

## Inerrancy Introduction:

C.S. Lewis: These men ask me to believe that they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves. They claim to see fern-seed and can't see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. What *is* inerrancy?

#### A. Some helpful definitions:

“When we say that the Bible is inerrant, we mean that the Bible makes good on its claims.”<sup>2</sup>

“The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.”<sup>3</sup>

Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with social, physical, or life sciences.<sup>4</sup>

- What about our Bible translations? Are they trustworthy?
  - For most practical purposes, then, the *current published scholarly texts* of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament *are the same as the original manuscripts*. Thus, when we say that the original manuscripts were inerrant, we are also implying that over 99 percent of the words in our present manuscripts are also inerrant, for they are exact copies of the originals. Furthermore, we *know* where [there are] uncertain readings.... Thus, our present manuscripts are for most purposes the same as the original manuscripts, and the doctrine of inerrancy therefore directly concerns our present manuscripts as well.<sup>5</sup>
  - Thus, though not technically inspired, copies and translations partake of inspiration by derivation.

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 156.

<sup>2</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2010), 174.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids: IVP; Zondervan, 2004), 90.

<sup>4</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 294.

<sup>5</sup> Grudem, 96.

- “Derived Inspiration”: the copies and translations partake of inspiration to the extent that they reproduce the originals. God has not chosen to extend miracle to copying and translation. Translations are therefore not technically inspired. But copies and translations are inspired to the extent that they reproduce the original. We know what the original manuscript said for over 99% of the words of the Bible.<sup>6</sup>

## B. Theological Basis.

- Inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16)
  - If we believe that the Bible is God-breathed, given fully by the Holy Spirit and that we are responsible to believe and follow this word then we can only do this *if* God has given it to us completely and without mixture of error.
  - The Scriptures are God’s speech (Gal. 3:8, 22; Rom. 9:17).
  - God is the author of what is recorded (Acts 13:32–35)
  - The Scriptures are presented as *the* very breath of God in both form and content.

“You have studied the Holy Scriptures, which are true, and given by the Holy Spirit. You know that nothing unjust or counterfeit is written in them.”<sup>7</sup>

The question is not whether the sacred writers could err . . . Rather the question is whether in writing they were so acted upon by the Holy Spirit (both as to the things themselves and as to the words) as to be kept free from all error and that their writings are truly authentic and divine.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the question of inerrancy is a question related to the integrity of God, the Holy Spirit. Is and was he able, through his work of inspiration, to put down special revelation which is free from error?

- Self-witness of Scripture
  - Psalm 119:142, 151, 160; Prov 30:5-6

**Psalm 119:142** “Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth.”

**Psalm 119:151** “You are near, O LORD, and all Your commandments are truth.”

**Psalm 119:160** “The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.

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<sup>6</sup> Andy Snider, *The Master’s Seminary Theology I Syllabus*.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Clement 45:2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 1:62–63.

**Proverbs 30:5–6** “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. <sup>6</sup>Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.”

- Jesus upheld the full inspiration, authority, and accuracy of the Scriptures:

**John 17:17** “Your word is truth.”

- **What Was Jesus’ View of Scripture?**

- He understood that the OT pointed to Him.

**John 5:39-40, 46-47** “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; <sup>40</sup> and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life... <sup>46</sup> “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. <sup>47</sup> “But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

**Luke 24:25-26, 44-45** “And He said to them, ‘O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> ‘Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?’ ...<sup>44</sup> Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ <sup>45</sup> Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”

- He taught that the Holy Spirit was given to insure the message of Scripture.

**John 14:16–17** “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; <sup>17</sup> *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.”

- He believed that the Spirit would inspire the Gospel accounts.

**John 14:25–26** “These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. <sup>26</sup> “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

- He affirmed that the Spirit would inspire the message & accounts that form Acts.

**John 15:26–27** “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, <sup>27</sup> and you *will* testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”

- Jesus understood that the Spirit would inspire the Epistles.

**John 16:12–15** “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. <sup>13</sup> “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. <sup>14</sup> “He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. <sup>15</sup> “All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.”

- Jesus affirmed that the book of Revelation is the final word of Jesus until He returns.

**Revelation 1:2, 19** “who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw...<sup>19</sup> Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.”

**Revelation 22:18–19** “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; <sup>19</sup> and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.”

- Inerrancy and the Character of God (divine truthfulness)

“If the Scriptures are from God and His character is behind them, it seems that they cannot be in error.”<sup>9</sup>

“Scripture did not come from the will of man; it came from God. And if it is God’s word then it must all be true, for in him there can be no error or deceit.”<sup>10</sup>

- God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; Rom. 3:4).

“[I]t means that he speaks truth in such a way that we can understand it, insofar as it can be understood by human beings. . . [Like] a wise parent, while choosing simple language to use with his children, does not lie to them.”<sup>11</sup>

- Scripture is God’s words (2 Tim. 3:16-17, 2 Pet. 1:20-21).

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<sup>9</sup> Feinberg, 286.

<sup>10</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 39.

<sup>11</sup> Frame, 175.

- Scripture is without error (Ps. 12:6, 119:89).
- His Word is truth (John 17:17).

“The importance of original inerrancy is that it enables us to confess consistently the truthfulness of God Himself.”<sup>12</sup>

“[Inerrancy] is a doctrine that can be shown to be a clear implication of what Scripture says about the character of God, and about the way his character shapes his action as the author of Scripture.”<sup>13</sup>

### C. Myths, Misconceptions, & Misnomers

- Myth #1—Only the *message* of Scripture is inerrant.
  - In other words, this myth asserts that only the general idea which Scripture communicates is inerrant, but not every word in every verse.
  - “Every word of God is tested” (Prov. 30:5).
  - *All* Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16).

- Myth #2—Scripture must follow rules of grammar to be inerrant.

“Scripture never claims to be written in the most impressive language, or even in perfect grammar. What it claims is *truth*. And truth can be expressed in any dialect.”<sup>14</sup>

- Myth #3—Inerrancy does not allow for figures of speech or literary genre.
  - There is nothing inherent in figurative or poetic language that requires them to contain falsehood because they are not literal. Literary style has nothing to do with falsity or truth of content.
- Myth #4—Inerrancy means that you don’t ask hard questions or struggle with the text.

[F]ar from cutting off wrestling and intellectual struggling with the text, a high view of Scripture’s truthfulness has led to deeper study, prayer, conversation with other interpreters, and wrestling to see how it’s true. Similarly, awareness that these are the very oracles of God should lead to a humble approach that doesn’t arrogate too

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<sup>12</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 181.

<sup>13</sup> Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2009), 133.

<sup>14</sup> Frame, 174–75.

much authority to one's own understanding, but trembles at the thought of misrepresenting God's Word.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Our presuppositions and our "problems" with Scripture.

A. We have "problems" with Scripture because of our presuppositions. [B/c of a perspective and thinking we have which is imperfect; flawed; tainted by sin]

"We have problems with Scripture for two reasons: finitude and sin."<sup>16</sup>

- We can account for these through the new birth by the Holy Spirit (regeneration), confession and repentance of sin (cf. Jas. 1:20-21), the illumination by the Holy Spirit, the local church (accountability in interpretation with biblically qualified and trained leadership).

B. What are some of the "problems" with Scripture?

\*By "problems," we mean perceived problems. These are theological issues which appear difficult to reconcile or embrace from our point of view. However, God is righteous and true in all he does (Rom. 3:4).

- Theological
  - E.g., God's oneness and tripersonality, the sovereignty of God and man's responsibility, and goodness and the existence of evil.
  - Criticisms are usually said to be "logical" but logic is not a free-form relative art. To say that God is *One* and that God is *Three* is not a true logical contradiction.
  - One of the common, intellectually irresponsible and feeble arguments you hear today is that the Bible is full of contradictions. Whenever someone makes that assertion to you, always ask, "Which ones?" Make them back up their claim. And then, ask them to define a contradiction. We've got to do this, because we have to love people enough to guide them into the truth.
  - The law of noncontradiction states that, "A cannot be both A and non-A at the same time and in the same relationship." In this proposition, "A" refers to an object being discussed. For example, "A" could be rocks. "Non-A" refers to any other object that is not "A." So, "non-A" could be coffee, trees, eggs, or anything that is not rocks. Thus we arrive at the proposition: Rocks cannot be both Rocks and coffee (not rocks) at the same time and in the same relationship.

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<sup>15</sup> Derek Rishmawy, "Inerrant ≠ Inerrant Interpretation," *The Gospel Coalition Blog*, November 21, 2013, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/inerrant-text-inerrant-interpretation>.

<sup>16</sup> Frame, 180.

- R.C. Sproul writes, “The law of noncontradiction is vital to the intelligibility of faith and life. Without it, the concept of truth loses all meaning.”
- So, is the Trinity a contradiction? It would be if they were both asserting the same thing but they are not. The two statements are not making the same assertion (i.e., e.g., “God is one person and God is three persons”). Rather the Bible teaches that God is one in *essence* but three in *person*. This is not a contradiction.

“When God meets with people in scripture, they are typically overwhelmed by his greatness, not prone to analyzing him. Those who insist on precise answers...need to ask whether their attitude expressed an appropriate humility before their Creator and Lord.”<sup>17</sup>

- \*\*Other supposed problems with Scripture: Ethical (“the norming norm” or justification of knowledge) [to some, God violates a system of ethics – do not go into the various ethics below, except for mentioning “transcendental” and the “key”]
  - Existential<sup>18</sup> ethics—inner subjectivity, feeling, conscience.
  - Teleological<sup>19</sup> ethics—happiness it brings, pleasure over pain.
  - Deontological<sup>20</sup> ethics—objective rules but whose rules?
  - Transcendental ethics—An ethical norm that “transcends” the other four and it is set according to the personal God of Scripture.
  - Key: to deny inerrancy is to make our own minds a higher standard of truth than God’s Word itself.
- Consistency
  - You can’t win: some say 1) the writers of Scripture contradict one another therefore the Scripture errs but when answered to show harmonization or even perfect agreement it is countered 2) that the writers of Scripture are suspected of conspiracy.
  - (E.g., temptation order of events in Matt & Luke are different—one reflects language that is chronological, one is thematic/climatic).
- Quotations/references (approximations), LXX
  - Issues like the word “fulfill” does not always refer to predictions that come true. Can mean complete, illumine, or exemplify by type or inference, correspondence, etc.
  - We use indirect discourse, general references, and summaries.

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<sup>17</sup> Frame, 184–85.

<sup>18</sup> The term “existentialism” was coined by the French Catholic philosopher [Gabriel Marcel](#) in the mid-1940s.

<sup>19</sup> *telos* is the end or purpose of something.

<sup>20</sup> From the Greek word *deon*, “obligation, duty.”

- “The sun rose.” It’s been said that such a statement is false because the earth is actually rotating with the result that the sun does not rise, but becomes visible from earth.
  - However, from the standpoint of the speaker, the sun does rise. And, it is a saying which does not violate truthfulness implied by the speaker and expected by the audience.
  - Further, the context of the biblical statements, “the sun rose,” are not astronomical in which the particular rotations and movements of the sun and earth expected to be explained.
- KEY: Is the quote or allusion to the OT reference adequate to the point that the NT writer is making?
- A biblical quote does not have to conform to modern conventions of citation in order to be true.
- Historical accuracy & factual precision

“[Inerrancy] asserts truth, not precision. Inerrant language is language that makes good on its own claims, not on the claims that are made for it by thoughtless readers.”<sup>21</sup>

- (E.g., “mustard seed...smaller than all other seeds” in Matt 13:31–32).
- Many times such “inaccuracies” are built on the misrepresentation that assumes a universal statement rather than a particular context. [Illus: “cleanest water anywhere”]
- Imprecision is not a characteristic of error.
  - However, a journalist can report that, “10,000 people were injured,” when, in fact, there may have been 9878 or 10,201 people injured. Again, the limits of truthfulness depend on the degree of precision implied by the speaker and expected by the audience.

“The liberal reads the text with an incredibly exalted view of his own competence to understand ancient cultures and writers in finest detail.”<sup>22</sup>

- The existence of a flood narrative amongst many pagan nations does not mean that the biblical account is less historical. Inerrancy does not require Scripture to be *unique* in every detail of history but *true*. In fact, if the flood is as it is reported in Scripture then we would expect various traditions to spin it according to their own methods and ideals.
- It is also mistaken to think that different biblical writers reporting on the same event will always have the same perspective and emphasis. They

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<sup>21</sup> Frame, 174.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 182.



wrote for different audiences. It does not follow that a difference in perspective requires a deficiency in accuracy and truth.

- In fact no gospel writer makes a claim to exhaust every detail, the opposite in fact is true (see John 21:25). They are supplementary not contradictory.

**John 21:25** “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.”

- We can also not divide the truth claims of Scripture from their historical contexts.

### Excursus # 3: Truth Claims and History God Together

God revealing—tied to historical virgin birth

God redeeming—tied to historical death on a Roman cross

God reconciling—tied to historical resurrection & ascension

“The gospel of salvation may sound wonderful, but if the history in which it is all said to have happened is not correct, then how can we trust the gospel itself? The heart of the Christian message is rooted in history.”<sup>23</sup>

- Scientific claims
  - We have argued that the Bible is written in ordinary language, not technical or scientific (“sun sets”). However nothing in Scripture restricts God’s words to specific subject matter. When Scripture touches on any discipline then we must yield to its authority as true and right.
  - If God is who He says He is then He can do exactly what the Bible depicts Him doing.
  - Could God create everything out of nothing, could he place a man and a woman in a brand new garden that would have appeared to have grown up over time—with the appearance of age, yet only days old. If the genealogical material in Genesis 5 and 11 lead us to assume a young earth created with the appearance of age, is it possible that some scientific frameworks are not taking into account other possibilities?

“The history of scientific theories is full of spectacular reverses of opinion.”<sup>24</sup>

### 3. What are the implications of inerrancy for us:

<sup>23</sup> Brian H. Edwards, *Nothing But the Truth* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2007), 129.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

A. Inerrancy means that we can trust God fully and completely.

- The issue is whether or not a perfectly honest God is able to communicate His word in a way that is perfect and true.

I conclude that Scripture is inerrant because the personal word of God cannot be anything other than true. When he gives us propositional information—and he certainly does—that information is reliable, though expressed in ordinary, not technical language. The written Word, further, is just as inerrant as the oral message of the prophets and apostles. And their word is just as inerrant as the divine voice itself.<sup>25</sup>

“I’d find it strange to tell people that the whole Bible represents the word of God, and the word of God is completely truthful, but that parts of the Bible aren’t completely truthful.”<sup>26</sup>

B. Inerrancy allows Scripture to speak for itself without qualification.

“Only when we doubt inerrancy do we have to invent new principles for interpreting Scripture that for convenience turn history into poetry and facts into myths.”<sup>27</sup>

C. Inerrancy is a guardrail to the sin of unbelief

“To deny, disregard, edit, alter, reject, or rule out anything in God’s word is to commit the sin of unbelief.”

D. Inerrancy is foundational to a reliable gospel.

“We cannot offer the world a reliable gospel presented in an unreliable Scripture.”<sup>28</sup>

One cannot doubt the Bible without far-reaching loss, both of fullness of truth and fullness of life. If therefore we have at heart spiritual renewal for society, for churches and for our own lives, we shall make much of the entire trustworthiness—that is, the inerrancy—of Holy Scripture as the inspired and liberating Word of God.<sup>29</sup>

E. Inerrancy is foundational to the work of the church in the “Great Commission.”

Central to this ‘Great Commission’ is Jesus’ instruction that His disciples are “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt 28:20). We see in Jesus an unswerving commitment to the Word of God, a high view of Scripture, a Christ-centered understanding of the text, and His confidence that Scripture alone through the power of the Spirit is

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<sup>25</sup> Frame, 176.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Wilson, “Why I Don’t Hate the Word ‘Inerrancy,’” *The Gospel Coalition Blog*, June 23, 2013, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-dont-hate-the-word-inerrancy/>.

<sup>27</sup> Edwards, *Nothing But the Truth*, 131.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>29</sup> J. I. Packer, *Truth and Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1996), 55.

enough to save and sanctify the believer. A Christian without this confidence will not make disciples but doubters.

\*Cornerstone Doctrinal Statement: [from our 3 Bibliology lessons now, we can see where we get our doctrinal statement; the logical flow] “We teach that the Bible is God’s written revelation to man, and thus the sixty-six books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Cor. 2:7-14; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). We teach that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Tim. 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God breathed.”