

- Premature Conclusions of Contradictory Truth

- Sometimes “incontrovertible” facts of history or science seem to stand in contrast to or even directly contradict Scripture.
- One point to keep in mind is whether the conflict is over what the text says or over what others have interpreted it to say. (*Does the Bible really teach geo-centrism as some in Galileo’s day thought?*)
- Just as we must sometimes remain tentative in our interpretation of Scripture, we must also realize that our understanding of science has developed over time and is constantly adapting. (At one point, a steady-state universe seemed to contradict Genesis 1. Many scientists resisted the “Big Bang” theory because of the seeming plausibility it gave to the Biblical account.)

(Remember Feinberg’s point: “...when all facts are known...”)

- Be willing to study out difficult passages (commentaries or *Hard Sayings of the Bible* by Walter Kaiser Jr., F.F. Bruce, and others)
- Examples: Daniel 5 – Belshazzar was unknown to history until the Nabonidus Chronicle was discovered in the latter half of the 19th Century; Daniel 6 – Darius the Mede puzzled many until careful study revealed it may be an enthronement name for either Cyrus or Cyaxares II; Kingdom of David & Solomon – was called a myth but the Tel Dan inscription (“house of David”) found in 1993 and other recent discoveries speak otherwise.
- “*Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence*” – archeology doesn’t have to “prove” the Bible but can speak to “plausibility.”
- Sometimes we need a better understanding of Scripture or even to change our views to agree with Scripture (see Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*).

A Look Ahead at Next Week

- We will finish looking at the character of Scripture.

Goal: Grow in our understanding of the doctrine of Scripture, be equipped to answer objections, and to better learn how to read and understand the Bible.

Sources: Quotes indicated “TDOS” are from Mark Thompson, *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2022). Lesson 7 draws heavily from TDOS, chapter 4.

Scripture: Theology, Text & Transmission

Class 7: Scripture’s Character: Truthful (or Inerrant)

Review

In our study we have settled “**what** Scripture is” (the written record of the speech of the living God), and are now moving on to discuss “**how** Scripture is.” This is important to establish since people tend to diminish God’s word in favor of church tradition (Catholicism), personal revelation (charismaticism), or intuition (contemporary post-modernism).

Last class, we focused on the clarity of Scripture: that it is accessible to all without need of authoritative interpreters. Its message is clear. This does not mean all parts of Scripture are equally clear, that no study is needed, or that teachers are irrelevant, or that there is no need for illuminating work of the Spirit, however. Yet the Bible is clear enough that unbelievers can be charged with refusing to believe or with wrongly twisting its message.

We then began discussing the truthfulness (or inerrancy) of Scripture and this is what we will major on today.

I. The Truthfulness [or Inerrancy] of Scripture

A. Terms

- Infallibility (does not fail) and Inerrancy (does not err) – were both used interchangeably for most of church history (until mid-20th Century when some held to infallibility of Scripture for what God intends for it but would not hold that Scripture is free from error)
- Consistent Church affirmation of Truthfulness in Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox traditions. Sample quotes:
 - Augustine of Hippo: “completely free from error”
 - John Wycliffe: “The authority of Holy Scripture is infallible... Scripture remains true in its totality.”
 - Zwingli: “The word of God is certain and can never fail. It is clear, and will never leave us in darkness. It teaches its own truth.”
 - Luther: “The Holy Spirit neither lies nor errs nor doubts.” ~ p. 142

B. Definitions

- B.B. Warfield and other Princeton professors in the late 19th Century helped formulate a more complete doctrine of inerrancy. To Warfield, “what Scripture says, God says” and hence it is inerrant. The books of Scripture “in all their real affirmations... are without error.” (Quoted in *The Christian Faith*, M. Horton, p. 177.)

- Paul Feinberg provides a longer definition which is helpful:

“Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm....” ~ TDOS, p. 152

- Helpful resource: “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy”

https://www.etsjets.org/files/documents/Chicago_Statement.pdf

C. Jesus & the Scripture’s Teaching

- Jesus’ word is truth (Jn. 8:31-32) as He is (14:6), and God’s Word is truth (Jn. 17:17, 19). (See also Jn. 10:35b.)
- God is not a man that he should lie (Num. 23:19), and his word is true (2 Sam. 7:28, Ps. 18:30, Tit. 1:2)

“The Bible must be both true and trustworthy if it is the word of the God we know as ‘the God of truth’ (Isa. 65:16). And this is exactly what Scripture testifies about itself (Ps. 119:160; John 17:17).” ~ TDOS, 148

D. Differences in Approach to this debate

- Building doctrine from *deduction*.
 - Starting with the Bible’s teachings about itself, its origin and its character, we can deduce that the Bible’s assertions must be truthful and without error.
 - This view is shaped by the Bible’s direct statements on the matter before grappling with the Bible’s indirect phenomena (data) – those points which critics allege are errors in statements of fact or material contradictions.
- Building doctrine from *induction*.

- Starting with historical difficulties and alleged contradictions, it can be inferred that the Bible is not wholly truthful and must contain some amount of error.
- This view majors on the Bible’s indirect phenomena (data) before grappling with its clear statements.

Roger Nicole responded to an example of this approach:

“[Some contend] that a proper approach to the doctrine of inspiration is to start with induction from... ‘the phenomena of Scripture’ rather than with deduction from certain Biblical statements about the Scripture.... This particular point needs to be controverted. If the Bible does make certain express statements about itself, these manifestly must have a priority in our attempts to formulate a doctrine of Scripture. Quite obviously, induction from Bible phenomena will also have its due place, for it may tend to correct certain inaccuracies which might take place in the deductive process. The statements of Scripture, however, are always primary.”

(Quoted in *Collected Writings on Scripture*, D.A. Carson, pp. 79-80.)

E. Difficulties with Inerrancy (2 errors of method)

- Anachronistic or False Expectations of Precision
 - We forget that Scripture was written hundreds of years ago in a different culture with different conventions of language than ours.
 - Our modern quest for precision (with tape recorders and computers) creates an unreasonable expectation when applied to the Bible.
 - We must also be sensitive to the type of literature (genre) we are dealing with as our literary and even grammatical conventions are not universal to all types of literature and all eras.
 - Examples: use of round numbers, phenomenological language (sunrise, four corners of earth), eyewitness testimony differing in details (like different camera angles in a movie, parallel Gospel accounts will differ – yet even in a modern courtroom this is the norm) – no need for detailed harmonies leading to (6 denials of Jesus by Peter – as per Harold Lindsell), different emphases in doctrine (Romans 3:28 vs. James 2:24).