

The Importance of Inerrancy—Part 2

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The Importance of Inerrancy for Christian Doctrine

William Culbertson, a former president of Moody Bible Institute once stated: “The root from which all heresy springs is a faulty view of the inspiration and the inerrancy of the Word of God.”¹ He was right.

Jesus, who is “the truth” (John 14:6) said, “Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17); and “Whoever is of the truth hears my voice” (John 18:37). That about says it all. But whatever this means for the truth of source, form, redaction and other critical systems, it underscores the fact that doctrine is truth, for doctrine is simply the systematization of God’s Word.

If the words of Jesus or the Bible cannot be trusted in earthly matters that *can* be tested (history, science, etc.) can they logically be trusted in heavenly matters that *can’t* be tested (doctrine)? Jesus spoke to this very point in John 3:12: “I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?”

To illustrate, note the following basic Christian doctrines:

- Theology Proper (Christian Theism, Trinitarianism)
- Christology (Jesus Christ)
- Pneumatology (the Holy Spirit)
- Eschatology (last things, the intermediate state, heaven, hell, etc.)
- Angelology (angels and demons)
- Anthropology (man)
- Ecclesiology (the church)
- Harmartiology (sin)
- Bibliology (the Bible)
- Soteriology (salvation)

Let’s ask a question. Is it logical to assume the *truth* of these doctrines, if we do not assume that an inerrant divine Revelation undergirds them? Apart from inerrancy, how could we assume any were true? In fact, apart from the Bible we could know nothing about them. Which of the above could be determined or discovered *apart* from revelation? But if biblical revelation itself is suspect, must not its systematization in doctrine and theology also be? If there is only a proportion of certainty, even if we argue it is a large proportion, we are still left with errant autographs and errant copies. Human error is mixed in with divine revelation in the autographs themselves. Will not this uncertainty influence at least our conviction of the truth, if not our acceptance of it?

With inerrant autographs and virtually inerrant copies however, we have the assurance that we possess the Word of God.

Let us examine the last two doctrines listed above and press the point a bit further.

In the doctrine of soteriology we may list the following subdoctrines:

- depravity
- imputation
- election
- grace
- propitiation/atonement
- reconciliation
- calling
- regeneration
- union
- conversion (repentance/faith)
- justification
- adoption
- sanctification
- eternal security/perseverance
- redemption
- resurrection
- glorification or judgment

It is, of course, easy for evangelicals to believe in something like salvation by grace. But some of the above doctrines, grace included, have rather fine points, are controversial, and have some very important ramifications. If the Bible is merely inspired truth and error, are we not free to pick and choose according to our own inclinations or sensibilities rather than attempting to determine what God has really spoken? When exegeting the text on its fine points will we treat a passage we dislike as *The Word of God* if indeed it may be the word of men or the prejudice of Paul? Does not the doctrine of autographic errancy, at least in theory, permit the prejudicial abandoning of “disagreeable” doctrines on the basis of defending e.g., man’s freedom (depravity), God’s character (election), or basic “common sense” (security of the believer, hell)? Where is the line to be drawn? (The fact that errantist evangelicals may not carry this progress to its logical conclusion is no guarantee it will not be at some point of crisis, or that they are not inconsistent in not doing this.)

Again, we are back at the door of a credible authority. If the Bible is inerrant it is objectively authoritative; if it is errant it is “subjectively authoritative” with no final authority at any given point unless we can objectively determine where the truth and error lie. The difficulty is that God has not told us this, so, in effect, we must guess. Either God’s Word as it stands is the final authority—or our subjective determination of its particular relevance is. As we will see in a future article, major doctrines are being questioned by some evangelicals on the basis of an assumed lack of biblical authority. Certainly, no *godly* person would question what He believes in his heart is *God’s Word*; the fact such doctrines *are* questioned means we have a problem.

The single major doctrine questioned in this debate, of course, is that of bibliology—the one

foundation from which *all other* doctrines ultimately flow. But is the doctrine of an authoritative (inerrant) Scripture upon which all of these *other* doctrines rest and depend of *less* importance than these doctrines themselves? Can one be an Evangelical if he rejects such a major evangelical doctrine? If he can reject one and be an evangelical, then can he reject two? Or three? Or four?

Christians who are limited inerrantists assert inerrancy for matters of faith and practice but not for science and history. But again, what doctrine of faith is not somehow related to history? As theologian, philosopher and historian Dr. John Warwick Montgomery observes:

In biblical religion it is important not to conceive of theological truth divorced from historical, empirical truth; this divorce would destroy the whole meaning of the Incarnation. The theological truths of Scripture are thus inextricably united with earthly matters, and the truth of the one demands the truth of the other....

...wherever the Scripture were to err objectively, there doubt would be warranted subjectively; and wherever the word of Scripture were to carry historically or scientifically erroneous ideas, there the reader would have every right to reject the theological affirmations, which, in the very nature of God's revelation, are inextricably entwined with empirical facts.

...in the final analysis, the biblical theology that centers on Christ the incarnate Word knows no distinction between "other aspects of life" and the religious: biblical truth is holistic, and its claim to theological validity is preserved from meaninglessness by its verifiability in the empirical domains that it touches.²

Further, is it really logical for the errantist to declare he accepts inerrancy even in matters of faith and practice?

Dr. Lindsell points out that one's view of the Bible is certainly a matter of faith—and if the Bible teaches its own inerrancy then the Bible must, as a matter of *that faith*, be correct in affirming such inerrancy. To say the Bible is inerrant in matters of *faith* (i.e., doctrine) is to say the Bible is fully (not partially), inerrant everywhere for the fundamental teaching of such *faith* is the doctrine of authoritative Scripture:

Matters of faith have to do with doctrine. One of the doctrines of the Bible is the doctrine of Scripture. If the Bible is infallible in matters of faith (or doctrine), then it must be infallible in its doctrine of Scripture as it would be in regard to the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, and the like. Thus, if there are errors in Scripture, then the doctrine of Scripture found in the Bible cannot teach that there are no errors.³

And what of other doctrines besides bibliology? Again, Lindsell states (as his books document): "...nowhere is there any example of a group that has proclaimed a belief in the truthfulness limited to those matters having to do with faith and practice where further defection has not occurred."⁴

Can we really tabulate the anguish of believers who have wrestled over biblical authority solely on the basis of hearing the unjustified pronouncements of first, evangelical errantists and second, secular critics of Scripture? Only God knows. And what of those whose faith has been seriously shaken? Indeed, if one believed Genesis couldn't be trusted because of the theory of evolution, that biblical personalities such as Adam and Eve and Jonah were myths, that Daniel and Peter were forgeries, that Paul and Jesus could be in error, who would not be shaken? What might have been the moral consequences in backsliding and the personal loss in evangelism, or the corporate loss in the ministry of their gifts to the church? Or the defections in ethical practices? Can the toll be counted? No one in the world would not carefully guard a container of gold bars he owned. But the Scripture declares our *faith* is more precious than gold (1 Pet. 1:7). How much more should it be guarded?

Certainly, to have peace of mind on biblical authority is a precious possession, not to mention

a fruit of the Holy Spirit of God. After all, He is “the Spirit of *truth*” (Jn. 14:17) who inspired Scripture (2 Pet. 1:21). Wrestling in doubt over what the Bible teaches is an unnecessary anguish and, in all likelihood, a fruit of the enemy of God who inspired the first doubt in God’s Word with, “Did God *really* say...?” (Gen. 3:1).

The uncertainty and inner turmoil so evident in the published statements of those evangelicals who wrestle with the uncertain authority of Scripture is a testimony to the pain and discomfort that rejecting God’s word can bring. As Rousas Rushdoony observes, “The clarity of that faith in the infallible word gives the believer an assurance, strength, and joy in the immediacy of God.”⁵ As we noted earlier, to doubt God’s word is to doubt God—and this can never be profitable.

Inerrancy gives the believer a firm foundation on which to stand, but errancy (or “limited inerrancy” as it is also called), crumbles that foundation. (And, of course, liberalism throws it out altogether.)

Whether one approaches the Bible with full confidence or genuine doubt carries an ocean of practical ramifications—doctrinal, moral, and social—all of them personal. For example, if one exchanges belief in inerrancy for “intellectual” credibility, and yet in his heart he believes that Jesus taught inerrancy, how might such an ethical compromise affect other areas of his life?

Notes:

¹ Cited in Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 1977), p. 152 without documentation.

² John W. Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1971), pp. 346-347.

³ Harold Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), p. 110.

⁴ Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, p. 139.

⁵ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Infallibility: An Inescapable Concept* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1978), p. 1.