

James Boice



DOES *INERRANCY*  
MATTER?



ALLIANCE OF CONFESSING EVANGELICALS

**James Montgomery Boice** (1938-2000) was the pastor of Philadelphia's historic Tenth Presbyterian Church (1968-2000). In 1994 he founded the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, a coalition of pastors, scholars, and churchmen who hold the historic creeds and confessions of the Reformed faith and who proclaim biblical doctrine in order to foster a Reformed awakening in today's Church.

James Boice served as the chairman of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI), which in 1978 drafted the seminal Chicago Statement. He also served as assistant editor of *Christianity Today*, and as editor of *Eternity Magazine*.

**The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy**, founded in 1977, had as its purpose the defense and application of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy as an essential element for the authority of Scripture and a necessity for the health of the church. It was created to counter the drift from this important doctrinal foundation by significant segments of evangelicalism and the outright denial of it by other church movement

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INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON  
BIBLICAL INERRANCY

# DOES INERRANCY MATTER?

JAMES BOICE

PREFACE BY J. I. PACKER



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## PREFACE

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I am not fond of the word "inerrancy." It is negative in form, and I like to sound positive. It is often thought to imply that one sees believing the Bible, especially its details, as mattering more than faith in Christ the Savior, and that is not my view. It is taken by many as enshrining the claim that one can prove Scripture true against all comers and resolve all apparent discrepancies of detail at the drop of a hat, and I know that is more than I can do.

But the word is one I need. Any word, as we know, can become a "weasel word" through having some of its meaning rubbed off, and this has happened to all my preferred terms for telling the world my beliefs about the Bible. I hear folk declare Scripture *inspired* (which in theology means "God-given") and in the next breath say that it misleads us from time to time. They call it *infallible* and *authoritative*, meaning only that in experience its impact on us, and the commitments to which it urges us, will keep us in God's way, not that all it tells us is true. This is not enough for me. I want to safeguard the full, historic, evangelical, and radical meaning of these three words. I want to set myself apart from those who have made "weasel words" out of them, and to make clear my intention, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, to take all Scripture, rightly

interpreted, to be affirming as instruction to me from my God. So I assert biblical inerrancy, after all, and encourage all faithful Christians to do the same.

For, first, it is *true*. If, as Christ and Paul among others believed, Scripture "came through the instrumentality of men from the very mouth of God" (Calvin), any idea of it teaching and affirming some falsehoods must be dismissed as blasphemous nonsense.

Second, it is *clarifying*. He who asserts inerrancy thereby shows what he means when he calls Scripture inspired, authoritative and infallible. We owe such honesty to each other.

Third, it is *health-giving* ("sound doctrine" in the New Testament sense), for it leads to that systematic submission of our proud minds to Scripture without which we cannot but lose some of God's precious truth.

The apostle John wrote to some first-century Christians: "You are strong, and the Word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1 John 2:14, NIV). I want to see such Christians today; therefore, I take a stand for the truth of biblical inerrancy, and commend Dr. Boice's booklet most heartily to all who care for the welfare of Christ's church.

J. I. Packer

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## A PLACE TO STAND

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Recently two members of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy were speaking on a seminary campus at the invitation of a conservative student group. They presented the case for inerrancy as a necessary element for the authority of Scripture, but many of the students objected by denying the need for authority in general. One student later wrote to one of the participants:

I have never held to the doctrine of inerrancy, and yet I found myself siding with you as today's discussion proceeded. Is it not true that behind most of the questions you received was a crypto-cultural Christianity, that is, a secret capitulation to the "try it, you'll like it" mentality of our civilization? That is how it seemed to me. Most questioners did not really seem to be engaged in a point-for-point argument over any substantial theological issue. Rather, most seemed to think that to preach the gospel in this day and age, one doesn't need a place to stand. All that one has to do is stand in the pulpit and say, not, "Thus saith the Lord," but only, "Try it, you'll like it."

I am surprised that I found myself feeling that you were right and all of us were wrong, at least insofar as this very basic point is concerned. Why we stand where we stand makes all the difference in the world!

Unfortunately, for every student like this, who has seen the issue, there are dozens of others who continue to operate without any authority at all. In the church this attitude expresses itself as a surrender to whatever the world is doing—living for personal pleasure, getting abortions, dissolving marriages at will, and other errors.

Christians need *authority*. Why do Christians believe as they do? Why are they Christians rather than Muslims, Jews, or Buddhists? It is because they believe that the true God has revealed Himself to us in Jesus and in the Bible, which tells us about Him. God has spoken in the Bible, and the Bible is authoritative because God is the ultimate authority. Because God is truth and speaks truth, the Bible must be truthful.

Those who undermine the truth of the Bible sometimes claim truthfulness for some parts of the Bible. These would be parts in which God has spoken, as opposed to other parts in which only men have spoken. But this position is unsound. People who think like this speak of biblical authority, but at best they have partial biblical authority since the parts containing error obviously cannot be authoritative. What is worse, they cannot even tell us precisely what parts are from God and are therefore truthful and what parts are not from God and are in error. Usually they say that the "salvation parts" are from God, but they do not tell us how to separate these from the non-salvation parts.

There is a very good reason for their failure, of course. The two go together. God reveals His salvation in history; therefore, the historical details are jointed to the story of salvation. Most Christians acknowledge this every week when they confess in the words of the Apostles' Creed: Jesus "was crucified under Pontius Pilate," for that is a historical as well as a salvation statement.



A second reason why inerrancy is important is *preaching*. There are many eloquent preachers today, but not many who do expository preaching. So the sermons are man-centered, weak, and shallow—and most Christians know it. Sometimes they are kind in their evaluation: "I guess I just didn't get much out of the sermon this morning." Sometimes they are more critical: "Why doesn't my minister preach the Bible?" Behind each of these comments is the sense that something is wrong. Many preachers talk about the Bible. They say they believe it, but they do not really teach it. Why is this? The reason (whether the ministers or the seminaries in which they are trained admit it or not) is that the majority of today's preachers are no longer sure that the Lord has spoken in Scripture.

It is not that they do not believe that God has spoken some place or that parts of the Bible, even large parts, may contain God's words. They are just not sure of it. If the Bible contains errors, it is not God's Word itself, however reliable it may be. And if it is not God's Word, it cannot be preached with authority. The result is an ambiguous attitude toward the Scriptures issuing in preaching which gives forth an uncertain sound.

Most laymen do not realize how bad this situation is, because most ministers are not quite honest in saying openly what they are thinking. The place where they do speak their minds is in gatherings of other ministers. In one such gathering an evangelical argued a point on the basis of the Bible's teaching. He referred to the words of Jesus and spoke of Jesus' promised return. When he had finished, a professor in one of our leading protestant seminaries stood up to discredit his testimony. He said, "You cannot appeal to the teaching of Jesus Christ, because we do not know what Jesus really taught. The Gospels are contradictory at this point. Each of them has been written to correct the others. So far as Christ's return is concerned, we have simply got to get it into our heads that Jesus is never coming back and that all things are going to continue on as they have from the beginning."

In another gathering, after an evangelical had argued a point, a minister came up to him and said, "Why are you always talking about the Bible when you try to make your case? Don't you know

that nobody believes the Bible anymore?"

Is it any wonder that preaching in the majority of American churches is at such low ebb? Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of the great preachers of our generation, has written, "I would not hesitate to put in the first position (for the decline in preaching): the loss of belief in the authority of the Scriptures, and a diminution in the belief of the Truth."

A third reason why inerrancy is important is the *health of the church*. In itself the church is not healthy because it is not holy. The church becomes holy only as God works upon it through the power of the Holy Spirit speaking in the written Word of God, the Bible.

What happens when the church is not really certain that God has spoken in the Bible? It neglects that portion of the Bible that it most needs to hear. That is a danger under any circumstance, for we all naturally dislike and avoid anything that condemns us or requires us to change in ways we do not want to change. We may stop going to church or stop reading the Bible. But this problem is increased many times when we no longer believe the Bible to be inerrant. Then it becomes easy to consider as errant (or outdated) those ethical requirements that go against our desires or the trends of our culture. Then we find people saying things like, "Sure I know that the Bible calls homosexuality sin, but we have gone beyond that today. Paul was wrong. What is important is that the church be loving to everybody." In this way the Bible as the reforming voice of God within the church is discounted.

Why is inerrancy important? It is important for religious authority, good preaching, and the health of the church. Without it the church flounders.

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## WHAT INERRANCY MEANS

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Recently, confusion has been introduced into discussions about inerrancy by those who either innocently or willfully misinterpret what the term "inerrancy" means. Nearly everybody has heard some of these misconceptions. It is important to acknowledge them and properly define this important term.

### INERRANCY AND LITERALISM

Some people say, "If you believe in inerrancy, then you have to take every statement in the Bible literally. You have to believe that the sun actually 'rises,' that God has a 'heart,' perhaps even that God has 'wings'" (Psalm 17:8). This is foolish, of course. It is based on the error of supposing that for something to be true it must be expressed in non-figurative language. This is just not so. The Bible uses poetical language at times, just as we do. We do not err just because we use it, nor does the Bible. Everyone understands the language to be poetical. In the same way, some biblical expressions are adaptations to the limits of human language as, for example, those parts of the Bible that refer to the emotions or parts of God.

God is not like us. He does not have a body. But how can the Bible adequately tell us that we are deeply loved by God unless it tells us that His heart is moved, and uses other similar expressions?

## INERRANCY AND JESUS

Other people say, "If you believe in inerrancy (especially if you consider that idea worth contending for), then you are making the Bible more important than Jesus." But Jesus taught that the Bible is trustworthy. He is the one who said, "Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18).

He said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away" (Matthew 24:35). He said, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). If we take a lesser view of the Bible, we are not making Christ more important. We are making Him less important, for we are discounting His testimony. To confess His Lordship means to believe Him and follow Him in all He says, including His teachings about the Bible. He once asked the question, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

## INERRANCY AND CHRISTIAN LIVING

Another misunderstanding is by those who say, "Inerrancy makes doctrines more important than Christian living." Anyone should be able to see the error in this. We only have to ask the question Francis Schaeffer has asked as the title of one of his books, *How Should We Then Live?* The only way we can know how to live is by the authoritative teaching of the Bible. God teaches us how to live in Scripture. So, far from undermining or lessening the importance of the Christian life, it is only the full authority of the Bible linked to its inerrancy that provides a standard for it.

## COPIES AND TRANSLATIONS

Finally, there are people who say, "Since translations of the Bible differ and since both cannot be right, inerrancy is a mistaken notion." The misunderstanding here is to suppose that inerrancy applies to the copies of the original documents or to translations of these documents. Actually, it applies only to the original manuscripts, called "autographs."

"But why didn't God see to it that we have error-free copies?" This question is a bit more substantial. It may be that in the final analysis we have to say that we simply do not know why God has seen fit to act as He did. We obviously do not understand much of what God does, and unless He has chosen to give us the answer to this question, there is no reason why we should know it. Still, we may guess at an answer. Knowing human nature, it is reasonable to suppose that if we had supernaturally preserved copies of the biblical manuscripts (or perhaps even the originals themselves), men and women would tend to worship them rather than the God who gave them. We remember the bronze serpent that God gave to Moses' time. Later it was worshiped (2 Kings 18:4). How much likelier is it that people would end up worshiping the manuscripts of the Bible rather than the Lord?

## INERRANCY DEFINED

What does inerrancy mean then? It simply means that the Bible is *wholly true*. Paul Feinberg has written, "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 they teach, whether that teaching has to do with doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, or other disciplines or knowledge." At the Chicago summit meeting of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy in October, 1978, several hundred key evangelical leaders signed this statement: "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."

Here is an even more concise definition:

**What Scripture Says, God Says —  
Through Human Agents and Without Error.**

Divine truthfulness is the bedrock upon which inerrancy and all other true statements concerning the origin and nature of the Bible are built.

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## WHY BELIEVE IN INERRANCY?

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The Western Reserve University poll and other evidence suggest that most ministers today do not believe in inerrancy and perhaps do not even believe in inspiration. But that is not the case with most laymen. Most laymen do believe that the Bible is the verbally inspired, inerrant Word of God. Their problem is likelier to be that they cannot always give good reasons why they believe in inerrancy. So here are some reasons.

### REASON 1: THE BIBLE

*The Bible teaches inerrancy.* This is one of the most important things that can be said, for many people rightly appeal to the Scriptures in defense of basic doctrines—the doctrine of God, the deity of Christ, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the nature of the church, the work of the Holy Spirit, the final judgment, and other points of theology. But if the Bible is accurate and authoritative in these matters, as it is, there is no reason why it should not be considered equally accurate when speaking about itself.

One text in which the Bible speaks about itself is 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." In the Authorized (King James) Version the words "God-breathed" are rendered "given by inspiration of God." In the Revised Standard Version the words are "inspired by God." But these do not have quite the right idea. The English words "inspired" or "inspiration" have come down to us from the Latin Vulgate through the translation of Wycliffe—they suggest men somehow being given extra insight—but the idea is actually what the New International Version (1984) fortunately suggests, namely, that the Scriptures are the direct result of the breathing-out of God. The difference is important. In the one case, the translation suggests that the Bible is composed of human words written by men, whom God has perhaps somehow "inspired." In the other case, the stress is on the fact that the Bible is God's Word and therefore is characterized by His truthfulness and authority.

One of the great Bible scholars of an earlier generation, B. B. Warfield, has written of this verse:

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

Next to this verse from 2 Timothy may be placed a double series of passages, collected by Warfield, that show as clearly as can be done that the New Testament writers identified the Bible which they possessed with the living voice of God. In one of these sets of passages the Scriptures are spoken of as if they were God (Matthew 19:4,5; Hebrews 3:7; Acts 4:24,25; 13:34,35). In the other God is spoken of as if He were the Scriptures (Galatians 3:8;



Romans 9:17). This shows that the biblical writers identified the two. Moreover, the mixture of the Scriptures and God is made so casually that we can only conclude that the unique and divine character of the sacred books was by no means an invented or abstract idea of the writers, but rather a basic, almost unquestioned assumption which was inevitably expressed whenever they taught or wrote. Warfield said, "The two sets of passages, together, thus show an absolute identification, in the minds of these writers, of 'Scripture' with the speaking God."

Several verses show that the teaching of the New Testament about the Old Testament applies for the New Testament writings, too. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul writes of the gospel which he preached, saying, "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe." Similarly, in 2 Peter 3:15-16 Peter writes in a way which puts Paul's letters in the same category as the Old Testament books: "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."

Of course, the New Testament does not speak of itself with the same frequency and in exactly the same way as it speaks of the Old Testament, for not all the New Testament writers knew of the other New Testament books. The New Testament books were not collected to make an authoritative volume during the lifetime of the writers. Nevertheless, when the New Testament writers do speak of their writings, they do so in the same terms Jews used for the Old Testament.

In 2 Peter 1:21 Peter writes, "Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." The word translated "carried along" is used by Luke in the second chapter of Acts to describe the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He says it was like the "blowing" of

a violent great wind that ultimately destroyed the ship that was taking Paul to Rome. He says that the ship was caught by the storm and so was "driven along" (Acts 27:15-17). Clearly, Luke wished to say that the ship was at the mercy of the storm. It did not cease to be a ship, but it did cease to have control over its course and destination. In the same way, Peter teaches that the writers of the Bible were borne along in their writing to produce the words which God intended to be recorded. They wrote as men, but as men moved by the Holy Spirit. The result was an inerrant revelation.

All these verses indicate that the authors of Scripture considered the Bible as a whole and in its individual parts to have come from God. **The Bible does not contain men's words about God, but God's words about man and to man.** Because the Bible has its source in God, because it is the Word of God and not the words of mere men, the biblical writers everywhere regard the Scriptures as being an absolute and infallible authority. To hear the Bible is to hear God. To obey the Bible is to obey God. To disobey it is to rebel against Him.

## REASON 2: JESUS

*Jesus affirmed inerrancy.* Jesus appealed to the Bible as an infallible authority. When tempted by the devil in the wilderness, Jesus replied three times by quotations from Deuteronomy (Matthew 4:1-11). He replied to the question of the Sadducees about the heavenly status of marriage and the reality of the resurrection, first, by a rebuke that they did not know the Scriptures, and second, by a direct quotation from Exodus 3:6—"In the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive" (Luke 20:37-38). On many occasions Jesus appealed to Scripture in support of His actions—in defense of the cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:15-17), and in explanation of His submission to the cross (Matthew 26:53-54).

Jesus also saw His life as a fulfillment of Scripture and consciously submitted to it. He began His ministry with a quotation from Isaiah 61:1,2. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18,19). He taught that this prophecy was fulfilled in His ministry. Again, He said that He had not come "to abolish the Law or Prophets" but to "fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). He foretold the scattering of the disciples on the night of His arrest because, He said, "It is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered'" (Mark 14:27, a quotation from Zechariah 13:7). He told the religious leaders of His day, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me" (John 5:39). Even after the Resurrection He chided the disciples for being "foolish . . . and . . . slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and enter His glory?" Then we are told, "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

These passages and others show us that Jesus regarded the Old Testament highly and constantly submitted to it, as to an authoritative revelation. He taught that the Bible bore witness to him. Because it is the very Word of God, Jesus assumed its total reliability even to the smallest point of grammar.

### REASON 3: THE CHURCH

Until relatively modern times *the church has believed in inerrancy*. This argument is not of as great weight as arguments 1 and 2, for the church has no special guarantee of being right. In fact, the church has often erred. But it is still of some weight, for we would be arrogant indeed to think that we automatically know better than all the Christians who have gone before us and can therefore disregard their testimony. What did earlier believers think?

**Irenaeus**, who lived and wrote in Lyons, France, in the early years of the second century, said that we should be:

Most properly assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the word of God and His Spirit.

**Cyril of Jerusalem**, who lived in the fourth century, argued:

We must not deliver anything whatsoever, without the sacred Scriptures, nor let ourselves be misled by mere probability, or by marshalling of arguments. For this salvation of ours by faith is...by proof from the sacred Scriptures.

In a letter to Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate, **Augustine** said:

I have learned to hold the Scriptures alone inerrant.

In his "Preface to the Treatise on the Trinity," he wrote:

Do not follow my writings as Holy Scripture. When you find in Holy Scripture anything you did not believe before, believe it without doubt; but in my writings, you should hold nothing for certain.

Again, in what is perhaps his most famous letter to Jerome (number 82), **Augustine** wrote of the Scriptures:

I have learned to pay them such honor and respect as to believe most firmly that not one of their authors has erred in writing anything at all...(Therefore) if I do find anything in those books which seems contrary to truth, I decide that either the text is corrupt, or the translator did not follow what was really said, or that I failed to understand it.

**Luther** wrote of the Old Testament:

I beg and faithfully warn every pious Christian not to stumble at the simplicity of the language and stories that will often meet him there. He should not doubt that, however simple they may seem, these are the very words, works, judgments, and deeds of the high majesty, power, and wisdom of God.

In another place the great Reformer says:

The Scriptures, although they also were written by men, are not of men nor from men, but from God.

In his *Table Talk* he declared:

We must make a great difference between God's Word and the word of man. A man's word is a little sound, that flies into the air, and soon vanishes; but the Word of God is greater than heaven and earth, yea, greater than death and hell, for it forms part of the power of God, and endures everlastingly.

**John Calvin**, the Genevan reformer, wrote similarly:

This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God has spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak of their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered, according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit...We owe to the Scripture the same reverence

which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it.

The same is true of more recent writers. **J. Gresham Machen** wrote that the Bible is:

Not partly true and partly false, but all true, the blessed, holy Word of God.

**R. A. Torrey** declared:

The Bible is the Word of God. The voice that speaks to us from this Book is the voice of God.

**Francis Schaeffer** says:

The Bible is without mistake because it is God's inspired Word and...God cannot lie or contradict Himself.

**J. I. Packer** has written:

Only truth can be authoritative; only an inerrant Bible can be used...in the way that God means Scripture to be used...Its text is word for word God-given; its message is an organic unity, the infallible Word of an infallible God, a web of revealed truths centered upon Christ.

He writes of our only proper approach to Scripture:

The only right attitude for us is to confess that our works are vile and our wisdom foolishness, and to receive with thankfulness the flawless righteousness and the perfect Scriptures which God in mercy gives us. Anything else is a conceited affront to divine grace. And evangelical theology is bound to oppose the attitude which undervalues the gift of Scripture and presumes to correct the inerrant Word of God.

## REASON 4: GOD'S CHARACTER

*God's character demands inerrancy.* Basic to each of the statements above is the argument that if every utterance in the Bible is from God and if God is a God of truth, as the Bible declares Him to be, then the Bible must be wholly truthful or inerrant. Jesus said of God's utterances, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). The Psalmist wrote, "All your words are true" (Psalm 119:160). Solomon said, "Every word of God is flawless" (Proverbs 30:5). Paul wrote to Titus, "God . . . does not lie" (Titus 1:2). The author of Hebrews declared, "It is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18). In the final analysis, then, an attack on the Bible is an attack on the character of God. Can God lie? Some may say so. But every true Christian will join with Paul in saying rather, "Let God be true, and every man a liar" (Romans 3:4).

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## ARE THERE ERRORS?

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Some people might follow the case for inerrancy up to this point, and even agree with parts of it, but still feel that it is irrelevant in view of the "errors" which have been pointed out by biblical scholarship. Are there errors? Have these been proved to exist? There are difficulties in some places. No one questions that. But has scholarship actually shown that the books of the Bible are fallible and therefore only written by men after all?

Not very long ago claims like these were made by many influential scholars. They spoke of the "certain results" or "assured findings" that were imagined to have laid the orthodox conception of the Bible to rest forever. Today, as anyone who has had the opportunity to delve deeply into such questions knows, these phrases no longer occur with such frequency. In fact, they hardly occur at all. Why? Simply because, as the result of the continuing accumulation of the results of biblical and archeological investigations, many of these so-called "assured results" have blown up in the faces of those who cited them.

In 2 Kings 15:29 there is reference to a king of Assyria named Tiglath-Pileser. He is said to have conquered the Israelites of the



Northern Kingdom and to have taken many of them into captivity. A generation ago liberal scholars were saying that this king never existed and that the account of the fall of Israel to Assyria was mythology. Now, however, archeologists have excavated Tiglath-Pileser's capital city and have even found his name pressed into clay tablets which read, "I, Tiglath-Pileser, king of the west lands, king of the earth, whose kingdom extends to the great sea . . ." The English reader can find accounts of his battles with Israel in James B. Pritchard's book *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*.

Here is another example. About the time some scholars were denying the existence of Tiglath-Pileser, others were saying that Moses could never have written the first five books of the Bible on the grounds, which seemed irrefutable enough, that writing had not been invented in his day. Since that time, however, archeologists have unearthed thousands of tablets and inscriptions written many hundreds of years before Moses and even before Abraham. In fact, they now know of six different written languages from or before Moses' period.

In more recent days many could be found who denied that the historical books of the New Testament were written close enough to the events they describe to be reliable. The synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) were dated late, and John, which seemed to have the greatest measure of Greek flavoring, was pushed back into the second Christian century and, by some more radical scholars, even into the third. Then a piece of papyrus was uncovered upon which several verses of John 18 had been written. It was found in the wrappings of a mummy, the embalming of which was placed no later than A.D. 125 and probably before that. In other words, the date of the original writing would have to be within the first century and thus within the lifetime of the apostle John, who traditionally has been identified as the writer.

The results of scholarship, far from discrediting the Bible, actually support its truthfulness. Of course, they do not prove inerrancy. We will probably never have all the data that would be necessary to do that. But they do point in the direction of reliability and reveal nothing that is not compatible with the

highest view of Scripture. Even *Time* magazine acknowledged this in a cover story on the Bible (December 30, 1974):

After more than two centuries of facing the heaviest scientific guns that could be brought to bear, the Bible has survived—and is perhaps the better for the siege. Even on the critics' own terms—historical fact—the Scriptures seem more acceptable now than they did when the rationalists began the attack.

No Christian should ever fear to stand upon the Word of God. At times theories will challenge it. The arguments may seem unanswerable, and the one who stands by the Bible will be called foolish. The wise of the world will say, "You can believe that nonsense if you want to, but science teaches us better." This has happened before and will happen again. But the Christian who will stand upon Scripture will find even within his lifetime that, as the so-called "assured results" begin to crumble about the scholars, the view of the Bible held by the Lord Jesus Christ and the historical Christian church will prevail.

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## MEETING OBJECTIONS

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Standing on Scripture is not the only responsibility a Christian has, however. There is also a responsibility to defend the truthfulness of God's written revelation, particularly when questions are asked about the evangelical position. When people ask questions about the Bible or oppose the doctrine of inerrancy the Christian should "be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks (him) to give the reason for the hope that (he has)," as Peter indicates (1 Peter 3:15). Here are some helpful approaches to some typical objections.

### OBJECTION 1: NOT IMPORTANT.

*Inerrancy is not important.* It is quibbling about insignificant details. What really matters is a person's relationship to Jesus Christ.

**Answer:** A person's relationship to Jesus Christ is of the highest importance. No Christian would ever want to dispute that. But how do you know Jesus except as He is presented to you in the

Bible? If the Bible is not God's Word and does not present a picture of Jesus Christ that can be trusted, how do you know it is the true Christ you are following? You may be worshipping a Christ of your own imagination. Moreover, you have this problem: a relationship to Jesus is not merely a question of believing on Him as one's Savior. He is also your Lord, and this means He is the one who is to instruct you as to how you should live and what you should believe. How can He do that apart from an inerrant Scripture? If you sit in judgment on Scripture, Jesus is not really exercising His Lordship in your life. He is merely giving advice which you consider yourself free to disobey, believe, or judge in error. You are actually the lord of your own life.

### OBJECTION 2: NOT BIBLICAL.

*Inerrancy is not Biblical.* The Bible does not say it is inerrant. It only says it is inspired.

**Answer:** This is like saying that the Bible does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity. True, the Bible does not contain the word "trinity," and nowhere does it say in so many words, "There are three persons in the one God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit." But the Trinity is still clearly and emphatically taught. The Bible teaches that there is one God. It also teaches that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are distinct from the Father and from each other and yet that each is divine. Our doctrine of the Trinity is merely a logical and consistent way of stating these two truths. It is the same with the doctrine of inerrancy.

The word "inerrancy" does not occur in Scripture, nor does Scripture say, "The Bible is without error in all it affirms." Yet the doctrine of inerrancy is there. It is a necessary and obvious conclusion based on two other truths that Scripture does declare clearly. First, the Bible is God's Word. That is, the very words of Scripture are the words of God. Second, God is a God of truth and therefore speaks truthfully. If those statements are true, the only

possible conclusion is that the Bible is inerrant in everything it teaches.

### OBJECTION 3: DIVISIVE.

*Inerrancy is divisive.* Many who call themselves evangelicals do not hold to inerrancy. If you insist on the importance of this doctrine, you will divide the evangelical movement at precisely the moment when it seems to be making a real impact.

**Answer:** Inerrancy, like the doctrine of inspiration (of which it is a part), is not a dividing point for evangelicals but a rallying point. The effect of defending inerrancy should be exactly the opposite of what this objection implies. The only thing that has ever tied Christians together is a common experience of salvation through the Christ of the Bible. Therefore, they have always acknowledged the Bible as their only infallible rule of faith and practice. What other unifying factor is there if we cannot agree that the written record of our faith is true? Without that everyone will do what he or she thinks best and the evangelical church will disintegrate just as the liberal church has done. If it is a choice between evangelicals who adhere to the church's historical teaching and evangelicals who reject it and try to remake the evangelical movement over into their own image—who is it who is being divisive? If evangelicals are being divided, it is being done by those who have changed from a high to a low view of Scripture.

### OBJECTION 4: MODERN SCHOLARSHIP.

*Inerrancy is refuted by modern scholarship.* It may have been possible to believe in inerrancy in a less knowledgeable or sophisticated age, but we know today that this view is impossible.

**Answer:** What argument has persuaded you that the Bible has errors in it and is therefore not totally true? Are there real, provable errors? Or are you just adopting the skeptical mindset of our contemporary unbelieving world? One class of supposed errors is

miracles. "The Bible must be making a mistake when it says that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, because dead men don't rise," some say. "The iron could not float, the sun could not stand still." The issue here is not error but faith in God or lack of it. Just because you have not seen a resurrection does not mean that resurrections never occur. In fact, if God repeated miracles too often, they would cease to be miracles and would lose their evidential value. The real issue is whether or not there is a God such as the Bible depicts. If there is, then no miracle is beyond possibility. Besides, if you accept the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, which you should, the other miracles are easy.

A second class of supposed errors has to do with moral issues. In Joshua the Jewish people are commanded by God to kill the Canaanites. Some regard this as an error, because on the basis of their own outlook "the killing of innocent people is morally wrong." This forgets two important points. First, the Canaanites were far from innocent. Second, God is the Lord of life. He gave life and has the right to take it away. The only error here is the error of assuming you or other fallen human beings have the right to pronounce on the rightness or wrongness of God's decrees or actions.

The most significant class of supposed errors are apparent contradictions within the Bible. Examples would be the length of time Israel is said to have been in bondage in Egypt (Genesis 15:13 say it was 400 years, while Exodus 12:41 says it was 430 years) or the number of angels reported as being at Christ's tomb following the Resurrection (John 20:12 mentions two, Matthew 28:2 only one). These are divergent ways of reporting the events, of course. But they are not contradictory. The difference in the number of years the Jews are said to have been in Egypt may be the result of one writer starting from a different point than the other or of one giving an exact figure while the other is rounding the number off. So far as the angels are concerned, if there were the two John reports, there was certainly one, as Matthew says. People who deny inerrancy try to give the impression that the discovery of problems like these has led them to abandon the inerrancy position. But these problems are not new. They have been known

down through the centuries, and reasonable answers have been given to them. So far as evidence goes, we have more evidence for a high view of the Bible today than in earlier times. Discoveries from the Dead Sea, Summeria, Nag Hammadi, and now more recently from Ebla in Syria, provide more support than ever for the position that evangelicals have long held.

#### OBJECTION 5: ARGUING IN CIRCLES.

*Inerrancy means arguing in circles.* You believe in inerrancy because you believe the Bible teaches it, but you believe the Bible because you believe in inerrancy.

**Answer:** This is not the case. A logical presentation of the case for inerrancy is not circular.

- a. The Bible is a reliable and generally trustworthy document. This is established by treating it as any other historical record, as, for instance, the works of Josephus or the accounts of war by Julius Caesar.
- b. On the basis of the history recorded by the Bible we have sufficient grounds for believing that the central character of the Bible, Jesus Christ, did what He claimed to have done and therefore is who He claimed to be. He claimed to be the unique Son of God.
- c. As the unique Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ is an infallible authority.
- d. Jesus Christ not only assumed the authority of the Bible existing in His day, the Old Testament, He taught it, going so far as to say that the Scriptures are entirely without error and are eternal, being the Word of God.

- e. If the Scriptures are the Word of God, as Jesus taught, they must for this reason alone be entirely trustworthy and inerrant, for God is a God of truth.
- f. Therefore, on the basis of the teaching of Jesus Christ, the infallible Son of God, the church believes the Bible also to be infallible.

This argument begins with the nature of the Bible in general, proceeds to the person and teaching of Jesus Christ and concludes by adopting His teaching where the nature of the Bible is concerned.

#### OBJECTION 6: WITHHOLD JUDGMENT.

*Inerrancy is a matter on which I can withhold judgment.* It is a technical matter and is best discussed by scholars.

**Answer:** On the contrary, it is the most basic of all matters. It is nothing less than the question: Is there a sure word from God? If we can answer that question positively, then the way of salvation and of sure blessing in the Christian life is known, and you will be blessed to the degree you follow it. If God has not spoken clearly, then everything is uncertain, and you are merely groping hopelessly after truth. Has God spoken? If He has, then to say, "I can withhold judgment" is the same as saying, "I can question God." God forbid that you should retreat into such an illogical and irreverent position.



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## CONCLUSION

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The inerrancy debate is about truth. This is a matter no true Christian can take lightly. It is a matter of foundations. As the hymn writer said,

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!

The psalmist asked, "When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3).

For the last hundred years Christians have seen the Bible attacked directly by modern liberal scholarship and have recognized the danger. Today a greater danger threatens—the danger of an indirect attack in which the Bible is confessed to be the Word of God, the only proper rule for Christian faith and practice, but in which it is said to contain errors.

This threat is greatest because it is often unnoticed by normal Christian people. If a liberal denies the virgin birth, questions the miracles of Christ or even declares that Jesus was only a man (as many are still doing), most Christians recognize this for what it is—unbelief. They see the hand of Satan in it. He is the one who

questioned the word of God in the first recorded conversation in the Bible: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?' . . . You will not surely die. . . God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:1,4). But if someone pretending to be an evangelical says, "Sure I believe in the Bible, as you do, but what difference does it make if there are a few mistakes in it? After all, the Bible isn't a history book. It's not a science book. It only tells us about God and salvation," many Christians fail to see that this is also an attack on the Bible and so have their faith undermined without their even knowing it.

John Wesley knew different. He said, "If there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth."

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