

## The Doctrine of the Word of God: Inerrancy

Recall the five characteristics of Scripture we will be studying:

1. Authority
2. Inerrancy
3. Clarity
4. Necessity
5. Sufficiency

Having dealt extensively with the authority of the Scriptures, we now move on to the inerrancy of the Scriptures.

### Definition of Inerrancy

*The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in its original manuscripts has no errors, and always tells the truth.*

As Grudem helpfully notes, this does not mean that the Bible tells us every fact there is to know about any subject. Rather, this definition simply affirms that what the Bible does say about any subject is true.

It is important for us to note as well that the truthfulness of Scripture is entirely consistent with other types of statements, such as the following:

1. The Bible can be inerrant and still speak in the ordinary language of everyday speech.

This is especially true in “scientific” or “historical” descriptions of facts or events.

- For example, many skeptics love to bring up the Bible’s description of the sun’s rising<sup>1</sup>, when science has proven this to be blatantly false.
  - However, we need to remember that the authors of Scripture were not intending to make scientific statements about the heliocentric

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Psa. 50:1; 113:3, etc.

nature of our galaxy, but rather is simply using a figure of speech familiar to the original audience.

→ No one in our scientific culture corrects the weatherman when he says that the sun rose at 6:03 a.m. and set at 9:17 p.m.

→ From *the perspective of the speaker*, this is exactly what happens.

- A similar attack is leveled against the Bible and its use of numbers when measuring or counting.
  - For example, we have no problem today with the reporter who says that 8,000 people were killed in a certain battle without thereby implying that he has counted everyone and that there are not 7,998 or 8,007 dead soldiers.
  - This is true for measurements as well. Whether I say, “I don’t live far from my office,” or “I live a little over a mile from my office,” or “I live one mile from my office,” or “I live 1.287 miles from my office,” all four statements are still approximations to some degree of accuracy.

We must remember that language can make vague or imprecise statements without being untrue.

## 2. The Bible can be inerrant and still include loose or free quotations

Again, skeptics love to charge NT writers with errantly misquoting OT texts.

In our culture, we use quotation marks when we want to accurately and exactly quote another source.

However, when we use an indirect quotation (without quotation marks) we only expect an accurate report of the substance of the statement.

- As Grudem notes, “Written Greek at the time of the New Testament had no quotation marks or equivalent kinds of punctuation, and an accurate citation of another person needed to include only a correct

representation of the *content* of what the person said (rather like our indirect quotations): it was not expected to cite each word exactly.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, inerrancy is consistent with loose or free quotations of the OT or the words of Jesus, for example, so long as the *content* is not false to what was originally stated. The writer did not ordinarily imply that he was using the exact words of the speaker and only those, nor did the original hearers expect verbatim quotation in such reporting.

### Some Current Challenges to Inerrancy

#### 1. The Bible is Only Authoritative for “Faith and Practice”

This sentiment allows for the possibility of false statements in Scripture (for example, in *other* areas such as in minor historical details or scientific facts).

The response to this objection is that the Bible repeatedly affirms that *all* of Scripture is profitable for us, and that *all* of Scripture is “God-breathed” (e.g. 2 Tim. 3:16).

- Thus, it is completely pure (Psa. 12:6), perfect (Psa. 119:96) and true (Prov. 30:5).
  - The Bible does not make *any* restriction on the kinds of subjects to which it speaks truthfully.

#### 2. We have no inerrant manuscripts; therefore talk about inerrancy is misleading

In reply to this objection, it must first be stated that for over 99 percent of the words in the Bible, we *know* what the original manuscript said.

- Furthermore, we *know* where the uncertain readings are.

Thus, our present manuscripts are for most purposes the same as the original manuscripts the same as the original manuscripts.

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<sup>2</sup> Grudem, *ST*, 92.

- For a more detailed understanding and analysis of what is called “Textual Criticism”, there are a plethora of excellent resources available.
  - Anything by James White or Daniel Wallace is excellent, and would be worth your time, as it will strengthen and boost your confidence that the Scriptures you hold in your hand are inerrant.

### 3. There are some clear errors in the Bible

As Ray Comfort reminds us, when skeptics level this assault, it is best to ask them which error they are talking about.

- Most antagonists usually have no specific error in mind, but merely want to attack the Bible’s integrity hoping this scare tactic will cause the Christian to acquiesce or retreat.
  - Grudem: It is surprising how frequently one finds that this objection is made by people who have little or no idea where the specific errors are, but who believe there are errors because others have told them so.

If they are able to give an example, we can then ask them to show us where it is in the Bible, and how they have come to that conclusion.

- Rather than running away from the text, we must run *towards* it, and carefully examine it in its original context, understanding what it actually means, and what the authorial intent of the text is.
  - Example of the atheist who thought Jesus was wrong about ‘germ theory’ from Mark 7.

If necessary, tell the skeptic you will look further into the text and get back to them. This is where it might be helpful to consult some commentaries on the text in question. Other thinkers wiser than us have most certainly had to deal with the very same accusations.

## Problems with Denying Inerrancy

1. The Serious Moral Dilemma: If God “lies” in small matters, can we who are called to imitate Him also do the same?
2. If the Bible contains any errors, can we really trust God in *anything* He says?
  - Once we believe that God has spoken falsely to us in some minor matters in Scripture, we will soon realize that God is *capable* of speaking falsely to us.
    - This will have a detrimental effect on our ability to take God at His word and trust Him completely or obey Him fully in the rest of Scripture.
3. We essentially make our own human minds the highest standard of truth
  - E.g. of how the liberals like to ‘pick and choose’ what is God’s Word and what is not.
4. If the Bible is wrong in minor details, it could be wrong in foundational doctrines as well
  - Again, the denial of gospel doctrines by liberals.