

CBC Sunday School
Bibliology: Inerrancy and Infallibility
October 3, 2021

“Inerrancy means having “an advance commitment to receive as truth from God all that Scripture is found on inspection actually to teach.” J. I. Packer, “Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority,” *Themelios*, 1 (1975):11

“The term ‘inerrancy’ “provides a vehicle for expressing our high regard for the Bible as the Spirit’s instrumentality. As Clark Pinnock declared, the term is a reminder of the command to take ‘the whole Bible seriously as the word of God.’ Hence, inerrancy is a theological affirmation of the Bible as totally trustworthy. It demands that we approach the text humbly, open to being taught by the Spirit as to how we can be God’s people... In declaring the trustworthiness of the Bible, therefore, we must keep in mind that it is, ultimately, not the book itself which we are affirming. Rather, we are confessing our faith in the Spirit who speaks in his revelatory message to us through the pages of Scripture. In declaring its infallibility and inerrancy, we are actually affirming the trustworthiness of the Spirit whose vehicle the Bible is.” Stan Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, pp. 523-4

“The statements of Holy Scripture will never be discordant with truth.” Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*, 21

“You have searched the Scriptures, which are true, which were given by the Holy Spirit; you know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them.” Clement of Rome, *Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians*, 45

“Since I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another, I shall admit rather that I do not understand what is recorded, and shall strive to persuade those who imagine that the Scriptures are contradictory, to be rather of the same opinion as myself.” Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, 65

I. Discussion

Have you ever read a passage of Scripture that made you question whether or not it was true? What are the hardest passages/parts of Scripture to believe? Do you think there might be any errors in the Bible? Discuss around your table.

II. Definitions and Clarifications

A. Inerrancy

1. “The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 91
-The Bible always tells the truth, concerning everything it talks about.

2. “*inerrant* means, simply, “without error.” John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 169
3. “*inerrant language makes good on its claims*. When we say that the Bible is inerrant, we mean that the Bible makes good on its claims.” John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 174
4. “The Bible, when correctly interpreted in light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms.” Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd Ed., p. 259

B. Infallibility

1. Infallibility differs from inerrancy in that it affirms that the Bible is true and reliable in matters of faith, practice, spirituality, etc., but may contain factual errors, such as errors in historical details or scientific assertions.
2. Infallibility means “The Bible will not lead us astray in matters of faith and practice.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 93
3. “I would say that Scripture is both inerrant and infallible. It is inerrant because it is infallible. There are no errors because there *can be* no errors in the divine speech... To say that a text is inerrant is to say that there are no errors in it. To say that a text is infallible is to say that there *can be* no errors in it, that it is *impossible* for that text to contain errors. So it is rather perplexing, I would say, and lexically irresponsible, for theologians... to urge the use of *infallible* as a *weaker* term than *inerrant*, or to say that an infallible text (as opposed to an inerrant text) may have errors in it.” John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 169

C. Clarifications

1. When we talk about inerrancy, we are referring to the original manuscripts of Scripture, as written by the original authors, and not about copies or translations, which may indeed carry errors or discrepancies.
2. Inerrancy means that whatever the Bible asserts as true is true. This does not mean that it cannot contain false statements or lies, as accurately quoted by the ones speaking them. In other words, the Bible may accurately quote lies or untruth spoken by individuals, without affirming the actual false words.
-See Genesis 3:4; John 10:20; Luke 22:57
3. The doctrine of inerrancy takes into account the different genres of Scripture. Different genres call for varying levels of precision in speech. For example, historical narratives require more (or a different kind of) precision than wisdom literature.
4. Inerrancy allows for “nonchronological” narratives. For example, the gospels may record events “out of order,” to suit the rhetorical purposes of the author.
5. Inerrancy is not negated by ordinary, human, or seemingly imperfect language. Scripture speaks more in ordinary language than in technical.
 - a. It speaks of the sun “rising” and “falling,” without absolute scientific technicality.
 - b. It may use round numbers without our cultural concern with “precision.”
-See Mark 1:5
6. Inerrancy allows for different levels of sophistication in speech. Some biblical authors write with more elevated speech, some with simpler language. God speaks in ordinary

- language through people, and inerrancy does not demand a high “caliber” of speech.
7. The Bible can speak with flawed or irregular grammar.
-See Ephesians 3:1-3
 8. The Bible may speak in loose quotations without violating inerrancy.

“Inerrancy, therefore, means that the Bible is true, not that it is maximally precise. To the extent that precision is necessary for truth, the Bible is sufficiently precise. But it does not always have the amount of precision that some readers demand of it. It has a level of precision sufficient for its own purposes, not for the purposes for which some readers might employ it.” John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 173

III. Biblical Support and Theological Reasoning

- A. Scripture tells us that every word of God is important, and no words are to be taken away.
-Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Revelation 22:18-19
- B. Jesus sees even the smallest words of Scripture as important and consequential.
-Matthew 5:18
- C. God cannot lie or speak falsely. If God cannot lie or speak falsely, and Scripture is God’s Word, then Scripture cannot speak falsely. What it asserts as true must be true.
-Numbers 23:19; 2 Samuel 7:28; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18; Proverbs 30:5
- D. Thus, God’s Word is true, and in fact is truth itself.
-John 17:17; Psalm 12:6; 119:43, 160; Romans 3:4
- E. God has all knowledge (i.e. He is omniscient), thus God cannot speak ignorant of fact.
-Psalm 33:13-15; Hebrews 4:12-13
- F. Scripture repeatedly affirms that everything it says is reliable and true.
-Acts 24:14; Romans 15:4
- G. Scripture gives us no warrant or means to separate out that which is “true” from that which may contain error. Matters of faith and practice are interwoven with historical details, and interdependent upon one another.
-Matthew 12:38-42; Romans 4:19; 5:12-14; Luke 17:28-30; Hebrews 7:1-2
- H. How can we know which words God sees as less important, or not needing to be absolutely true?
- I. It is difficult to imagine Scripture being “God-breathed,” yet containing error.
-2 Timothy 3:16-17
- J. If we determine that God’s words are not true at some point, then we set ourselves up as the authority over His Word.

IV. Challenges

A. Supposed errors or contradictions in Scripture.

1. The death of Judas. How did he die and who bought the field?
-Matthew 27:5-7 and Acts 1:18-19
2. The number of angels at Jesus' tomb.
-Matthew 28:2; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4; and John 20:12
3. Whether the disciples are to "take" sandals and a staff as they are sent out.
-Luke 9:3; Mark 6:8-9; and Matthew 10:9-10
4. The different genealogies of Jesus.
-Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38

Response: Each supposed contradiction or error has a logical, plausible explanation.

B. The Bible at places is morally corrupt.

1. Calls to put people or even whole peoples to death.
-1 Samuel 15:2-3; Deuteronomy 2:34; 3:6; 20:16-18
-Genesis 9:5-6; Deuteronomy 21:18-21
2. Laws that seem ridiculous or unnecessarily burdensome.
-Leviticus 19:19; Exodus 23:19;
3. Moral stances that offend modern sensibilities.
-Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9

Response: Each moral objection presupposes that we determine our moral standard, and that God does not. Our challenge is to bring our own sense of right and wrong underneath the authority and will of God.

C. Inerrancy overly stresses the Bible's divine Author, and doesn't allow for "human" error. Response:

1. Error, or even sin, is not essential to humanity. Something does not have to be full of error, mistakes, or fallenness to be genuinely human.
2. To state that Scripture is inerrant is not to overstate the Spirit's or God's role in its authorship. Rather, to affirm that there are errors in Scripture is to dishonor or discredit God's activity in the formation of Scripture.
3. God's speech through humans is inherently a different kind of speech; an authoritative and truthful speech. See Balaam's words in Numbers 23:19.

D. Because we have no original manuscripts, inerrancy is only theoretical, and does not apply to the Bibles we hold in our hands. Response:

1. For a vast majority of Scripture (some would say over 99%), we know what the original words were. The current Greek and Hebrew texts that we hold are essentially the same as the original texts.
2. The number of textual variants, or words that differ according to different manuscripts, is very small. Even for those textual variants, the correct/original reading is often clear; "there are really very few places where the textual variant is both difficult to evaluate and significant in determining the meaning." Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 96

V. Questions

What might be some of the practical problems of denying the inerrancy of Scripture?

Should we have any cautions or concerns about affirming the inerrancy of Scripture?

To what extent should the inerrancy of Scripture be a “test of orthodoxy?” Can someone be a faithful Christian and not hold to the doctrine of inerrancy?

VI. Statements

A. USMB Confession

Article 2: Revelation of God

God’s Self-Revelation

We believe that God has made Himself known to all people. God’s power and nature have always been evident in creation. The Old Testament reveals God as the one who established a covenant relationship with Israel to make known to all people the eternal plan of salvation. God revealed Himself supremely in Jesus Christ, as recorded in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit continues to make God known to individuals and the church; this revelation is always consistent with the Scriptures.

The Written Word of God

We believe that the entire Bible was inspired by God through the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit guides the community of faith in the interpretation of Scripture. The person, teaching and life of Jesus Christ bring continuity and clarity to both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament bears witness to Christ, and Christ is the One whom the New Testament proclaims. We accept the Bible as the infallible Word of God and the authoritative guide for faith and practice.

Genesis 9:1-17; Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 6:2-8; Psalm 19:1-11; Psalm 119; Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 24:27, 44-47; John 1:16-18; John 16:13; Acts 8:34-35; Romans 1:18-21; Hebrews 1:1-2; Colossians 1:15-23; II Timothy 3:14-17; II Peter 1:16-21.

B. CBC Membership Confession

1. Submit to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the perfect and authoritative Word of God.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...” 2 Timothy 3:16

“...no prophecy of Scripture comes from one’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” 1 Peter 1:20-21

C. Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy - 1978

Preface

The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.

The following Statement affirms this inerrancy of Scripture afresh, making clear our understanding of it and warning against its denial. We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word which marks true Christian faith. We see it as our timely duty to make this affirmation in the face of current lapses from the truth of inerrancy among our fellow Christians and misunderstanding of this doctrine in the world at large.

This Statement consists of three parts: a Summary Statement, Articles of Affirmation and Denial, and an accompanying Exposition*. It has been prepared in the course of a three-day consultation in Chicago. Those who have signed the Summary Statement and the Articles wish to affirm their own conviction as to the inerrancy of Scripture and to encourage and challenge one another and all Christians to growing appreciation and understanding of this doctrine. We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight. Yet we rejoice in the deepening of our own convictions through our discussions together, and we pray that the Statement we have signed may be used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the Church in its faith, life, and mission.

We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

We invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak. We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help which enables us to strengthen this testimony to God's Word we shall be grateful.

* The Exposition is not printed here,

A SHORT STATEMENT

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms, obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

ARTICLES OF AFFIRMATION AND DENIAL

Article I

- We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.
- We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.

Article II

- We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.
- We deny that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.

Article III

- We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.
- We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

Article IV

- We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.
- We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

Article V

- We affirm that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive.
- We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.

Article VI

- We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.

- We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

Article VII

- We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.
- We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

Article VIII

- We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.
- We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

Article IX

- We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.
- We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

Article X

- We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.
- We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

Article XI

- We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.
- We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

Article XII

- We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.
- We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further

deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

Article XIII

- We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.
- We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

Article XIV

- We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.
- We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

Article XV

- We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.
- We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

Article XVI

- We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.
- We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

Article XVII

- We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.
- We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

Article XVIII

- We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.
- We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, de-historicizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

Article XIX

- We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.
- We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences both to the individual and to the Church.