

BIBLICAL INERRANCY:
HEARING THE VERY HEART AND MIND
OF GOD THROUGH SCRIPTURE

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An Important Issue for Every Believer

Human opinions abound concerning the extent of the Bible's inspiration and inerrancy; that is, whether the Bible is errorless in its original writings. Yet from God's far keener vantage point, all Scripture is fully inspired and trustworthy.

Biblical inerrancy is more than a theological topic. It carries implications for every believer in terms of living a meaningful life, enjoying a deepening relationship with God, and sharing His truth with others. Approaching the Bible with an attitude of devotion and full acceptance affords us the opportunity to *hear the very heart and mind of God*, unobscured by the philosophies of men. The benefits are everlasting (Rom. 8:11; 2 Tim. 3:16–17).

One Bible commentator explains the marvellous opportunity to hear God speak through His supernatural Word:

“Do you know that every time we come to the Scriptures, it can be as if we were sitting before the Creator-Redeemer Himself, allowing Him to express His very heart and mind to us? What God has to say to us this side of eternity has been wonderfully recorded in the written Word of God. His Word is as relevant and powerful today as when it was first spoken because His words have behind them all the nature and character of God.”¹

What Is Biblical Inerrancy?

¹ Bob Hoekstra, *The Ability of God's Word*, ed. Heidi Ceballos (Costa Mesa, CA: Living in Christ Ministries / IPM Books, 2016), 1–2. (Bob was a pastor and worldwide Bible teacher who received his Masters in Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary. His works, radio teachings, and current broadcast listings are at LivingInChrist.org.)

The historic Christian view of the Bible has been that it is inspired by God and without error or contradiction in the autographs (its original writings) and hence is God's infallible Word. An age-old war continues to rage over the Word of God. Its authority was first challenged in the Garden when the serpent asked, "Has God really said...?" (Gen. 3:1).

Inerrancy matters. For if a believer considers scriptural revelation to be fallible, how could he determine which parts of Scripture are trustworthy? How could he hear God speak to him clearly through the living Word of God (Heb. 4:12)? Why would he voluntarily surrender to its instructions? And why would he cultivate his personal walk with God through diligent prayer and Bible study?

For clarification of this vital doctrine, see the "Chicago Statement" published by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy in 1978.²

God's Spirit, the Teacher of Truth

The Holy Spirit, the divine Author of Scripture, indwells all true believers and teaches them truth (see 2 Pet. 1:20–21; John 14:16–17). He is the "Spirit of Truth," who helps believers discern that Scripture is the voice of God; that is, that God speaks to us primarily through the written Word. The Holy Spirit not only illuminates God's invaluable truths to believers (thereby enriching their relationship with God and enabling them to become grounded in His love and truth), He also empowers them to live according to the Bible's instructions. And He enables them to encourage others to fully trust in God's Word and recognize the unseen spiritual battle to discredit God's revelation to mankind.

Ten Reasons to Trust Biblical Inerrancy

² Norman L. Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy: Official Commentary on the ICBI Statements* (Matthews, NC: Bastion Books, 2014), The Chicago Statement, 15–17. (This statement can also be accessed on the internet at <http://www.isca-apologetics.org/sites/default/files/Explaining%20Biblical%20Inerrancy.pdf>.)

The case for biblical inerrancy is presented in numerous books and articles on Christian apologetics. Summarized below are ten reasons we can trust the full authority of the Bible.

Reason 1. The Testimony of Scripture Itself

The Bible claims to be the infallible and inerrant Word of God. The classical text for Bible inspiration, 2 Timothy 3:16, declares that all Scripture is literally “God-breathed” revelation. Understanding the origin of the term *inspiration* and its theological meaning (e.g., see the definition of *inspirare* in Latin and *theopneustos* in Greek³) serves to confirm biblical inerrancy. Inspiration and authority extend to every part of Scripture, including historical and factual matters.⁴ The Word of God is living and powerful, and it is forever settled in heaven (Heb. 4:12; Ps. 119:89). Regarding the Old Testament, God’s divine revelation came through the prophets in various ways, so that their messages were God’s message (Heb. 1:1).⁵ Regarding the New Testament, the Holy Spirit dwelling within the human authors superintended their Scripture writing (2 Pet. 1:20–21). The New Testament writers consistently identified the Bible as the living voice of God—to hear the Bible is to hear God.⁶ They also identified it as the word of God (e.g., Ex. 4:12; 20:1; 1 Thess. 2:13). According to the Bible itself, the Scriptures are pure, divine, eternal, and trustworthy. As such, they constitute the plumb line of objective truth.

Reason 2. The Everlasting Gospel

³ Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, revised and expanded 1986), 33–42.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 58–64.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *Does Inerrancy Matter?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, third printing 1981), 17–20. (See Scripture citations: Matt. 19:4–5; Acts 4:24–25; 13:34–35; Rom. 9:17; Gal. 3:8; Heb. 3:7.)

The Bible is one continuous story of God's plan of redemption for mankind, containing complete harmony and unity. The Old Testament predicts the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Whereas, the New Testament records His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and foretells His future return and reign. The overriding message of the Bible is this: Out of immeasurable love, God the Father sacrificed His only Son on the cross to redeem fallen man (John 3:16; Rom. 8:32). Jesus settled the sin issue for precious human souls in order to offer them the gift of eternal life. The Most High God (*El Elyon*) has spoken and preserved His Word (Gen. 14:18–20; Isa. 46:9–11) down through the ages to present this powerful salvation message. He wants the whole world to hear the “everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6). Yet how could we proclaim to others the pure gospel if it were not contained within an inerrant Bible? The gospel is intricately woven throughout Scripture with types, prophecies, and foreshadows. Hence, to dilute the authority of Scripture is to dilute the gospel and its impact. There cannot be an inerrant (errorless) gospel without inerrant Scripture.⁷

Reason 3. Jesus' High View of Scripture

Jesus Christ, the infallible Son of God, placed His seal of approval on the entire Bible. He taught that Scripture was: authoritative (Matt. 22:43), reliable (Matt. 26:54), final (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10), sufficient (Luke 16:31), indestructible (Matt. 5:17–18), unified (Luke 24:27, 44), clear (Luke 24:27), historical (Matt. 12:40), scientifically factual (Matt. 19:2–5), inerrant (Matt. 22:29; John 3:12; 17:17), and infallible (John 10:35).⁸ Jesus declared that His words are life and that they speak of spiritual realities (John 6:63). Regarding the New Testament, Jesus promised His apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them

⁷ John Warwick Montgomery, ed., *God's Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1974), chapter 1, “Biblical Inerrancy: What Is at Stake?” by Dr. Montgomery, 23–28.

⁸ Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, Victor Books, 1990), 142–3.

into all truth to write God's final revelation (John 14:25–26; 16:13; Eph. 2:20). The weight of Jesus' testimony to Scripture is more powerful than any alleged contradiction or error in it because He demonstrated that He is the divine Son of God.⁹ He did so by performing countless miracles, by supernaturally rising from the dead, and by fulfilling extensive Old Testament prophecy (three hundred messianic prophecies) with complete accuracy.

Reason 4. The Great Watershed Issue

A few decades ago, conservative evangelicals termed biblical inerrancy “the great watershed issue” (see the classic book by Dr. Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*).¹⁰⁻¹¹ They predicted that if the church forfeited this vital doctrine—the guarantee that the other doctrines are true—it would be impossible to stop the process of doctrinal deterioration.¹² A descent would

⁹ Montgomery, 38.

¹⁰ Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible: Defending the Inerrancy of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 142. An abridged edition is available on Amazon (last accessed on 4/24/16) (ed. Calvary Chapel Publishing, 2008.) See also Dr. Lindsell's vol. 2, *The Bible in the Balance* (Zondervan, 1979). (Dr. Lindsell served as *Christianity Today* editor for ten years, and he was one of the signatories of the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, signed by nearly 300 evangelical scholars.)

¹¹ Francis A. Schaeffer defined “watershed issue” in *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, tenth printing 1995), 43–44. “[On a high rocky ridge], the snow lies along that watershed, unbroken, as a seeming unity. But when it melts, where it ends in its destinations is literally a thousand miles apart. . . . A watershed divides. A clear line can be drawn between what seems at first to be the same or at least very close, but in reality ends in very different situations.” In other words, a watershed issue is a slippery-slope crisis. (On the back cover of Dr. Schaeffer's 1975 book *No Final Conflict* he wrote, “Holding to a strong view of Scripture, or not holding to it, is the watershed of the evangelical world.”)

¹² Lindsell, 210.

begin down a *slippery slope*, eroding other Christian beliefs and eventually culminating in abandonment of the faith. On the other hand, liberal evangelicals believed that the Bible only “contained” revelatory truth, that the Holy Spirit inspired only the portion of Scripture pertaining to “faith and practice,” and that the Bible therefore was only “partly” reliable.¹³ As foreseen, numerous individuals and institutions over the years have withdrawn their commitment to inerrancy, which became their first step downward into greater doctrinal error. As a result, we now have weakened missionary outreach, progressively liberal views, religious pluralism (acknowledging various sources of truth), postmodern relativism, the recent movement to rethink/redefine Christianity, and apostasy.

Reason 5. “It Is Written”

The Bible cautions us not to alter Scripture. When the Devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness for forty days (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13), he misquoted and misapplied Scripture (an effective strategy that he used against Adam and Eve and continues to use today). Yet Jesus overcame the Devil’s three attacks by accurately quoting God’s words and submitting to them. He demonstrated the inerrancy of God’s Word by wielding His sword of the Spirit (applying Scripture with precision) and declaring “*It is written*” (Matt. 4:4–10). Jesus clearly proclaimed biblical inerrancy by stating, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4, quoting Deut. 8:3).¹⁴ Therefore, believers need to trust the whole counsel of Scripture, considering every word as significant.¹⁵ In His own words, Jesus verified that the entire Old Testament was written about Himself—the prophesied Messiah (Luke 24:27). (See also Jesus’

¹³ *Ibid*, 113–140.

¹⁴ All Scripture quotations in this article are from the *New King James Version*. Copyright ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

¹⁵ Montgomery, 31.

prophetic words in Ps. 40:7, quoted in Heb. 10:7.) Every law, situation, and page speaks of Jesus Christ, who is the Word or *Logos* (John 1:1–3, 14).

Reason 6. The Sovereignty of God

God's character requires an inerrant Bible. He is pure and righteous, and sovereignly rules over all. He spoke the world into existence and sustains all things (Gen. 1; Heb. 1:3). Hence, He is able to preserve His Word forever (Ps. 119:89). Any attack on the Bible is an attack on His character because He is a God of truth.¹⁶ It is impossible for God, who is omniscient, to lie. Logically, since God cannot err (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2), and the Bible is the Word of God, therefore the Bible cannot err.¹⁷ In essence, Creator-God says to mankind, "Trust the entire Bible because it expresses *My heart and mind*, and 'I Am' has sent it to you." God's sovereignty is challenged when the Bible is considered to be only partially inspired. For then people who are finite decide which Scriptures their infinite Creator inspired. Man's reasoning is thus elevated over God's revelation. God exposed this presumptuous position when He asked Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38:4). Since He is the Potter and we are the clay, His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isa. 29:16; 55:9). Eventually all people will wither like grass, but the Word of God will stand forever (Isa. 40:7–8).

Reason 7. *Sola Scriptura*

The 16th century Protestant Reformation brought a revitalization of the Word of God. Its slogan, "*Sola Scriptura*," which means "Scripture alone," pronounced that to hear or read the Scripture was to hear God. This conviction was common to the Christian church from the earliest times. Martin Luther, the great Reformer, set the authority of the infallible Word of God over that of popes, councils, church fathers, and

¹⁶ Boice, 24.

¹⁷ Geisler and Nix, 55.

tradition in all forms.¹⁸ He wrote that the Christian “should not doubt that, however simple [language and stories in Scripture] may seem, these are the very words, works, judgments, and deeds of the high majesty, power, and wisdom of God.”¹⁹ Luther unfailingly asserted the inerrancy of Scripture.²⁰ The Reformation movement recognized and honored God’s inerrant Word, strengthening its testimony for generations to come. Although the divine *authority* of Scripture was always held, not until the time of Luther was the *sufficiency* of Scripture clearly enunciated and practiced consistently.²¹ The Reformers appreciated that God magnifies His holy Word even above His holy name (Ps. 138:2).

Reason 8. The Antithesis

If the Bible is not viewed as inerrant, its truth is compromised and weakened. Tremendous damage results. The gospel is robbed of its power. Jesus Christ is robbed of His glory. And precious souls for whom Christ died will not hear the life-saving gospel. In addition, if Christians do not approach the Bible with an attitude of complete trust and prayerful expectancy, they cannot discern the voice of God from His heart and mind, since their interpretation of Scripture conflicts with Christ’s view. By reading the divine Word of God through filtered lenses, they miss thrilling opportunities to connect closely with the Lord of heaven, who created people for that purpose. The “errantists” (who maintain that the Scriptures contain error) unknowingly cooperate with the spiritual powers of darkness in undermining confidence in Scripture, which is

¹⁸ Montgomery, *God’s Inerrant Word*, chapter 2, “*Sola Scriptura* in History and Today” by J. I. Packer, 43–44.

¹⁹ Boice, 22–23.

²⁰ Lindsell, 57.

²¹ Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), chapter 12, “The View of the Bible Held by the Early Church through Luther” by Robert D. Preus, 382.

the foundation of the Christian faith. Accordingly, Bible teachers are instructed to “hold fast” the faithful word and endure sound doctrine (Titus 1:9; 2 Tim. 4:3). There is a high price to pay for tampering with God’s Word (Prov. 30:5–6; 2 Pet. 3:15–17; Rev. 22:18–19).

Reason 9. Textual Criticism

One claim against inerrancy is that the text of today’s Bible cannot be errorless since the original manuscripts no longer exist. However, “the entire body of sophisticated technique comprising the field of Textual Criticism has made possible the effective reconstruction of the original on the basis of copies.”²² Textual criticism is an objective science and an art.²³ According to Bible scholar Dr. Norman Geisler, we are certain of about 99.5 percent of the New Testament’s textual accuracy, based on comparing the abundance of manuscripts.²⁴ (A “manuscript” is a handwritten copy as opposed to a printed copy.) For example, today we have more than 5,600 original Greek manuscripts, as well as 19,200 manuscripts in other languages. There are only .5 percent “variant” readings (places where copies are not in agreement). This means that only 1/2 of 1 percent of the text requires textual analysis. And the bulk of those variants are made up of minor scribal mistakes that do not affect any key Bible doctrine. In addition, the accuracy of the Old Testament text is established by manuscript evidence, as confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Greek Septuagint. As Dr. Geisler concludes, “The text of our modern Bibles is so close to the original that we can have every confidence that what it teaches is truth.”²⁵

²² Montgomery, *God’s Inerrant Word*, 35–36.

²³ Geisler and Nix, 465–489.

²⁴ Geisler and Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*, 159–160.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 160.

Reason 10. Biblical Hermeneutics

A common tactic to diminish the importance of inerrancy is to challenge the Bible's authority. That is, a person might agree that all Scripture is revealed by God, and the autographs were errorless, yet claim that Scripture is open to personal and/or liberal interpretation. However, that approach usurps the author's revelatory position and inserts the reader's own authority.²⁶ In order to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), it is important to apply the rules and principles of "hermeneutics" (the science of interpretation) to biblical texts. The plain and literal meaning of Scripture is determined by using the grammatical-historical method of Bible interpretation, which focuses on literary forms, grammatical constructions, and historical contexts. This methodology is embraced by virtually all conservative exegetes and scholars, yielding a consistent interpretation of Scripture. One of the ten principles of biblical hermeneutics, for example, is that Scripture interprets other Scripture, through internal consistency. The Old and New covenants are inseparably related. "The New is in the Old contained, and the Old is in the New explained."²⁷ While the truth of Scripture is not subject to reader interpretation, the application of God's truth to our lives is dynamic and endless.

Conclusion: Hearing God Speak through Scripture

As exemplified by King Josiah, the prophet Nehemiah, and Peter at Pentecost, the power of the Scriptures brings conviction, revival, and great joy. God spoke to these men through the written word by His Holy Spirit, and a revival took place in their hearts (2 Kings 22:10–23:3; Neh. 8:9–12; Acts 2:1–41). Likewise, as we develop a hunger for biblical truth, the

²⁶ Geisler, *Inerrancy*, chapter 5, "Legitimate Hermeneutics" by Walter C. Kaiser Jr., 119.

²⁷ Geisler and Nix (quoting W. Graham Scroggie, *Know Your Bible*), 22.

Word of God will bring rejoicing to our souls. We will hear God express to us *His very heart and mind*.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate (John 1:1–3, 14). At His transfiguration, God the Father's voice thundered from heaven, causing the disciples to fall on their faces with great fear. They heard these heartfelt words of exhortation: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matt. 17:5). Will we hear Jesus, who has placed His stamp of approval on the inerrant Word of God?