerrancy' differs with 'Absolute Inerrancy' as it recognizes that the authors did not always intend to write with 'test-tube' accuracy. For example, 'full Inerrancy' notes that sometimes the authors correctly 'rounded off' numerical counts because it simply wasn't necessary information for their message. 'Limited Inerrancy' teaches that the Bible is without error as it pertains to the matters of salvation. 'Limited inerrancy' also says that errors are in the Bible and that the *errors are a result of the writers' limited knowledge* of science and history. 'Inerrancy of Purpose' promotes that the Bible is not written as a book of truths, but is *written solely for the purpose of bringing people to a knowledge of God*. Both 'Limited Inerrancy' and 'Inerrancy of Purpose' seem to forget the teaching of our savior. Jesus said, "*For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled*"(Matthew 5:18). 'Accommodated Revelation' teaches that since the Bible came through human channels it is therefore is a mixture of human and divine teaching. In contrast with 'Accommodated Revelation', Second Peter 1:21 states that the writers of scripture were

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed.(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1998), 248.

‘moved’ or ‘born along’ by the Holy Spirit keeping and preserving their words. This scripture testifies that the writers of scripture believed that deity and not man guided them. ‘Nonpropositional Revelation’ believes the Bible is a product of man. The Bible is simply a record of men guiding others into a subjective relationship with God. According to scripture, the ‘Nonpropositional Revelation’ view is wrong. Throughout the Bible, there are instances where the scriptures claim to be of God and not man. Hebrews 1:1 is one clear example, “*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.*” Lastly, there is a view that believes that Inerrancy is simply irrelevant. Inerrancy, they say, is irrelevant because of several reasons: (1) the word inerrancy is not found in the Bible, (2) erring is a spiritual matter instead of an intellectual matter, (3) Inerrancy distracts and hinders proper research. Inerrancy is certainly relevant and will be addressed in a following section. Let it simply be noted now that theologians have expressed a broad range of opinions concerning the Bible.

After noting various views of Inerrancy, the complexity of defining Inerrancy becomes apparent. The word inerrancy means ‘without error’, but in today’s theological environment a simple ‘two-word definition’ is not sufficient. A complete definition of inerrancy will involve words that are more specific. After considering the various opinions of theologians, Geisler offers the following conservative definition:

“Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences.”²

Geisler provides a detailed definition with consideration to various objections to inerrancy. Another definition for inerrancy may be stated as follows: Inerrancy references God’s writings as

² Norman L. Geisler, *Inerrancy*(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1980), 294.

incapable of error to the slightest degree and completely accurate to the highest degree as it is presented in the original languages and interpreted within the framework of authorial intent.

In Past centuries, most theologians and layman accepted inerrancy without hesitation. Their acceptance was the result of a simple faith in a great God. Today, the Bible is the object of critique. Considering today's environment, there is a need to objectively ask a couple of questions: (1) Why is Inerrancy True? (2) How does the Bible claim to be Inerrant?

Why Inerrancy is True

There are several reasons for believing that inerrancy of scriptures is true. First, the Bible is a revelation from God and therefore linked directly to His Person. The second reason for believing Inerrancy is true is that the Bible teaches inerrancy of Scripture. The third reason is that Jesus taught inerrancy of Scripture.

Inerrancy is true because the Bible comes from God. The Bible clearly states that the words found in the scriptures are from God. The Prophets, Jesus, and the Apostles recognized that God spoke to mankind. For example, Isaiah and Jeremiah recorded the Words of God (Isaiah 7:7; 10:24; Jeremiah 7:20). Jesus also mentioned that God spoke to Moses (Mark 12:26). The Writer of Hebrews also records that 'God spake...unto the fathers by the prophets' (Hebrews 1:1). The testimony of the Prophets, Jesus, and Apostles give ample proof that God spoke to mankind.

The Bible also states very clearly that God doesn't lie or stray in the least bit from truth. The writer of Hebrews recorded that it is "impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18). Within the context, the writer is speaking of the promises or Words of God. The Apostle James recorded that in God there was "neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). The Savior of humanity

speaking of the recorded Words of God said that the “scripture can’t be broken” (John 10:35). Since God has spoken and His words are linked directly to His perfect and truthful being, the conclusion is clear that the Words of God are true and without error.

Inerrancy is true because the Bible teaches Inerrancy. The Bible not only teaches that the words that God speaks are true and trustworthy, but that *Inerrancy extended from the person of God to the paper of God’s penmen*. Two separate passages recognize this teaching. The first verse is located in 2 Peter 1:19-21.

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

Peter said they had a ‘*more sure word of prophecy*’. In the context Peter is saying that *he trust the written word of God more than His own experience on the Mount of Transfiguration*. The rest of the verse is a commentary on “*Scripture*” (which means literally writing). Peter here claims that Scripture (the writings on paper) is “*not by the will of man.*” The writings on the paper came from God and not from man. Peter also claimed that “*Holy men of God spake as they were move (born along) by the Holy Ghost.*” From this passage in 2 Peter, the testimony is clear that God used these men to speak and also write down on paper the very Words intended of God.

The second passage which places God’s Word on paper is found in 2 Timothy 3:16.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:”

The phrase highlighted in this verse provides plenty of information concerning God's word as *revealed upon paper*. "All" is the first word mentioned in this verse. The word all in this passage refers to the whole body scripture.³ "Scripture" is the second word recorded. Studies of the word "Scripture" ('graphe' in the greek) within Holy and secular writings reveal conclusively that it means "written word".⁴ Concerning "Inspiration of God" the following quote provides much insight into the passage.

*"The Greek term has nothing to say of inspiring or inspiration; it speaks only of a 'spiring' or 'spiration.' What it says of scripture is, not that it is 'breathed into by God' or is the product of divine 'in-breathing' into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, 'God-breathed'...When Paul declares, then, that 'every scripture' or 'all scripture' is the product of the divine breathe, is 'God-breathed,' he asserts with as much energy as he could employ that Scripture is the product of a specifically divine operation."*⁵

From this passage, we can conclude that God has placed His expression of thought upon paper.

From the testimony of Peter and Paul, we understand that God has provided His words through Holy men and upon paper. According to Peter, the result of God's action is words that are more trustworthy than his own eyewitness accounts (2 Peter 1:16-21). The Bible speaks loud and clear that the Scriptures are inerrant and completely trustworthy.

Inerrancy is true because Jesus taught inerrancy. A topical study of Jesus' teaching concerning scriptures gives overwhelming evidence that Jesus believed in the inerrancy of Scripture. According to Matthew 4:4, Jesus said that man was in need of '*every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*'. Jesus assumed that the every word was available to man. He did not qualify the availability of God's Word. In Matthew 5:18 Jesus stated that every 'jot and tittle' of the Law will be fulfilled. Again, Jesus did not qualify His statement. In John 10:35

³ Ibid., 46.

⁴ Ibid., 46.

⁵ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Doctrines of the Bible; a Study and Analysis of Major Bible Doctrines*(Grand Rapids,; Zondervan Pub. House, 1964), 8.

Jesus said that the 'scripture could not be broken'. In this verse, Jesus recognizes the permanence of the written word. Throughout the scriptures, Jesus revealed a high regard for the written word of God. Jesus revealed that mankind was in need of 'every word' of God and that every word would be fulfilled.

The Bible is inerrant because: (1) God gave His Word and He can not lie, (2) the Bible testifies that the Words of God were successfully penned upon paper, (3) Jesus accepted and taught the full acceptance of scripture.

Inerrancy relates to other areas of Systematic Theology

Inerrancy relates to several areas of Systematic Theology. Two of these areas are crucial to Christianity. Inerrancy of scripture is tied directly to Theology Proper. Inerrancy of scripture is vitally important to the Doctrine of Christ.

Theology Proper is a study of the person of God. Through the study of 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:17-21 it has been noted that God's Person is directly linked with the Holy Scriptures. Because of this link between the scripture and God, His character is attacked when inerrancy is called into question. The omnipotence of God is assaulted when God's parting of the Red Sea is slighted. The omniscience of God is insulted when the validity of Daniel's visions or Isaiah's prophecies are attacked. Scripture and Theology proper are linked so tightly that any battle set against scripture constitutes a war with God's Person.

Inerrancy is directly joined to Christology. Jesus Christ affirmed Scripture. Jesus made statements which approved the teaching of the Law, the prophets, and the Psalms (Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:24). These passages and many others show that Jesus highly esteemed scripture without hesitation even to the slightest detail Matt. 5:17-18; John 10:35). Within the New Testament

Jesus commissioned certain disciples to teach after him (John 14:26). Because Jesus taught and commissioned the apostles to write scripture, any slur against scripture is a reflection upon Jesus character.

Inerrancy is directly joined to Theology Proper and Christology. A low attitude toward scripture produces a low attitude toward God. The God of the Bible is a God which is able to do the impossible (Matt. 19:26; Mark 9:23; 10:27). If the God the Bible can answer prayers, resurrect the dead, and save souls, He is certainly able to part seas, predict the future, and superintend the writing of His own revelation to the point of Inerrancy.

Pragmatic Objections to Inerrancy

Pragmatic objections have been raised against Inerrancy. There is one contention that says Inerrancy hinders our interpretation of scripture. This contention, found mainly in the classroom, makes the accusation that if inerrancy is believed man is not free to question and explore the scriptures (i.e. to start his study with doubt). This pragmatic objection is not found in the hearts of laymen but is mostly found in the school of ‘negative higher criticism’⁶. Negative higher criticism is an *approach* to scripture that starts with a low, faithless view of scripture and ends with the denial of miracles. Jesus taught very plainly to approach the scriptures with faith. Jesus taught us to come with child like faith (Mark 10:15). Jesus also asked a question concerning those who doubted the testimony of scripture: *“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead”* (Luke 16:31). The negative higher critic’s faithless approach contradicts the direct teaching of our Savior. An

⁶ Geisler, 89.

attitude of Inerrancy toward the scriptures is the proper approach for interpreting the truths of our God.

Inerrancy is not the issue...saving souls is! Some see the battle for inerrancy as a waste of time. For many, Inerrancy is a battle of the classroom that never reaches the real world. This view has led many preachers to abandon their Bible for 'more practical' solutions for reaching the lost. This attitude of laziness and abandonment toward the Bible is unscriptural. Paul wrote to Timothy and encouraged him to keep the scriptures at the forefront of ministry; *"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee"*(1 Tim 4:16). The Apostle Jude heralded the call to *"earnestly contend for the faith"* (Jude 3). Inerrancy is not a useless and impractical battle. According to scripture, the battle and proclamation of the inerrant word should be at the forefront of any evangelistic effort.

Relevance of Inerrancy to Ministry

One Sunday Morning at the close of the invitation, I asked someone to give our benediction. As I walked toward the back of the church to greet people, a middle-aged man grabbed me by the arm and asked me point blank how to be saved. We retired to my office and subsequently the man received Christ. When that man grabbed me by the arm, I knew he was serious. This man was not playing games with his soul. This man wanted to be sure of his eternal destiny. He was looking to me for that information. Thankfully (for me and that man), I had an inerrant Bible that I could reference *back and forth with confidence* in order to lead that man to a saving knowledge of Christ.

The Church is a mixture of people with different races, genders, and educational achievements to name just a few. Although the Holy Spirit unites us into one body, we still have various backgrounds influencing our new lives. It is from separate backgrounds that every one of us are growing more and more into the person of Jesus. The process of growth is not a growth of subjective opinion, but our growth is focused on the Lord Jesus. He is our goal. In order for a varied group of believers to grow more and more like one person, we need an inerrant Bible. We need a standard of truth to reference. Jesus said that man shall not live by bread alone, but by *“every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God.”* The Inerrant Bible is necessary food for any child of God.

Our salvation is based upon the factual, biblical, and historical Jesus Christ. His work on the cross redeemed the soul from eternal damnation. Through this study, we have seen that His character of life and message of truth is at stake when the scriptures are questioned. When scriptures are not readily received Christianity will weaken and eventually crumble. Without an inerrant Bible, we will not be able to tell confidently the story nor will we grow in grace. When the Written Word is honored the Living Word is honored.

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