



Living Scripture with the Corinthians.
Week 27: Considering 2 Corinthians –
The Ramifications of the Inerrancy of Scripture
a.k.a. What does a life look like that believes what the Bible says is actually God's spoken Word?

Thank you for joining us here LIVE in the WAJC radio station.
You can listen to WAJC at 88.1 or 91.7 or at Realiferradio.fm or search WAJC in the TuneIn App on your phone

Intro

We welcome you to this special live stream experience of Chew On This.

You are about to enter a discussion on how to actually live out faith in Christ. Living it out loud within our messy lives. The content of this discussion comes from The Pastoral Preaching notes and this live, small group discussion these notes will prompt here tonight. Something we call: A Community Based Learning Experience. Come, Chew On This with us.

Opening Question(s): [Pertains to Subject being discussed. Pulls listener in.]

Introduction: This is Pr. Orleen Haseltine with and ***** Sam Beamond along with Bruce Nelson (and our very own Otto Steve Lunde & Pr. Robin Bjornson joining us remotely).

Date/Topic:

We thank you for joining us for this week's discussion on Chew On This. This week's topic -
Considering 2nd Corinthians: The Ramifications of the Inerrancy of Scripture
a.k.a. What does a life look like that believes what the Bible says is actually God's spoken Word?
– Wednesday 4/22nd

Access/Website: All sermon/discussion, raw notes, and handouts are available at:
realchurch.org/wednesdaynight

Discussion

Closing Statement [Gives application of the topic. How do I apply to my life what was just talked about?]

Do I live like scripture is truth? Do I think like scripture is truth?
Do I treat others like scripture is truth? Do I really believe scripture is truth?

Outro (Steve)

Thank you for joining us for this week's discussion on **CONSIDERING 2ND CORINTHIANS:
The Ramifications of the Inerrancy of Scripture**
a.k.a. What does a life look like that believes what the Bible says is actually God's spoken Word?

To enjoy this process live, come join us and the Wednesday Night Crew every Wednesday night @ Maranatha's Forest Lake Campus @ 6:30PM. This is Steve Lunde, ALWAYS BE KIND.



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“It is significant that Paul’s expression of these teachings in this letter was inspired by the personal crisis he underwent during his rebuttal suffered on his second visit to Corinth (2:1-4, 9), his desperate escape from Ephesus (1:8-11) and his deep anxiety for the Corinthians experienced at Troas and Macedonia (2:13; 7:5-6) it is no exaggeration to say the coming of these ‘other Jesus’, accompanied as it was by a massive assault on the integrity of Paul, could easily have spelt the end of Pauline Christianity there. **That is survived and continued is probably due, in no small part, to this powerful letter.**” (Pg 17 IVP 2 Cor. BST)

Topics Covered:

Living in Spiritual Warfare – Offensive and Defensive

We already do this, do we notice?

[If we do one topic per week, that brings us through May 6th]

- 1.) God has proved faithful in keeping His ancient promises by His recently inaugurated new covenant of Christ and the Spirit (1:18-20; 3:3-6, 14-18). Moreover, God faithfully delivers and holds on to those who belong to Christ (1:3-11, 22; 4:7-9; 7:6).

Faithfulness: Faithful fulfilling of His promises. They did not expect Jesus to be that. When promises are kept in unusual ways. When faithfulness does not look like faithfulness. When God delivers to the back door.

- 2.) The new covenant, based as it is on the graciousness of God (6:1), has now surpassed and replaced the old covenant (3:7-11). It powerfully meets man’s needs at His points of greatest weakness – in His aging and death (4:16-5:10) and in His alienation from God due to sin (5:14-21).

The New Covenant fulfills the Old Covenant

- 3.) Christ is the pre-existent Son of God (1:19; 8:90, the image of God (4:4), the Lord (4:5), the Judge of all (5:10), the sinless one who died as substitute and representative for all people, God reconciling the world to Himself through Him (5:14-21). 2 Corinthians contains Paul’s most comprehensive statement about the death of Christ (5:14-21).

Christ – 100% God/100% Man.

- 4.) Genuineness of New Testament ministry is not established by ‘letters of recommendation’ or by a would-be minister’s mystical or miraculous powers, but by his faithfulness in persuading and his effectiveness in converting people to the Christian faith (5:11-12; 3:2-3; 10-7). The very existence of the Corinthian congregation was Christ’s living letter of recommendation of Paul’s ministry (3:2-3). The pattern and measure of the minister’s lifestyle is the sacrifice of Christ (4:10-15; 6:1-10; 11:21-33). Establishing true criteria for genuine Christian ministry is one of the major contributions of this letter.

What is genuine Christian Ministry? (Prosperity Gospel? NAR?)

- 5.) The ‘word of God’, the gospel, has a definable, limited content which neither Ministers nor anybody else may add to or subtract from (4:2; 11:4). This gospel is exceedingly powerful in bringing rebellious humans under the rule of God (4:6; 10:4-5).

How does one ADD or SUBTRACT from Scripture? (Seeker sensitive? Was it subtracting from scripture?)

- 6.) Paul was, both in person and through his writings, the apostle of Christ to the Gentiles. The risen Lord gave Paul this ‘authority’ in His historic commissioning of him on the road to Damascus (10:8; 13:10), and it is still exercised to subsequent generations through his letters, which now form part of the canon of Scripture. This letter is very important because it is Paul’s major defense of his apostleship to his detractors – both ancient and modern. In it, Paul answers the perennial question why he should be regarded as having authority over churches and Christians.

How do we Question Authority appropriately? (Unity & disunity look like what?)

*“When you cannot discredit the ministry, discredit the person.
When you cannot discredit the person, discredit the ministry.”*

Pastor Orleen

- 7.) Christian giving and serving arise out of and are in response to the graciousness of God displayed towards and in us. Cheerful and generous giving, in all its forms, brings a harvest of great enrichment to the givers (chapters 8-9).

(The Message of 2 Corinthians, Bible Speaks today. Barnett, Paul. IVP 1988. IL, Downers Grove.)

When Giving and Serving are a response to the Love of Christ, not a duty to earn it.



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TIMELINE

Paul plants the church in Corinth
 Stays 18mths
 Goes to Ephesus to do the same there
 While in Ephesus (2-3yrs) he sends 1 Corinthians via Timothy
 Uproar over 1 Corinthians – Not well received
 Paul makes a 2nd visit to Corinth from Ephesus (2 Cor2:1)
 The visit failed! Opponents insulted him, rebuked him, questioning his Apostolic Authority, Prominent member led.

Paul went back to Ephesus disheartened and distressed.
 He wrote the Corinthians the ‘Severe Letter’ which is now lost. Sent with Titus (2Cor 2:3-13).
 This letter had the success Paul wanted from his 2nd visit (2Cor 7).
 Paul left Ephesus and went to Macedonia. Met Titus there and heard the amazing results of repentance. In response to what Titus reported, Paul wrote 2nd Corinthians.

Get your bibles

The ‘word of God’, the gospel, has a definable, limited content which neither Ministers nor anybody else may add to or subtract from (4:2; 11:4). This gospel is exceedingly powerful in bringing rebellious humans under the rule of God (4:6; 10:4-5).

How does one ADD or SUBTRACT from Scripture? (Seeker sensitive? Was it subtracting from scripture?)

Scripture as Complete Comprehensive,

2 Corinthians 4:2-5 (ESV)

*² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. **We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.** ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants^[b] for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

How does one add or subtract from scripture?

- By making things up.
- By focusing on just one part.
- By using it as a shield for personal bias, a.k.a. bigotry.
- Saying it cannot mean that today, it was only for that time period.
- That it is a collection of stories, not the actual Word of God.

By not understanding what is historical context???????

**How does one guard against being hoodwinked by lies or manipulated by someone else’s agenda?
 How does one guard from the addition or the subtraction from Scripture = Scriptural Manipulation?**

#1 – Safe People (Cloud and Townsend)

#2 – Personally KNOW your bible, KNOW scripture. Do not just read it, LIVE IT.

inerrancy

exemption from error: INFALLIBILITY

in·fal·li·ble *adjective*

incapable of making mistakes or being wrong.

Unerring; error-free; unfailing; faultless; flawless; impeccable; perfect; true; uncanny; precise; accurate; meticulous



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never failing; always effective.

Unfailing; never failing; always effective; guaranteed; dependable; trustworthy; reliable; sure; certain; safe; sound; tried and tested; foolproof; effective

Can we believe this?

2 Tim. 3:12-17 ESV "All Scripture is inspired by God"

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

The ramifications of the inerrancy of Scripture a.k.a.

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ASK TEAM:

CAN YOU SHARE A TIME WHEN YOU FIRST PUT IN TO PRACTICE WALKING OUT A SCRIPTURE VERSE(S) WITH YOUR BEHAVIOR/ACTIONS? You believed a verse so you did it. (You could give personal examples of the verses below or share another verse that motivated you to do something.)

- It shows in our thought life.

2 Corinthians 10:5b

*We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, **and take every thought captive to obey Christ,***

Examples of taking every thought captive

- It shows in our decisions.

Galatians 2:20

*I have been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.** And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Name an example of a decision that goes one way without Christ living in you and another way when He does

- It shows in how we treat people.

Matthew 7:12

"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Share an example of the difference of treating others for self-centered benefit and treating others how you would like to be treated.

- It shows in whether we pray.

Psalm 116:1-2



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I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

² *Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.*

- It shows in how we pray.

Matthew 6:5-8

⁵ *“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

⁷ *“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ **Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.***

- It shows in our relationship towards money/wealth/riches.

Matthew 6:24

²⁴ *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

Share an experience of how a relationship with money/wealth/riches has changed once Christ was embraced.

- It shows in how we deal with forgiveness.

Matthew 6:14

¹⁴ *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

O's Forgiveness example: **Matthew 5:6**

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

Hunger – Passion, Consume

Righteousness – Yearn for truth, compassion, Justice, Truth

Satisfied – Filled, Vindicated, Desire for righteousness honored/answered

- It shows in how we witness/share the truth of Jesus.

Matthew 5:13-16

¹³ *“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.*

¹⁴ *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that ^[b]they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

Philemon 6

and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full ^(A)knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ

1 Peter 2:12

¹² *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*



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Give an example of sharing the Love of Christ with someone. (Influence, Words, Relationship)

- It shows in our self-talk

Isaiah 43:1b-2 (ESV)

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

Isaiah 45:3 (ESV)

³ I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

NLT

And I will give you treasures hidden in the darkness—secret riches.

I will do this so you may know that I am the Lord,
 the God of Israel, the one who calls you by name.

Challenge: What have I said to myself about my value today?

- It shows in what we value.

Proverbs 23:17-19 (ESV)

*¹⁷ Let not your heart envy sinners,
 but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day.*

*¹⁸ Surely there is a future,
 and your hope will not be cut off.*

*¹⁹ Hear, my son, and be wise,
 and direct your heart in the way.*

(NLT) Don't envy sinners,
 but always continue to fear the Lord.

¹⁸ You will be rewarded for this;
 your hope will not be disappointed.

¹⁹ My child, listen and be wise:
 Keep your heart on the right course.

- It shows in where we place our hope.

Hebrews 6:18-20

¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which ^(A)it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope ^(B)set before us. ¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into ^(C)the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus has gone ^(D)as a forerunner on our behalf, ^(E)having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. (ESV)

(NLT) So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. ¹⁹ This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. ²⁰ Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Where do I place my hope? How do I define strength?

- It shows in our response to the frightening



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Isaiah 41:10 (ESV)

fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

- It shows in how we let go of our shame.

Isaiah 54:4 (ESV)

"Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.

- It shows in how we Live by Faith

Hebrews 11:1-3 (ESV)

11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of ^(A)things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by ^(B)the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of ^(C)things that are visible.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ For ^(A)this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ ^(B)as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 5:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ So we are always of good courage. We know that ^(H)while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for ^(L)we walk by faith, not ^(L)by sight.

1 Peter 1:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ ^(U)Though you have not seen him, you love him. ^(V)Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining ^(W)the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Share an example of stepping out in Faith and then, what happened.

- It shows in our acceptance of living counter to the culture.

Matthew 7:13 (ESV)

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV) *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*

Luke 12:31-33 (ESV)

³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

³² "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV)

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^(E) destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Share a decision to live NOT like the world does.



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- It shows in our anxiety level.

Matthew 7:11 (ESV)

¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Matthew 6:25-34 (ESV)

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?^(G) ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

- It shows in how we trust Him to help us deal with human emotion.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

- And be motivated by that experience that WE WITNESS ABOUT IT/PRAY FOR OTHERS

2 Corinthians 1:2-4 (ESV)

² ^(A) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ ^(B) Blessed be the ^(C) God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and ^(D) God of all comfort, ⁴ ^(E) who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Closing:

**The ramifications of the inerrancy of Scripture a.k.a.
What does a life look like that believes what the Bible says is actually God's Word?**

THE BIBLE BECOMES A GUIDE FOR ALL THOUGHT AND CONDUCT.

Psalms 107:9 (ESV)

For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.



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Notes:

Matthew 10:28-32 English Standard Version (ESV)

²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.^[a] ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?^[b] And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. ³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,

NOT USE?

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 (ESV)

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, **and take every thought captive to obey Christ**, ⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

NLT ³ *We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do.* ⁴ *[a] We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments.* ⁵ *We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.* ⁶ And after you have become fully obedient, we will punish everyone who remains disobedient.

2 Corinthians 11:4 (ESV)

⁴ For if someone comes and *proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept **a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

*1 Cor 3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

** Galatians 1:6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and...

NLT ⁴ You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed.

Matthew 6:9-13 English Standard Version (ESV)

⁹ Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.^[a]

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,

your will be done,^[b]

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,^[c]

¹² and forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.^[d]

Footnotes:

a. [Matthew 6:9](#) Or *Let your name be kept holy*, or *Let your name be treated with reverence*

b. [Matthew 6:10](#) Or *Let your kingdom come, let your will be done*

c. [Matthew 6:11](#) Or *our bread for tomorrow*

d. [Matthew 6:13](#) Or *the evil one*; some manuscripts add *For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen*

4:2 A CODE OF ETHICS FOR CHRISTIAN WITNESS

When believers present the message of Christ, we need to be like Paul, absolutely above board in our motives and manners (2 Cor. 4:2). We need to respect our hearers and refuse to do



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anything that would violate their integrity. Otherwise we become like a cult, peddling spiritual goods (2:17).

Here are some suggestions (from material distributed by Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship) to guide Christians in their witness:

ETHICS FOR WITNESSING

(1) We are Christians, called by God to honor Jesus Christ with our lives, abiding by biblically defined ethical standards in every area of life, public and private. This includes our efforts to persuade coworkers and others to believe the good news about Jesus Christ.

(2) Wherever we live and work, we seek to follow the mandate, motives, message, and model of Jesus, who still pursues and reclaims those lost in sin and rebelling against Him.

(3) We believe all people are created in God's image with the capacity to relate to their Creator and Redeemer. We disdain any effort to influence people which depersonalizes them or deprives them of their inherent value as persons.

(4) Since we respect the value of persons, we believe all are worthy of hearing about Jesus Christ. We also affirm the right of every person to survey other religious options. People are free to choose a different belief system than Christianity.

(5) We affirm the role and right of Christians to share the gospel of Christ in the marketplace of ideas. However, this does not justify any means to fulfill that end. We reject coercive techniques or manipulative appeals, especially those that play on emotions and discount or contradict reason or evidence. We will not bypass a person's critical faculties, prey upon psychological weaknesses, undermine a relationship with one's family or religious institution, or mask the true nature of Christian conversion. We will not be intentionally mislead.

(6) We respect the individual integrity, intellectual honesty, and academic freedom of others, both believers and skeptics, and so we proclaim Christ without hidden agendas. We reveal our own identity, purpose, theological positions, and sources of information. We will use no false advertising and seek no material gain from presenting the gospel.

(7) We invite people of other religious persuasions to join us in true dialogue. We acknowledge our humanness—that we Christians are just as sinful, needy, and dependent on the grace of God as anyone else. We seek to listen sensitively in order to understand, and thus rid our witness of any stereotypes or fixed formulae which block honest communication.

(8) As our "brothers' keepers," we accept our responsibility to admonish any Christian brother or sister who presents the message of Christ in a way that violates these ethical guidelines.¹

5:18–19; Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:15–20; Hebrews 1:1–3.²

CONFLICT OVER BIBLICAL INERRANCY

Fifth in a Series

The issue of biblical inerrancy is today dividing evangelicals into ever more rigidly competitive camps. The inerrancy emphasis of theologians like Charles Hodge and of New Testament scholars like B. B. Warfield has in the main characterized conservative Christianity in America and most evangelical colleges, Bible institutes, and seminaries reflect it in their doctrinal commitments. In Britain, where critical theory took a

¹ *Word in life study Bible*. (1996). (electronic ed.). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

² Anderson, K. (1996). *Where to Find It in the Bible*. Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.



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larger toll, emphasis on biblical inerrancy did not as conspicuously dominate the evangelical scene, although the issue has always arisen in evangelical controversy over the authority of Scripture.

The Wenham (Gordon) Conference on Scripture (1966) was a kind of turning point in the inerrancy controversy. Because of inadequate advance planning, the gathering failed to face issues that ought to have been resolved and therefore achieved little more than the predictable conclusion that reputable evangelical scholars are ranged on both sides of the debate. The invasion of neo-orthodoxy into Southern Baptist seminaries eroded the emphasis on scriptural inerrancy. Other evangelical campuses, Asbury and Fuller among them, experienced internal faculty disagreement. As Fuller hedged on its original commitment concerning Scripture, the enthusiasm of such faculty members as Wilbur M. Smith, Gleason L. Archer, and Harold Lindsell waned; E. J. Carnell also resisted alteration. In 1961 the Christian Reformed Church was impelled to issue synodical study reports and decisions on biblical infallibility and in 1971 and 1972 on scriptural authority. A major issue in the rupture of Concordia Seminary (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod) was the legitimacy of the historical critical method in Bible interpretation. Right now the Evangelical Theological Society is in the midst of an unpublicized struggle over its inerrancy statement, which some member scholars sign but no longer share.

More and more books and articles support scriptural errancy (e.g., Dewey Beegle's *The Inspiration of Scripture*, Westminster, 1963, and *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*, Eerdmans, 1973; Jack Rogers's *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical*, Westminster, 1974; cf. Richard J. Coleman, "Biblical Inerrancy: Are We Going Anywhere?," *Theology Today*, January, 1975).

Scores of young evangelicals emphasize that scholars uncommitted to inerrancy are producing substantial evangelical works. They repudiate the "domino theory" that a rejection of inerrancy involves giving up "one evangelical doctrine after another." They point to the vigorous contributions to evangelical theology by scholars like James Orr in an earlier generation and G. C. Berkouwer, George Ladd, Bruce Metzger, and others in our time; F. F. Bruce, while apparently noncommittal, has written an appreciative introduction to Beegle's last book. Many young scholars invest their own critical learning in defense of evangelically crucial commitments. Some aspire to posts on non-evangelical faculties, aware that an inerrancy commitment seemingly barred the door to competent evangelical scholars in the recent past. Most would be shocked to learn that, for all his concessions to critical theory, James Orr's refusal to go further disqualified him as a scholar in the sight of a former principal of New College, Edinburgh, who disapproved the writing of a doctoral dissertation on Orr's evangelical contribution.

The point is not that biblical inerrancy today lacks stalwart champions in the succession of J. Gresham Machen, B. J. Young, and Ned Stonehouse. Among the present-day champions one might name Geoffrey Bromiley, Gordon Clark, Frank Gaebelin, Kenneth Kantzer, Roger Nicole, Robert Preus, Francis Schaeffer, Cornelius Van Til, and virtually the entire membership of the Evangelical Theological Society. The view is supported in Clark Pinnock's *Biblical Revelation* (Moody Press, 1972) and in the volume edited by John W. Montgomery, *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture* (Bethany Fellowship, 1974), which includes an essay by the English scholar James I. Packer. Earlier support can be found in *Revelation and the Bible*, which I edited (Baker, 1959).

Yet a growing vanguard of young graduates of evangelical colleges who hold doctorates from non-evangelical divinity centers now question or disown inerrancy, and the doctrine is held less consistently by evangelical faculties. Some of its supporters increasingly project inerrancy as the hallmark of evangelical fidelity, so that conflict over the issue more and more ruptures the comprehensive unity of evangelical scholars once evident a quarter century ago amid secondary disagreement on this issue.

The present editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Harold Lindsell, details in *Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan, 1976) the growing rebellion against inerrancy on evangelical campuses. Some retain the term and reassure supportive constituencies but nonetheless stretch the term's meaning. CHRISTIANITY TODAY has come to make inerrancy the badge of evangelical authenticity. Francis Schaeffer projects it as the watershed of evangelical fidelity and deplores a "false evangelicalism" that minimizes inerrancy.

For all their commitment to inerrancy, scholarly evangelicals earlier in this century—Hodge and Warfield included—avoided wholly resting Christian theism upon it. With New Testament balance their doctrine of Scripture emphasized first of all the divine authority and then the inspiration of Scripture, much as did the apostles. While scholars disagreed as to whether inerrancy is explicitly or only implicitly taught in



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Scripture, they did not make inerrancy a theological weapon with which to drive those evangelicals not adhering to the doctrine into a non-evangelical camp.

From the very first CHRISTIANITY TODAY was editorially committed to inerrancy. But its contributors were drawn from the broad evangelical spectrum to wage literary battle against non-evangelical perspectives. To divide this array of contributors over the issue of inerrancy was not in purview. This does not mean that a reasoned presentation of the epistemological significance of inerrancy is unimportant. The magazine editorially affirmed what is the case, that inerrancy and not errancy is the logical implicate of the divine authority and inspiration of Scripture; that champions of errancy have adduced no objective biblical, theological, or philosophical criterion to distinguish supposedly errant from inerrant passages; that errancy introduces epistemic instability as evidenced by disagreements over biblical reliability even among its evangelical advocates, to say nothing of liberal advocates whose irreconcilable differences drove neo-orthodoxy to affirm that no part of the Bible is in itself God's Word.

The claim by young evangelicals that to reject inerrancy does not automatically drive one to repudiate other evangelical doctrines is wholly right. The real question is whether, once scriptural errancy is affirmed, a consistent evangelical faith is maintained thereafter only by an act of will rather than by persuasive epistemological credentials. A volitional faith may also affirm that God can and does use poor grammar and may equally use errant statements and resort therefore to a theology of paradox. Paul K. Jewett (*Man as Male and Female*, Eerdmans, 1975) and G. C. Berkouwer (*Holy Scripture*, Eerdmans, 1975) seem to compromise not only the inerrancy but also the normativeness of Scripture by differentiating within it a timebound and a non-timebound authority.

Yet the appeal to useful contributions made by mediating scholars, and distaste for the use of inerrancy as a polemical weapon in the absence of reasoned supports, must not be ignored. Neither can the increasing fragmentation of evangelical cohesion over the issue of inerrancy. Evangelical churches and campuses that incorporate inerrancy into their statements have every obligation to preserve doctrinal fidelity. But the duty of the evangelical enterprise requires something higher than invalidating every contribution of evangelicals who halt short of that commitment. Those in leadership posts must exhibit the doctrine's rational roots and openly display its intellectual fruits.

CARL F. H. HENRY³

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE: AN OVERVIEW

True Theology: Knowing and Loving God

The study of theology is considered by many to be dry, boring, irrelevant, and complicated. But for those who want to know God, the study of theology is indispensable. The word "theology" comes from two Greek words, *theos* ("God") and *logos* ("word"). The study of theology is an effort to make definitive statements about God and his implications in an accurate, coherent, relevant way, based on God's self-revelations. Doctrine equips people to fulfill their primary purpose, which is to glorify and delight in God through a deep personal knowledge of him. Meaningful relationship with God is dependent on correct knowledge of him.

Any theological system that distinguishes between "rational propositions about God" and "a personal relationship with God" fails to see this necessary connection between love and knowledge. The capacity to love, enjoy, and tell others about a person is increased by greater knowledge of that person. Love and knowledge go hand in hand. Good lovers are students of the beloved. Knowledge of God is the goal of theology.

Knowledge without devotion is cold, dead orthodoxy. Devotion without knowledge is irrational instability. But true knowledge of God includes understanding everything from his perspective. Theology is learning to think God's thoughts after him. It is to learn what God loves and hates, and to see, hear, think, and act the way he does. Knowing how God thinks is the first step in becoming godly.

Many would like to think that just being a "good" person and "loving" God, without an emphasis on doctrine, is preferable. But being a good person can mean radically different things depending on what someone thinks "good" is, or what constitutes a "person." Loving God will look very different depending on one's conception of "God" or "love." The fundamental connections between belief and behavior, and between love and knowledge, demand a rigorous pursuit of truth for those wanting to love God and to be

³ Henry, C. F. H. (1976). [Footnotes](#). *Christianity Today*, 20(16), 831–833.



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godly. Hebrews 5:11–6:3 teaches that deepening theological understanding equips one to be able to differentiate good from evil, and it exhorts believers to mature in their knowledge of God and his ways:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity (Heb. 5:12–6:1).

Good theology is based in the belief that God exists, is personal, can be known, and has revealed himself. These presuppositions motivate theologians to devote themselves to a passionate pursuit of knowledge from God's Word. Unfortunately, the word "theologian" is used almost exclusively for vocational theologians rather than for anyone earnestly devoted to knowing God. On one level everyone who thinks about God is a theologian. But a believer whose life is consumed with knowing his Lord is most certainly a theologian, and theologians are committed to truth.

Loving God means loving truth. God is a God of truth; he *is* truth. In Scripture, all three persons of the Trinity are vitally related to truth (see chart).

All Three Persons of the Trinity Vitally Related to Truth

Father

"What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, "That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged"" (Rom. 3:3–4).

"For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs" (Rom. 15:8).

Son

"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"" (John 14:6).

"But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:20–21).

Spirit

"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me" (John 15:26).

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:13).

In light of this relationship between God and truth, it should be no surprise that the Great Commandment includes loving God with one's mind: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30, quoting Deut. 30:6). Fully loving God and obeying the Great Commandment requires actively engaging the mind in the pursuit of truth.



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The second half of the Great Commandment—love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31)—also requires a great commitment to truth. Love, kindness, and compassion must include profound concern that people understand the truth, since their lives depend on it. God meets man’s greatest need of relationship with him through an understanding of truth: “Of his own will [God] brought us forth *by the word of truth*, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18; cf. 1 Pet. 1:23). Sanctification also happens by means of the truth: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17; cf. Rom. 12:2). Authentic discipleship is marked by knowing and obeying truth: “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32). Therefore, loving others involves having a deep desire that they understand truth. This is the reason the Great Commission has a vital teaching element. Making disciples of Christ involves teaching them to observe all he has commanded (Matt. 28:20). Jesus wants people to understand and obey truth and thereby find life in him. Failure to care whether or not loved ones understand the truth is failure to care about their abundant and eternal lives. People are judged and go to hell because they fail to love and obey God’s truth (2 Thess. 2:11–13; cf. Rom. 1:18, 21, 25; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23).

Theological Method

Systematic theology seeks to summarize biblical teaching on particular topics in order to draw definitive conclusions that intersect with life. God has revealed himself to his people in human history, which is why he can be known personally. He has not only revealed himself in facts and statements, but what is objectively true of him has also been revealed in the subjective experience of historical events. The experiences God’s people had with him in the Bible become the basis for all believers experiencing him now.

God’s revelation in history is rich, personal, and wedded to real life. It can also be more difficult to understand than mere facts and propositions because the historical context of the revelation is often foreign to modern people. Because revelation of God is personal and historical, the biblical understanding of God is progressive and cumulative. The theologian then must consider the historical context and progressive nature of revelation at every stage. The theological process must include careful exegesis of passages that are relevant to the question being answered. Furthermore, exegesis should be done with great sensitivity to the historical context of the passages being studied. This theological method has produced several focused areas of study.

The Theological Process

The theological process can be categorized under several aspects and disciplines, as shown on the chart. In particular, systematic theology (the focus of these articles) builds on the conclusions of exegesis and biblical theology. It attempts to summarize the teaching of Scripture in a brief, understandable, and carefully formulated statement. It involves appropriately *collecting*, *synthesizing*, and *understanding* all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics, and then *summarizing* their teachings clearly so that God’s people know what to believe and how to live in relation to theological questions.

The Theological Process

Exegesis	The process of seeking to determine the correct meaning out of a particular passage of Scripture.
Biblical theology	The study of scriptural revelation based on the historical framework presented in the Bible.
Systematic theology	A study that answers the question, “What does the whole Bible teach us today about a given topic?”
Historical theology	The study of how believers in different eras of the history of the church have understood various theological topics.



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Philosophical theology

The study of theological topics primarily through the use of the tools and methods of philosophical reasoning and information gained from nature and reason (“general revelation”) apart from the Bible.

Practical theology

The study of how to best apply theological truths to the life of the church and the world (including preaching, Christian education, counseling, evangelism, missions, church administration, worship, etc.).

Apologetics

The study of theology for the purpose of defending Christian teaching against criticism and distortion, and giving evidences of its credibility.

Reference to this sort of whole-Bible theology can be seen in Paul's insistence that he did not shrink back from declaring “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) and in Jesus' Great Commission that the church should “make disciples of all nations” by “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20).

Major Categories of Study in Systematic Theology

The major topics covered in the study of systematic theology can be seen in the chart.

Studies in Systematic Theology

Area of Study	Technical Title
Method and foundation	Prolegomena
The Bible	Bibliology
God	Theology proper
Humanity (or man)	Anthropology
Sin	Hamartiology
Christ	Christology
Holy Spirit	Pneumatology
Salvation	Soteriology
Church	Ecclesiology
Last things	Eschatology

Essential vs. Peripheral Doctrine

The ability to discern the relative importance of theological beliefs is vital for effective Christian life and ministry. Both the purity and unity of the church are at stake in this matter. The relative importance of theological issues can fall within four categories: (1) *absolutes* define the core beliefs of the Christian faith; (2) *convictions*, while not core beliefs, may have significant impact on the health and effectiveness of the church; (3) *opinions* are less-clear issues that generally are not worth dividing over; and (4) *questions* are currently unsettled issues. These categories can be best visualized as concentric circles, similar to those on a dart board, with the absolutes as the “bull's-eye” (see diagram).



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Where an issue falls within these categories should be determined by weighing the cumulative force of at least seven considerations: (1) biblical clarity; (2) relevance to the character of God; (3) relevance to the essence of the gospel; (4) biblical frequency and significance (how often in Scripture it is taught, and what weight Scripture places upon it); (5) effect on other doctrines; (6) consensus among Christians (past and present); and (7) effect on personal and church life. These criteria for determining the importance of particular beliefs must be considered in light of their cumulative weight regarding the doctrine being considered. For instance, just the fact that a doctrine may go against the general consensus among believers (see item 6) does not necessarily mean it is wrong, although that might add some weight to the argument against it. All the categories should be considered collectively in determining how important an issue is to the Christian faith. The ability to rightly discern the difference between core doctrines and legitimately disputable matters will keep the church from either compromising important truth or needlessly dividing over peripheral issues.

The Bible and Revelation

Knowing God is the most important thing in life. God created people fundamentally for relationship with himself. This relationship depends on knowing who he is as he has revealed himself. God is personal, which means he has a mind, will, emotions, relational ability, and self-consciousness. Because he is personal, and not merely an impersonal object, God must personally reveal himself to us. He has done this in general revelation (the world) and special revelation (the Word of God).

General Revelation

General revelation is revelation of God given to all people at all times. This revelation is found both in the external creation (Ps. 19:1, "the heavens declare the glory of God") and in internal human experience (Rom. 1:19–20, "what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse"). General revelation shows attributes of God—such as his existence, power, creativity, and wisdom; in addition, the testimony of human conscience also provides some evidence of God's moral standards to all human beings (Rom. 2:14–15). This means that from general revelation all people have *some* knowledge that God exists, *some* knowledge of his character, and *some* knowledge of his moral standards. This results in an awareness of guilt before God as people instinctively know that they have not lived up to his moral requirements. Thus in the many false religions that have been invented people attempt to assuage their sense of guilt.

But general revelation does not provide knowledge of the only true solution to man's guilt before God: the forgiveness of sins that comes through Jesus Christ. This means that general revelation does not provide personal knowledge of God as a loving Father who redeems his people and establishes covenants with them. For this, one needs *special revelation*, which God has provided in his historical supernatural activities, in the Bible, and definitively in Jesus Christ.

Special Revelation

The Bible is God's written revelation of who he is and what he has done in redemptive history. Humans need this divine, transcendent perspective in order to break out of their subjective, culturally bound, fallen limitations. Through God's written Word, his people may overcome error, grow in sanctification, minister effectively to others, and live abundant lives as God intends.

The Inspiration of Scripture

The Bible is "God-breathed" (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16) and gets its true, authoritative, powerful, holy character from God himself, who inspired human authors to write exactly what he wanted them to write. Instead of merely dictating words to them, God worked through their unique personalities and circumstances. Scripture is therefore both fully human and fully divine. It is both the testimony of men to God's revelation, and divine revelation itself. "No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone'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" (2 Pet. 1:20–21). Because the Bible is God's Word in human words, it can be trusted as the definitive revelation from the mouth of God himself.



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The Inerrancy of Scripture

The doctrine of inerrancy means that the Bible is entirely truthful and reliable in all that it affirms in its original manuscripts. Another way of saying this is that the Bible does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. Because God is the ultimate author of the Bible, and because God is always perfectly truthful, it follows that his Word is completely truthful as well: He is the "God who never lies" (Titus 1:2). It would be contrary to his character to affirm anything false. God is all-knowing, always truthful and good, and all-powerful, so he always knows and tells the truth and is able to communicate and preserve his Word. "O Lord GOD, you are God, and *your words are true*, and you have promised this good thing to your servant" (2 Sam. 7:28). "Every word of God proves true" (Prov. 30:5; cf. Ps. 12:6; 119:42; John 17:17).

Inerrancy does not require twenty-first-century precision or scientifically technical language. The following quotation from the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy summarizes what inerrancy does *not* mean:

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 (*Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, Art. XIII).

The inerrancy of Scripture gives the believer great confidence in the Bible as his sure foundation for understanding all God wants him to know and all that he needs for godliness and eternal life.

The Clarity of Scripture

The Bible itself acknowledges that some passages of Scripture are "hard to understand" (2 Pet. 3:15, referring to some aspects of Paul's letters). In general, however, with the illumination of the Spirit (2 Tim. 2:7), the teaching of the Bible is clear to all who seek understanding with the goal of knowing and obeying God. OT believers were instructed to teach God's commands continually to their children with the expectation that they would understand it: "These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deut. 6:6–7). God's Word is said to "make wise the simple" (Ps. 19:7; 119:30). Jesus based his teaching squarely on the OT Scriptures: he assumed its teaching was clear and would often ask, "Have you not read . . .?" (cf. Matt. 12:3, 5; 19:14; 21:42; 22:31).

Because of the basic clarity of the Bible, when Christians disagree over the meaning of a passage they can assume that the problem is not with the Bible but rather with themselves as interpreters. Misunderstandings may be due to various factors such as human sin, ignorance of enough of the relevant data, faulty assumptions, or perhaps trying to reach a definite conclusion about a topic where the Bible has not given enough information to decide the question. Yet the emphasis of the Bible is not on difficulties in understanding but on the fact that ordinary believers are capable of comprehending Scripture for themselves. In addition, God provides teachers of his Word to further help his people's understanding (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). Believers have the responsibility to read, interpret, and understand the Bible because it is basically clear. This was an assumption of the Protestant Reformers who sought to translate the Bible into the language of the common people. They believed that all true Christians are priests who are able to know God for themselves through his Word and to help others do the same.

The Sufficiency of Scripture

Scripture provides all the words from God that we need in order to know God truly and personally, and everything we need him to tell us in order for us to live an abundant, godly life (Ps. 19:7–9; 2 Tim. 3:15). God has given his people a sufficient revelation of himself so that they are able to know, trust, and obey him. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17). God commands that nothing be added or taken away from the Bible, which indicates that it has always been



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exactly what he has wanted at each stage in its development throughout the history of salvation. "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you" (Deut. 4:2; cf. Deut. 12:32; Prov. 30:5–6). The powerful admonition against tampering that stands at the conclusion of the entire Bible (Rev. 22:18–19) applies primarily, of course, to the book of Revelation, but in a secondary sense what it says may be applied to the Bible as a whole: "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book" (Rev. 22:18–19).

Believers should find freedom and encouragement in the knowledge that God has provided all of the absolutely authoritative instruction that they need in order to know him and live as he intends. God's people should never fear that he has withheld something they might need him to say in order for them to know how to please him, or that he will have to somehow supplement his Word with new instructions for some new situation that arises in the modern age. (The NT allows for the activity of the Holy Spirit in leading and guiding individuals, as in Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16, 18, 25; but this guidance is always in line with Scripture, never in opposition to scriptural commands.) Therefore believers should be satisfied with what Scripture teaches and what it leaves unsaid. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

Jesus' View of Scripture

The most convincing reason to believe that the Bible is inspired, inerrant, clear, and sufficient is because this is what Jesus believed. His teaching assumed that the OT was the authoritative Word of his Father: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:17–18). Jesus referred to dozens of OT persons and events and always treated OT history as historically accurate. He quoted from Genesis as his Father's Word when he said, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:4–6). Jesus not only assumed that the creation story was true, he also freely quoted words from the OT narrator as words that God himself "said." It is not uncommon for Jesus' theological arguments to depend on the truthfulness of the OT account (Matt. 5:12; 11:23–24; 12:41–42; 24:37–39; Luke 4:25–27; 11:50–51; John 8:56–58). Jesus' view of the OT as the Word of God aligns with the way the OT regularly speaks of itself.

Jesus saw his entire life as a fulfillment of Scripture (Matt. 26:54; Mark 8:31). Throughout his life, Jesus used Scripture to resist temptation (Matt. 4:1–11) and to settle disputes (Matt. 19:1–12; 22:39; 27:46; Mark 7:1–13; Luke 10:25–26). At the end of his life, Jesus died quoting Scripture (cf. Matt. 27:46 with Ps. 22:1). On his resurrection day he explained Scripture at length on the Emmaus road and to his disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24:13–17, 44–47).

Conscious of his identity as God the Son, Jesus saw his teaching as no less divinely inspired than the OT. Jesus taught with an authority that distinguished him from other teachers of the law. He interpreted the law on his own authority rather than depending on rabbinic sources (Matt. 5:21–48). He described his teaching and the law as sharing the same permanence: "heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt. 24:35, cf. Matt. 5:17–18; John 14:10, 24). Jesus viewed both the OT and his own teaching as the Word of God. The NT apostolic witness was a result of Jesus giving his disciples authority and power through the Holy Spirit to impart spiritual truths in writing no less than by word of mouth (Mark 3:13–19; John 16:12–14; Acts 26:16–18; 1 Cor. 2:12–13).

Jesus took Scripture to be the authoritative Word of God upon which he based his entire life. Those who follow Christ are called to treat Scripture (OT and NT together) in the same way. For Christians, the Bible is a source of great delight and joy. God is to be diligently sought in his Word (1 Pet. 2:2). The Word of God is a precious treasure that deserves to be studied, meditated upon, and obeyed:

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice



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for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God (Prov. 2:1–5).⁴

GOD'S WORD THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

All Christians recognize that God has acted and spoken in history, thus revealing Himself to His creatures. God's revealing or disclosing of Himself is called His revelation. God has disclosed Himself in a variety of ways (Heb 1:1–3) including nature, history, human experience, human reason, human conscience, the church, Jesus Christ, and Holy Scripture.

Revelation is God's manifestation of Himself to humankind in such a way that men and women can know and fellowship with Him. If human beings are to know God, such knowledge must come about by God's self-revelation to them because humans are finite, and God is infinite. Theologians generally distinguish between *general* and *special* revelation. In this presentation we will look carefully at how God has revealed Himself and also survey the concepts of inspiration and inerrancy as they relate to Holy Scripture, which for today is the source of God's revelation.

Revelation

General Revelation. The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 1:18–23 that God has made Himself known through general or natural means. This echoes an affirmation made by the psalmist centuries earlier. He observed, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God" (Ps 19:1). The psalmist saw the glory of God clearly because he knew God from special revelation, but what he saw had been objectively and genuinely there.

These statements can be rephrased to say that all that can be known about God in a *natural* sense has been revealed in nature. We can say that *general revelation is God's disclosure of Himself in a general way to all people at all times in all places.* Jesus confirmed in Matthew 5:45 that God sends the sun and the rain upon *all* people, both righteous and unrighteous, thus revealing His goodness to all.

Of course, we must acknowledge that although available to all, this is a limited revelation. In fact, Paul limited this knowledge of God to God's power and deity. God exists, and human beings know it. When men and women subsequently refuse to acknowledge and worship God, as they do, the fault is not in a lack of evidence but in their irrational and resolute determination not to know Him. God's revelation in nature is sufficient to convince anyone of God's existence and power if individuals will receive what has been made known to them.

Not only has God revealed Himself in nature but also in what might be called an internal revelation. This internal revelation involves human reason, human experience, and human conscience. This means that each person has been given the capacity for receiving God's general revelation. In Romans 1:19–21 and 2:12–16, Paul talked about this capacity and confirmed that humans know right from wrong and thus are responsible for their actions. The combination of human experiences makes up human history, another source of God's general revelation. In Acts 17:22–31 it is asserted that God has made Himself known in history and that He is no unknown God; rather, He is the true God who commands all people everywhere to repent. God's general revelation is *plain*. No one, no matter how weak minded or seemingly insignificant, can be excused for missing it. There is enough knowledge of God made known in a flower to lead a child or a scientist to acknowledge God and worship Him. There is sufficient evidence in a tree, a fingerprint, a snowflake, or a grain of sand to cause us to glorify the true God. But people *will not* do this. Instead, they substitute nature or parts of nature, or their own experience, for God and find their hearts darkened.

Even though men and women lack the will to come to a pure and clear knowledge of God, all excuse is cut off because the fault of rejection is within them. It is impossible to pretend to be ignorant of God's revelation without human conscience itself convicting humankind of rejection and ingratitude. Men and women suppress God's truth because they do not like the truth about God. They do not like the God to which the truth leads them, so they invent substitute gods instead.

The universality of religion on earth is evident of both truths just discussed. God has revealed Himself to all people in all places at all times; thus people everywhere express a need for God. This expression may be found in sophisticated laws of culture, in materialism, in the gods and goddesses of world religions, or in bestial images of paganism. Yet these expressions are equally evident of the fact that human beings in history

⁴ Crossway Bibles. (2008). [The ESV Study Bible](#) (pp. 2505–2509). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.



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have consistently and willfully rejected God because they will not have God and, therefore, need something to take God's place (Rom 1:18–32).

According to Paul, the act of suppressing the awareness of God and His demands warps our reason and conscience. Because of this rejection of God, God righteously reveals His wrath against humankind. God's general revelation does not bring one into a saving relationship with God; it does reveal God to His creatures, and they are therefore *responsible* for their response.

Special Revelation. God has revealed Himself in nature, history, and human experience, but sin's entrance into the world has changed that revelation and the interpretation of it. What is needed to understand fully God's self-disclosure is His special revelation. Indeed, it can be said that special revelation provides the spectacles through which we can fully understand and appreciate God's general revelation. There is divine truth outside of special revelation, but it is consistent with and supplemental to, not a substitute for, special revelation. General revelation is consistent with special revelation but yet distinct from it.

In contrast to God's general revelation, which is available to all people, *God's special revelation is available to specific people at specific times in specific places, which is available now only by consultation of sacred Scripture.* In recognition of the human predicament, God chose at the very beginning to reveal Himself in a more direct way. God has entered our world throughout the course of history. He has disclosed Himself to us within time and space. In this special revelation, God both acted and spoke to redeem the human race from its own self-imposed evil. Through miracles, the exodus, and ultimately through Jesus Christ, God has made Himself known in history. God's revelation includes not only these *acts* in history but also the prophetic-apostolic interpretation of these events.

We can thus affirm that this special revelation has three stages. There is, first of all, redemption in history as mentioned in the previous paragraph. This ultimately centers in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He died in the place of sinners and rose as proof of their divine justification. Second, there is the written source of God's revelation, the Bible. God has, in Holy Scripture, provided interpretive records of what He has done for the redemption of men and women. Third, there is the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals and the corporate life of the church. The Spirit applies God's revelation to the minds and hearts of His people. As a result men and women receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and are enabled to follow Him faithfully in a believing, covenant community until life's end.

For today it is evident that the Bible is of crucial importance. For it is in the Bible alone we learn of God's redemption of sinners in Christ Jesus. It is through the Bible that the Spirit speaks to individuals and believing communities. There, as John Calvin has said, "our wisdom ought to be nothing else than to embrace with humble teachableness, and at least without finding fault, whatever is taught in Sacred Scripture."

General revelation is inferior to special revelation in clarity and in range of subjects considered. The insufficiency of general revelation requires special revelation. It is important to note that general revelation provides concepts of God that enable God's people to know and understand the God of special revelation. These concepts have a common subject matter and perspective that bring about a mutually harmonious and complementary understanding.

We have mentioned the *modes* of God's special revelation, which involve the words and deeds of God primarily focused in Jesus Christ and Holy Scripture. It is necessary also to note the *nature* of this revelation. Special revelation is both personal and propositional. God has revealed Himself personally as "I AM" (Exod 3:14). This is also consistent with the manifestation of Himself in the covenants. Likewise, it is propositional in that God's self-disclosure made known to His people reveals truths about Him. Yet the primary purpose of revelation is not to enlarge the scope of one's knowledge. Rather, the knowledge *about* was for the purpose of knowledge *of*. The primary purpose of special revelation is redemptive so that people may enter into a salvific relationship with God.

Special revelation is not generally speculative. It only speaks on matters on cosmology and history when these issues touch the nature of faith. God has revealed Himself incarnationally through human language, human thought, and human action as ultimately demonstrated in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Revelation was made known in diverse ways, but this diversity was progressive and developing. Such progressive revelation was complementary and supplementary to what had been revealed prior, not contradictory in any fashion.



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In sum, we can say that God has initiated the revelation of Himself to men and women. This revelation is understandable to humankind and makes it possible to know God and grow in relationship with Him. God's self-manifestation provides information about Himself for the purpose of leading men and women into God's presence. Therefore we can identify God, know and understand something about Him and His work, and point others to Him.

Inspiration

God's Inspired Word. *Through the superintending influence of God's Spirit upon the writers of Holy Scripture, the account and interpretation of God's revelation has been recorded as God intended so that the Bible is actually the Word of God.* In writing, these men of God used their own ordinary languages and literary forms that were typical of their day. Yet within this very human activity God was at work. God chose to convey His Word through their words. This divine-human activity is truly the concursive inspiration of Holy Scripture.

When God's Word came to us through human authors, the humanity of the instrument God chose to use can be seen in the product. It is possible to actually see different personalities as we look at various books of the Bible. The style, vocabulary, and particular purposes of the apostle John are distinct from those of Luke. Yet both final products of their writings are equally the inspired Word of God.

In the history of the church, the divine character of Scripture has been the great presupposition for the whole of Christian preaching and theology. This is readily apparent in the way the New Testament speaks about the Old Testament. That which appears in the Old Testament is cited in the New Testament with formulas like "God says" and "the Holy Spirit says" (Acts 4:24–25; 13:47; 2 Cor 6:16). Scripture and God are so closely joined together in the minds of the New Testament authors that they naturally could speak of Scripture doing what it records God as doing (Gal 3:8; Rom 9:17). The introductory phrase "It is [stands] written" is also used of the New Testament writings.

Because of the apostolic word's divine origin and content, Scripture can be described as "certain" (2 Pet 1:19), "trustworthy" (1 Tim 1:15; Titus 3:8), "confirmed" (Heb 2:3), and eternal (1 Pet 1:24–25). As a result those who build their lives on Scripture "will never be put to shame" (1 Pet 2:6). The Word was written for instruction and encouragement (Rom 15:4), to lead to saving faith (2 Tim 3:15), to guide people toward godliness (2 Tim 3:16b), and to equip believers for good works (2 Tim 3:17).

The Bible affirms its own inspiration in 2 Timothy 3:16–17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Second Timothy 3:16–17 focuses primarily on the *product* of inspiration, the final writing of Scripture, though it also includes the secondary aspects of purpose and process. What is being asserted is the activity of God throughout the entire process, so that the completed, final product ultimately comes from Him. It is a mistake to think of inspiration only in terms of the time when the Spirit moves the human author to write. The biblical concept of inspiration allows for the activity of the Spirit in special ways within the process without requiring that we understand all of the Spirit's working in one and the same way. In the processes of creation and preservation of the universe, God providentially intervened in special ways for special purposes. Alongside and within this superintending action of the Spirit to inspire human writings in the biblical books, we can affirm a special work of the Spirit in bringing God's revelation to the apostles and prophets. God's Spirit is involved both in revealing specific messages to the prophets (Jer 1:1–9) and in guiding the authors of the historical section in their research (Luke 1:1–4).

We can assert that inspiration extends to the choice of words, even though Scripture's meaning is located at the sentence level and beyond. Thus our understanding of inspiration affirms the dual nature of Holy Scripture—it is a divine-human book. This recognition enables us to have a healthy understanding of the diverse literary genres represented in Scripture. The Holy Spirit is the one who, in a mystery for which the incarnation provides the only analogy, causes the verbal human witness to coincide with God's witness to Himself.

It is necessary to view inspiration as extending to all portions of Holy Scripture, even beyond the direction of thoughts to the selection of words. We must recognize the element of mystery involved in the process, which does not fully explain the how of inspiration. This understanding of inspiration seeks to do justice to the human factors in the Bible's composition and avoids any attempt to suggest that the Bible was



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mechanically dictated. We affirm both the divine character of Scripture and the human circumstances of the Bible's composition. (See the article Inspiration and Authority of the Bible.)

God's Inerrant Word. Inerrancy is the corollary and result of our affirmations about a full view of inspiration. We believe the idea of an inerrant Scripture is important and adequately describes the results of inspiration. Inerrancy means that the Bible is fully truthful, trustworthy, and reliable. More completely, it means that *when all the facts are known, the Bible (in its autographs) properly interpreted in light of which culture and communication means had developed by the time of its composition, will be shown to be completely true (and therefore not false) in all that it affirms, to the degree of precision intended by the author, in all matters relating to God and His creation.*

This definition recognizes our need to approach Scripture in humble submission in awareness to God's omniscience and our own finiteness. Instead of maintaining the critic's relative omniscience, we think it best to admit our own fallibility as critics and trust the omnipotent and omniscient work of God over the writers.

Inerrancy is the proper implication of inspiration. It is an important doctrine not because inerrancy is necessary for salvation but because it is important to continue to affirm an orthodox and biblical confession of salvation and other doctrines as well. Inerrancy, as the corollary of inspiration, yet remains a foundational issue for all of Christian theology. Inerrancy as the result of the Spirit's inspiration primarily stresses the truthful and trustworthy character of God's faithful revelation to humanity.

Inerrancy does not imply an exhaustive knowledge of God or any other subject. Neither does it deny human authorship, promise a correct interpretation of Scripture, nor guarantee an accurate preservation of Scripture so as to produce inerrant translations. It does, however, set certain limits upon the range of acceptable answers in the matters of biblical interpretation and criticism and also provides a solid foundation for trustworthy translations of Scripture.

As many orthodox theologians have observed, theology that is not built upon an inerrant view of Scripture operates within the circle of human concepts and experience and has no reference point. A renewed commitment to biblical inerrancy is the first step toward healing the deadly sickness in today's theological trends. Believing the Bible to be inspired and true, we can joyfully and confidently commit our lives to its message and gladly proclaim this truth to others.

Conclusion

God's revelation has made it possible for men and women to know God truly and salvificly. This knowledge of God is not exhaustive, but God has revealed Himself in acts and words in various times and diverse ways. The Bible is the primary place of God's self-disclosure for people today. While acknowledging the historical situation of the human authors and the time-relatedness of the biblical text, we still affirm the normative character of Scripture.

Because of the basic needs shared by men and woman of all ages and races in all times and cultures, the central message of Scripture can be known in a normative and authoritative way. Beyond this we acknowledge that Scripture speaks to the spiritual needs of humankind but also reveals the truth of and about God. We confess that all Scripture is inspired and is the true, reliable, and inerrant source of God's revelation for today. Beyond these affirmations and articulations about the Word of God, we willfully and happily commit ourselves to it by placing our trust and confidence in the truthful, trustworthy, reliable, inspired Word of God.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do general and special revelation differ?
2. Why was specific revelation necessary?
3. What is meant by biblical inspiration?
4. What is meant by biblical inerrancy?
5. Why should the Bible be considered a special book?



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6. How do these truths about the Bible influence our desire to read, study, and obey it?

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What Are the Implications of the Bible Being the Word of God?

If the Bible is in fact God's Word, then there are very important implications we must consider. Scripture itself presents some of these implications. The following are just a few.

The Bible Is True

Because God is always truthful and correct in whatever he says (2 Samuel 7:28; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), his Word also is truthful and correct in whatever it says (Psalm 12:6; Proverbs 30:5). Jesus said to his Father, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). He does not just say God's Word is true but rather equates it with truth itself—ultimate Truth. Theologically, this is to say that the Bible is *inerrant*, that is, without error.

Jesus' own understanding of this can be seen in John 10. When he claimed deity for himself, saying, "I and the Father are one" (v. 30), the Jews picked up stones to execute him for blasphemy. Jesus then said, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'?" If he called them "gods," to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be set aside—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, "I am God's Son"?

vv. 34–36

Jesus said Scripture "cannot be broken" (v. 35 NASB), that is, cannot be shown to be false or wrong in any way. Furthermore, he backs up this claim on the basis of one word—*gods (elohim)*—in the middle of verse 6 of Psalm 82. He was staking his own life on the "unbreakableness" of one word from one verse in the Hebrew Bible! If this is the nature of just one word in Scripture, how much more so the whole.

This view has been expressed by renowned Christian thinkers from early on. For example, Augustine wrote, "I firmly believe that no single error due to the [biblical] author is found in any one of [the canonical books]." Martin Luther quoted this statement in agreement and added, "The Scriptures have never erred" and "The Scripture *cannot* err."

The Bible Is Trustworthy

Because God is faithful and always can be trusted to do what he says (Numbers 23:19; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:24), the Bible, as the Word of God, also can be trusted (2 Samuel 7:28). The theological way of saying this is that the Bible is *infallible*. This word frequently gets used as a synonym for *inerrant*, but, more precisely, it says more by taking an additional step (based on inerrancy): Because the Bible is without error, it will never fail in its message or purpose, nor will it ever cause anyone to fail, be led into error, or be fooled into believing something unworthy of belief.

Jesus made a startling statement that reflects this idea:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, 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 5:17–18

When Jesus referred to the "Law or the Prophets," he had in mind all of the Scriptures then available—what we call the Old Testament. His assertion, then, was that from those Scriptures, not the smallest letter or least pen stroke would be lost. The "smallest letter" in the language Jesus spoke was a *yodh*, or Y. It would look to us like an apostrophe ('), written at the top of a line of letters with just a flick of the wrist. The "least stroke of a pen" was a part of a letter that distinguishes it from another letter. If we start with a P and add a stroke at the bottom, we end up with an R. If we start with an I and add a stroke at the top, we end up with a

⁵ Dockery, D. S. (Ed.). (1992). *Holman Bible Handbook* (pp. 814–817). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.



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T. Jesus is saying that until the end of time, God will protect and preserve his written Word down to individual words, tiny little letters, even parts of letters! He would not do this unless it were all true and trustworthy (see also Matthew 24:35).

Some evangelical theologians prefer to speak of the Bible as infallible but *not* inerrant. They mean that while the Bible is truthful and trustworthy in matters of faith and practice—that is, what Christians must believe to be saved and how they are to live—there may be errors regarding history, geography, or science. This view is sometimes called “limited inerrancy,” meaning inerrancy limited to areas of faith and practice.

The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) was founded in 1977 to defend the traditional view of the Bible's complete inerrancy. In their “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” they replied to this view (which rejects inerrancy but affirms infallibility) as follows:

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 XI

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.

Article XII

Indeed, it would seem that complete infallibility and complete inerrancy must necessarily go together. History has shown that when it is thought that Scripture contains even minimal errors, gradually and eventually more and more supposed “errors” are perceived, even in areas of faith and practice.

The Bible Is a Unity

Because the Bible ultimately comes from one source and mind (God's), it reflects a perfect harmony of thought. Thus it contains no contradictions, as there are no contradictions in God's mind. One portion will never contradict any other; a biblical text will always agree with and complement all others.

With typical bluntness, Luther wrote, “It is impossible that Scripture should contradict itself, only that it so appears to the senseless and obstinate hypocrites.” This is not to deny that the Bible will sometimes *seem* to contradict itself, but as Augustine wisely said, “When I am confronted in these Books with anything that seems to be at variance with truth, I put it down ... to my own mistaken understanding of the passage.”

FUN FACT

I jokingly say that “limited inerrancy” is like me claiming “partial omniscience”—that is, I know absolutely everything, except those things I do not know. “Limited inerrancy” says there are no errors in Scripture, except where there are errors.

5

What Are Other Implications of the Bible Being God's Word?

So far we have seen that the Bible is inspired, meaning it is indeed God's Word. Thus other things must be true by way of implication.

One is that the Bible is inerrant. God does not make mistakes, and his Word does not include them.

Another is that the Bible is infallible. If there are no mistakes in it, then it will never fail in what it says or cause anyone to fail in believing it.

This also implies the unity of Scripture. There are no contradictions in it, just as there are no contradictions in the mind of God.

Here are a few more important implications.

The Bible Is Authoritative

Because God is our final authority, the Bible is our final written authority. Because it comes from God, and God's authority is ultimate, its authority is greater than any human (pastor, priest, bishop, king, president, prime minister), human institution (church, denomination, council, senate, parliament, court), or human document (creed, catechism, confession, doctrinal statement, ordinance, law). The Bible deserves to be believed and obeyed, for to disbelieve or disobey it is to disbelieve or disobey God himself.



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This is why the prophets continually called Israel to obey God's law as given in the Hebrew Scriptures. At the end of the Old Testament, God said through his prophet Malachi, "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel" (Malachi 4:4). This is what Paul meant when he wrote, "What I am writing to you is the Lord's command" (1 Corinthians 14:37). John stated the same truth while dealing with the threat of false teaching: "We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us" (1 John 4:6).

The ICBI Chicago Statement puts it this way:

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 I

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 II

I have chosen to discuss the authority of Scripture somewhat later, since it is a logical implication of revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility. However, the ICBI dealt with biblical authority at the very beginning of their statement, likely due to its utmost importance. I also affirm this importance, especially with the multiplying "voices of authority" all around us regarding what is acceptable and what is not, what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. Christians are to embrace the absolute authority of God's Word in all that it states and are to willingly and gladly believe and obey it, even when our culture says to believe and do something different. This is not easy to do, but it is vital to please God first and honor his Word.

The Bible Is Sufficient

What we have in the Bible—Old and New Testaments—is what God intended for us to have. We are not waiting for further revelation or clarification. The Bible is sufficient in the sense that it contains all we need to know to be made right with God and live before him in a way that pleases him.

This was really true at each stage of God's progressively revealing his Word. Paul wrote to Timothy, "From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). The "Holy Scriptures" Paul was referring to were what we call the Old Testament. Even though the New Testament was yet to come, the Old Testament was sufficient *at that time*, until God inspired the New.

The very next thing Paul wrote was the aforementioned primary text regarding the doctrine of inspiration:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

vv. 16–17

Once more, "Scripture" technically refers to our Old Testament, but Paul adds that through it, the believer "may be *thoroughly* equipped for *every* good work." That is, in the Bible (both Testaments now) we have everything we need to know to be who God wants us to be and do what God wants us to do.

This is not to say that the Bible answers all of *our* questions. Rather, it answers the questions for which God wants us to know the answers. Apart from that, our answers to other questions remain speculative and tentative. This should encourage us, however, in ensuring that all *important* questions, from God's perspective, can be answered based on what we have in his Word. Therefore, we should go there looking for these answers with the confidence that they can be found.

The Bible Is Clear

Not only is the Bible sufficient for what we are to know and do, but it is also understandable to the average reader. The theological term for this is *perspicuity* (which is *not* very clear, although that is exactly what the word means!). Psalm 19:7 says, "The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple." Psalm 119:130 declares, "The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." It's encouraging that graduate training in Hebrew, Greek, and theology are not necessary to comprehend the Bible.



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This does not mean everything in the Bible is easy to understand. The things of God are deep and ultimately incomprehensible. Some things we need to study extensively and ponder deeply in order to grasp them better. Neither does Scripture's clarity nullify the need for pastors and Bible professors (I like my job!). But it does mean believers should not be totally dependent upon such people for their understanding of Scripture. With a humble dependence on God, the help of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:9–14), and an earnest desire to know truth, any reader *can* and *should* understand what God wants that reader to know, believe, and obey.

MORE FACTS

More could be said on how the Scripture's sixty-six books were included (canonicity), how it was copied and passed on to more and more people (transmission), and how it was made available to those who could not read Hebrew and Greek (translation). These factors and others add to the confidence we ought to have in the Bible, even our English translations. They are briefly addressed in Daryl Aaron, *Understanding Your Bible in 15 Minutes a Day*, chapters 21, 23–24.⁶

Scripture

How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103)

Delight. Life. Truth. Love. Hope. Wonderful. All of these words and many others like them are used in Psalm 119 to describe how the believer relates to God's Holy Word. Yahweh's people are encouraged in this extended psalm to meditate upon the divine testimonies, commandments, and promises of the Holy Scriptures, storing them up in their hearts, fixing their eyes upon them, and walking according to the illumination they provide. Just as food and water sustain the body, so a steady diet of the Scriptures nourishes God's people, bringing comfort, guidance, and strength. As the psalmist concludes, "My heart stands in awe of your words. I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil" (Ps. 119:161b–162). Why? Because through his Word God draws near; here one is invited to know the eternal, holy, majestic, loving, and merciful Lord. When we begin to talk about the doctrine of Scripture, we should always carry with us the attitude modeled for us by the psalmist.

Scripture Reveals God

One of the core concepts in Christianity is that God establishes his people in fellowship with himself. This means he makes himself known to us, not just in terms of fact (Matt. 22:29) but also relationally (Rom. 8:14–15). In our history as his people, he chose some servants (the prophets and apostles) to convey his will to the rest of us. They recorded these revelations in the books we now know as the Scriptures of the OT and NT, principally given to us that we might know what to believe about this God and how we are to live in his world.

Remarkably, although the Bible is made up of 66 distinct "books" written by prophets and apostles in various literary genres over a vast historical period, it nevertheless possesses a divinely arranged unity of meaning. Here God reveals his ways to us. God reveals himself, not by dropping a note from heaven, but through real people in real times—thus we can never forget what is sometimes called the full humanity of Scripture. Even amid the particularities of authors, original audiences, and history, the one true and holy God—Creator and Redeemer of heaven and earth—calls us to himself through these writings.

Consequently, while not every reader will be able to comprehend everything that is contained in the Scriptures, the fundamental message of salvation in Christ by the Spirit is clear or perspicuous for all who are willing to receive it. Speaking of the sufficiency of Scripture, the 1561 Belgic Confession affirms, "We believe that this Holy Scripture contains the will of God completely and that everything one must believe to be saved is sufficiently taught in it" (Art. 7).

Scripture Depends on the Trinity

⁶ Aaron, D. (2012). *Understanding Theology in 15 Minutes a Day* (pp. 31–40). Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers.



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Fundamental to the underlying unity of the Scriptures are the work of the Holy Spirit who inspired them (2 Pet. 1:20–21; 2 Tim. 3:16) and the promise that all of the Scriptures ultimately point to God's great self-revelation in his Son (Heb. 1:1–2; 3:3; Matt. 28:18). The Son and the Spirit give the Bible its unity, purpose, and power. Repeatedly, for example, the NT comments on how the coming of the incarnate Word fulfills the Scriptures (e.g., Matt. 26:54–56; Mark 14:49; Luke 4:21; John 17:12; 19:36; Acts 1:16; Rom. 1:1–4; 1 Cor. 15:3). Jesus says plainly, "Scripture must be fulfilled in me" (Luke 22:37). Although he refers here to one particular OT passage (Isa. 53:12), this connection represents the larger purpose of the Bible, which is to know God in his Son and by his Spirit. This is why the resurrected Jesus, on the road to Emmaus, spoke to two disciples about "Moses and all the Prophets" and then "interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). The result? Their hearts burned within them as Jesus "opened to [them] the Scriptures" (Luke 24:32). Later, Jesus appeared to his disciples and "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45).

Here we rightly distinguish between inspiration and illumination. Inspiration points to the Holy Spirit's work in the prophets and apostles (i.e., the original authors of Scripture) so that they would faithfully record God's revelation to them, even in and through their own peculiar personalities, writing styles, and historical moments. Illumination is the Holy Spirit's work enabling us to receive God's Word. Whether the Word comes through preaching, reading, or memorizing the Bible, it is God's Spirit who alone can open our eyes, soften our hearts, and make us receptive to God's Word. The same Spirit who inspired the writings of these Scriptures is the one who applies them to our hearts, that by his illumination we might see the perfect image of God in his Son, Jesus the Messiah (1 Pet. 1:10–12).

Scripture Authoritatively Points to Christ

Early in his ministry, Jesus made it clear that the purpose of the Scriptures was never merely to impart data, but to be an instrument of relationship with God himself. That is why Jesus warns his religious opponents to stop using the sacred texts against him. Jesus chastens them: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39). The words of the Scriptures were always meant to draw us to the Word—the Son of God—because Jesus himself is primarily and originally "the Word of God" (John 1; Rev. 19:13). We love and savor the Scriptures, not because they function as a textbook where we can simply learn stuff, but because in the Scriptures we truly and uniquely meet God himself.

In this way the Bible is different from any other book. *Scripture's authority rests upon God himself.* As a seventeenth-century confession states: "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God" (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.4). We must never forget that the authority, infallibility, and power of Scripture always ultimately rest on the triune God himself. The Father reveals himself through his Son by his Spirit, and we most clearly receive this revelation through the sacred Scriptures.

Scripture Should Be Proclaimed

The Bible says that the Scriptures are to be received, given, spoken, heard, and passed on. Having received the divine Scriptures, we now employ them to point others to the God who has come in his Son and by his Spirit. Accordingly, Philip and Apollos base their proclamation of the good news upon the sacred texts (Acts 8:35; 18:24–28), even as Paul reasons from the Scriptures for his synagogue listeners (Acts 17:1–2). Similarly, those who received the proclamation were themselves commended for "examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Since the triune God truly reveals himself in his Word, we should test all claims about God and Christian living according to these Scriptures.

Scripture Should Be Trusted

Orthodox Christians through the ages have had a very high view of the Bible. Coming from the heart of God through his prophets and apostles, the Scriptures are uniquely "breathed out" by the Lord himself, so that these texts are "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Scripture is totally true (Prov. 30:5) and thus authoritative, trustworthy, and life giving. However, we must here distinguish, for example, between the inerrancy of Scripture and the inerrancy of interpretation.



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The Bible is without error (inerrant) in all it intends to teach, but that does not mean our interpretations of the Bible are always free from error—we can misinterpret or misapply the holy text.

Affirming the Scriptures as the “norming norm,” we always stand under God's Word, subjecting our interpretations and our lives to the Bible. Since Scripture gains its authority from God—rather than an outside source, such as a private interpreter or ecclesial body—debates about interpretation can be solved only by constantly going back to the Scriptures themselves, submitting ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit in illuminating our hearts. Protestants, while believing the church is vitally important, nevertheless usually affirm that the ecclesiastical authorities do not give the Bible its authority; instead, the church—guided by the Spirit—simply recognizes the Scripture's own self-authenticating character (*autopistos*) and authority. The Reformation slogan that the “church is always being reformed” (*ecclesia semper reformanda est*) refers to its insistence that the church stands under the Scriptures and always repeatedly needs to submit itself to God's Word.

Scripture Should Be Obeyed

Handling the Scriptures requires care and calls us to faithful action. As Jesus memorably declared, “Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Luke 11:28). The “royal law” of Scripture (James 2:8) is to love our neighbor truly, humbly, and graciously. Such love originates from God himself, is received by his Spirit through the Word, and then moves through us to others. Augustine argued that the fulfillment and end of the Holy Scriptures is love (*On Christian Doctrine* 1.39–40), understood first in terms of discovering God's love for us, then finding how we can rightly love our neighbor. This “principle of charity,” as it is sometimes described, reminds us that the Bible is meant not merely to pass along information, but to reorder our loves and reshape our lives. The Scriptures ably draw us ever more closely to God and his people, even as they also send us out to a world desperately needing this Word of life.⁷

INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim. 3:16 HCSB). B. B. Warfield argued that the compound word (*theopneustos*), translated “inspired by God,” misleadingly borrows from the Vulgate (Lat., *divinitus inspirata*). Instead of an inspiration (i.e., a breathing into by God), Paul's Greek suggests that Scripture is a divine “spiration” (that which God has breathed out, the product of His creative breath). Paul's point, then, is not that Scripture is inspiring to read (it is that), or that the authors were inspired (they were), but that Scripture's origin means it is the very Word of God.

Moreover, the verse is sometimes incorrectly translated as “every Scripture which is inspired,” perhaps implying that Paul did not believe all Scripture is inspired. But in the preceding verse, he alludes not to just a portion but to the entire OT as the “sacred Scriptures.”

For Paul and the writers of the Bible, the Scriptures are “the spoken words of God” (Rom. 3:2 HCSB). When Scripture speaks, God speaks (1 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 3:7; 10:15).

Theories of Inspiration Historically, biblical inspiration has been reckoned in four ways. (1) The Bible is only inspired like other good books with human authors. This is neither what Scripture says nor what the church has believed. (2) The Bible is only partially inspired by God. Proponents hold that only the theological (not the scientific or historical) portions of Scripture are inspired, or that Scripture is just a record of God's saving historical acts, or that the Bible contains the word of God rather than being that word. But inspiration ensures that Scripture itself is the revealed word of God, not only testifying of God's redemptive work but also interpreting it. (3) The Bible is divinely inspired without use of human authors. Mechanical dictation theory renders Scripture analogous to myths regarding the origins of the Koran or Book of Mormon, and runs contrary to what the Bible says of its origins. (4) The Bible is divinely inspired because God concurrently worked with human authors to produce the very written message He desired. This classical view teaches the Holy Spirit superintended more than 40 authors from widely divergent backgrounds (shepherds, kings, prophets, fishermen, etc.), spanning a period of approximately a millennium and a half, to produce with supernatural congruity not just the thoughts but the very words of God to mankind.

⁷ Crossway. (2017). *ESV Systematic Theology Study Bible: Notes* (pp. 1667–1670). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.



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Mode of Inspiration The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) confesses that the “mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.” But certain inferences can be drawn. For instance, the authors were divinely prepared to write God's word in much the same way as the prophets were made ready to speak His word. “Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you ... all that I command you, you shall speak.... Behold, I have put My words in your mouth’” (Jer. 1:4–9 NASB; cp. Exod. 4:11–16; 1 Sam. 3; Isa. 6:1–9; Ezek. 2:3–3:11; Amos 7:14–15; Gal. 1:15; Rev. 1:10–11, 19). New Testament apostles were received as authoritative by the early church in the same way as OT prophets under inspiration (1 Cor. 2:9–13; 14:37; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 2:13; 5:27; 2 Thess. 3:6; 2 Pet. 3:2). Peter referred to the writings of Paul as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15–16; inferred also in Jude 17–18).

God Himself wrote the Decalogue (Exod. 24:12; 31:18; 32:16), and the writers of Scripture occasionally wrote what God dictated (Exod. 34:27–28; Rev. 1:10–11). But normally God used His chosen writers' personalities, theological meditations, and literary styles. Inspiration was not always continuous in the writers' minds (Jer. 1:2; 14:1; 25:1; 26:1). The divine inscripturated message often surpassed the author's understanding (Dan. 12:8–9; Luke 10:23–24; 1 Pet. 1:10–12). Biblical authors were not always aware that divine inspiration was at work in them (Luke 1:3, Luke's historical research). The apostles could write divinely inspired letters in responding to questions and by stating their opinions (1 Cor. 7:1, 25). The Holy Spirit saw to it that each biblical book actually has two authors, one human and one divine. Thus the divine superintendence of Scripture guarantees its inerrancy.

Inerrancy P. D. Feinberg defined inerrancy as “the view that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original manuscripts and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or to the social, physical, or life sciences” (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*).

Inerrancy extends only to the original biblical writings, the *autographa* (Chicago Statement: “Copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original”). Though this stress by conservatives upon the *autographa* is often ridiculed, the emphasis is critical and sensible. Compared to a later copyist or translator, the author of the original text had a supernatural task for which the total superintendence of the Holy Spirit was needed. Only once for all time the text was written. Should the autograph be corrupted by errors, the following copies and translations of it would never be able to arrive at God's revealed truth. Therefore, the evangelical who emphasizes the inerrancy of the original manuscript does not undermine copies or translations, rather the undermining is done by those who deny the inerrancy of the *autographa*. The obvious order of transmission is from the original to copy to translation. Biblical faith, then, must not admit of error in the *autographa* but must be diligently aware of the possibility for error in copy or translation. This awareness has led to careful study of the textual transmission process and the original languages.

Thankfully, divine providence has overseen the transmission of scriptural copies for 3,000 years. The remarkable conserving work of the OT accomplished by Masoretic scribes is well documented, and NT copies abound more than any other work of antiquity, lending great confidence that we have what the apostles wrote. (It is simply not true that use of modern critical texts as opposed to the *Textus Receptus* will obscure or corrupt biblical doctrine. The widespread consensus among conservative textual scholars is that variants in the copies are insignificant regarding doctrine.) English readers are especially well served by an abundance of translations that faithfully make available the Word of God in the vernacular.

Inerrancy is a matter of faith and is not demonstrable by scholarship. But many attacks upon the veracity of Scripture are wrongheaded from the outset by those who insist upon arbitrary criteria for inerrancy. As the Chicago Statement notes, inerrancy is not undermined “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.” Claims regarding other types of alleged errors are often greatly exaggerated. Indeed most Bible difficulties have yielded to the patient work of scholars that can be accessed in quality conservative commentaries.

So attempted harmonization of apparently discrepant texts is the appropriate first response, not the assumption of error. Some difficulties may not yield to investigation unless more archaeological or historical



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facts come to light. And if problems regarding some texts are not solved, evangelical confidence assumes that were all the pertinent facts known, no error would be found in the Bible. In the final analysis, the follower of Jesus exercises this kind of trust in the Word of God because it is mandated by the example of the Lord Himself.

Jesus' Attitude Toward Scripture Some today attempt to pit Christ as God's supreme revelation against scriptural revelation. Jesus reproved those in His day who searched the Scriptures but did not recognize that they bear witness to Him (John 5:39). But He did not reprove them for searching the Scriptures; after all, the Scriptures alone testify of Christ. There is no other way to know Him. Christ is the center of the Christian faith, and the way to Him is by that which the Spirit of God employs for this purpose, the God-breathed Bible.

The disciple's attitude should not be other than his Master's toward Scripture: Scripture is final and authoritative (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; John 10:35) because it is the inspired Word of God. His reverence for and confidence in the OT was stunning (Matt. 5:17–19; 26:54; Luke 16:17; 18:31). See *Revelation of God*.

*Ted Cabal*⁸

The Beatitudes

² And ^(C)he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ ^(D)“Blessed are ^(E)the poor in spirit, for ^(E)theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “Blessed are ^(G)those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ “Blessed are the ^(H)meek, for they ^(I)shall inherit the earth.

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and ^(J)thirst ^(K)for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ “Blessed are ^(L)the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ “Blessed are ^(M)the pure in heart, for ^(N)they shall see God.

⁹ “Blessed are ^(O)the peacemakers, for ^(P)they shall be called ^(Q)sons^[a] of God.

¹⁰ ^(R)“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for ^(S)theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ ^(T)“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely ^(U)on my account. ¹² ^(V)Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for ^(W)so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

⁸ Cabal, T. (2003). [Inspiration of Scripture](#). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (pp. 824–826). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.