

INERRANCY POSITION PAPER

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Abstrak

Keyakinan tentang ketidakbersalahan Alkitab sangat penting bagi setiap orang yang percaya Kristus. Sebab itu dalam paper ini, penulis menjelaskan beberapa argumentasi bahwa Alkitab adalah benar-benar diilhamkan Allah, dan doktrin tersebut harus senantiasa dipertahankan sebagai dasar dari iman Kristen, karena berfondasi pada karakter Allah.

Kata Kunci: Ketidakbersalahan, Alkitab, iman Kristen.

Abstract

Belief in the infallibility of the Bible is very important for everyone who follows Christ. Therefore, in this paper, the author presents arguments for claiming some arguing that the Bible is truly inspired by God. That doctrine must always be maintained as part of the Christian faith, because it is based on the character of God.

Keywords: Inerrancy, Bible, Christian faith.

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is wholly true. Inerrancy is the term used to denote the truthfulness or veracity of Scripture as it was recorded in the original manuscripts. J. I. Packer defines inerrancy as “an advance commitment to receive as truth from God all that Scripture is found on inspection actually to teach.”¹

Scripture is the Word of God and presents itself as such. The doctrine of inerrancy arises out of that declaration and an

¹James I. Packer, “Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority.”, *Themastios*, 1 (1975), 11.

understanding of the nature of God. Rene Pache put it this way, "When the Lord speaks, He cannot lie; neither can He teach truth by means of error. His veracity as well as His power is at stake."²

Full inerrancy does not imply that the text was given by dictation without having the imprint of human personalities. The literary styles of the different authors causes a variety of details reported when they write about any event or theme in common. The lack of uniformity does not imply a lack of truth. "If four independent witnesses in court parrot syllable by syllable the same story, made up of complex facts, those men would at once be charged with collusion. Their uniformity would make them suspect."³

Inerrancy does not imply a stilted literary style without symbols, parables, or other normal language forms. There are approximations, summaries, and the use of non-technical terminology as there would be in other literature. Popular language must be taken in its historical context. Satan is quoted and what he says is not truth (Gen. 3:4-5). The biblical authors were not omniscient and there are many facets of any subject not addressed. They did not attempt a treatise of information giving us all truth. That wasn't God's purpose. What they do teach is true and adequate for spiritual needs. Biblical content should generally be interpreted according to its own historical setting. Grammar, dating, and cultural traditions may cause things to be wrongly interpreted out of that context.

Information in the bible was not necessarily arranged chronologically. That is true of subject matter in individual books as well as the arrangement of books in the Bible. That does not lessen the truthfulness of Scripture. The material was often

²Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 121.

³*Ibid*, 123.

arranged according to topics in accordance with the intent of the authors.

Errors of translation or copying causing variance in manuscripts do not affect the doctrine of inerrancy since it is based on the original texts. Actually there is very little error that has crept in over the centuries. The agreement of different manuscripts is truly amazing in light of over 3000 years of copying the texts by hand.

Full inerrancy does not mean that the Bible will be easily understood in its entirety. It has some parts that are very clear, but there are others that remain a mystery for this age. Comprehension is not a test of veracity.

Not everything in the Bible is valid if applied literally to people today. There were commands and laws given for a particular era or historic time period. Some things were culturally relevant, and were not meant to be applied in other dispensations or situations. An example would be the temple worship system that included animal sacrifices. They were valid for the Old Testament economy but according to Hebrews are no longer to be applied.

Having seen what is not a part of the definition of inerrancy, the original definition needs to be considered more fully. The beginning statement was that the Bible is wholly true. It is trustworthy in its entirety as recorded in the original manuscripts.

To proceed in scientific research there is often a premise or prior conclusion that will be tested and help with the understanding of the investigation. In this paper we begin with an advance commitment that Scripture is the Word of God and is therefore truth. 'Sacra Scriptura est. Verbum Dei' (Sacred Scripture is God's Word). The doctrine of the inspiration of Scriptura is very closely linked with the concept of inerrancy.

The commitment is to receive as truth from God all that Scripture is found on inspection actually to teach. Some of the

things not intended in the concept of inerrancy have already been examined. There must be an application of good hermeneutical principles to determine what Scripture is actually teaching. The grammatical-historical approach to hermeneutics can aid in determining the intent of a passage. If the method of interpretation is faulty symbolic language or fictional stories such as parables could be accepted as absolute truth when God never intended them to be understood that way. Milliard Erickson said that, "Inerrancy pertains to what is affirmed or asserted rather than what is merely reported."⁴

The concept of "full inerrancy" is being advocated in this paper as opposed to "absolute inerrancy" which would mean that Scripture is always precise in every detail. Limited inerrancy is also rejected in that it claims that only the doctrines pertaining to salvation are without error. Redemption takes place in history and deciding what is truth in limited inerrancy leaves too much up to individual discretion. The concept of inerrancy of purpose is tied to 2 Timothy 3:15-17 and the goal of Scripture making one "wise unto salvation". That view of inerrancy does not find the factuality of the Bible a major issue. They admit errors but claim that the writer's purpose can still be accomplished in leading to salvation. That view is far from the understanding that the writers of Scripture had of the truth given to them by God.

In determining the doctrine of inerrancy, the retroductive theological method is used. The question of inerrancy is considered in light of Biblical teaching and the proposed solutions of a variety of theologians of different persuasions. The solution with the least problems, yet fully concurring with Scripture - which is the final authority - has been determined to be the position of full inerrancy.

⁴Milliard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983) , 234.

The truth conveyed in Scripture is factual (correspondence), accomplishes its purpose (intentional), and is relevant for the reader in every generation (existential). There are several concepts of truth gleaned from word study of Greek terms used in the New Testament. Roger Nicole likens those concepts of truth to a rope.

The biblical view of truth ('emet-aletheia) is that it is like a rope with several intertwined strands. It will not do to isolate the strands and deal with them separately, although they may be distinguished just as various lines in a telephone cable may be distinguished by color. The full Bible concept of truth involves factuality, faithfulness, and completeness.⁵

The concept of truth in the Bible is based on God's character and therefore is fuller or more complete than factual correspondence alone. God is faithful to His purpose and His word must be in accord with that intent for every generation.

SUPPORT FOR FULL INERRANCY

Understanding inerrancy means first understanding the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture since that is its foundation. The Bible is God's inspired Word (God breathed) in its totality and in every part (verbal-plenary), 2 Timothy 3:16. It is not just a channel of God's Word, nor does it become God's Word, but it actually is God's Word. 2 Peter 1:20-21 tells us that "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" and that this was not a matter of their own interpretation. Because God breathed Scripture it is in character with the nature of God and is inerrant.

God cannot lie according to Titus 1:2. That is affirmed also in Hebrews 6:18 with the words, "it is impossible for God to lie". Jesus claimed to be truth in John 14:6. Yahweh is spoken of as, "O Lord, God of truth" in Psalm 31:5. There are many other verses that declare the truthfulness of God's character. The "God of

⁵D.A. Carson and D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth*, (Inter-Varsity Pers, 1983), 296.

truth” could not initiate a faulty or erroneous message, therefore Scripture is inerrant.

The prophets and writers of the Bible were aware that they were writing what God wanted to say and did not speak on a personal level. “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment” (1 Cor. 14:37). The penalty for speaking what the Lord had not commanded in the name of the Lord was death (Deut. 18:20-22) and all that was spoken was to be tested for its veracity. That testing has been done through the ages and the conclusion is that their writing is inerrant and fully trustworthy.

Jesus, who is Truth, spoke of the Scriptures as truth in John 17:17 with the words “Thy word is truth”. He affirmed that “the Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:35). It was important to the very letter and stroke of a letter (Matt. 5:18-19) and to annul any part of it meant judgment. Since it is truth, important to the letter, and cannot be broken, Scripture is fully inerrant.

“The authors of the Old Testament speak most explicitly: 3,808 times they claim to be transmitting the very words of God.”⁶ In 2 Samuel 7:28 we have an example of that claim, “And now, O Lord God, Thou art God, and Thy words are truth and Thou has promised this good thing to Thy servant.” All of these claims support the inerrancy of the Old Testament.

In the book of Psalm there are many references to the truth of Scripture. “Thy law is truth” (Ps. 119:142). “And all Thy commandments are truth” (Ps. 119:151). “The sum of Thy word is truth, and every one of Thy righteous ordinances is everlasting” (Ps. 119:160). “Let my tongue sing of Thy word, for all Thy commandments are righteousness” (Ps. 119:172). The Psalm writers accepted the inerrancy of the law, commandments, and the sum of God’s word.

⁶Pache, 121.

The apostles and authors of the New Testament confirm that the Scriptures were given by God and therefore were inerrant. Matthew 1:22 affirms that the prophecy about the Messiah is Isaiah "was spoken by the Lord through the prophet". Acts 3:18 tells us that it was God who announced things before hand by all the prophets. In Hebrews 1:1-2 it indicates that God spoke through the many prophets in the same way that He spoke through Christ.

The law and commandment were said to be holy, therefore true (Rom. 7:12). The word of God was characterized as a living word in Hebrews 4:12 that would pierce "as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Holiness implies truthfulness, which in turn points to the concept of inerrancy.

Paul in Galatians quotes from the Old Testament and stresses the importance of a singular noun instead of a plural one, (Gal. 3:16-17). He found the Scriptures so accurate that he could teach from even the minor details of its promises. Paul treated the Old Testament as exact, trustworthy, and inerrant.

The New Testament closes with a warning not to delete anything from the words of "this book" lest God judge (Rev. 22:18-19). At least for the book of Revelation that confirms that God agrees with it being in Scripture. In light of his belief that God oversaw the compilation of the New Testament Wayne Grudem concludes, "it may not be inappropriate to think of Revelation 22:18-19 as having a secondary application to the whole of the Bible that precedes it."⁷ On the basis of God's agreement with all of Scripture, it must be inerrant and reflect His holy and trustworthy character.

The earliest fathers of the church believed that the Bible is the infallible rule for faith. It is absolutely true in all its utterances,

⁷Carson and Woodbridge, eds., 49.

since it is given by God Himself. The Bible is harmonious, containing no contradictions; and has absolute divine authority.⁸

Augustine (354-430) regarded Scripture as truth and completely free from error. For it seems to me that most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books: that is to say, that the men by whom the Scripture has been given to us and committed to writing, did put down in these books anything false, (Letters 23.3.3).⁹

According to Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), "It is heretical to say that any falsehood whatever is contained either in the Gospels or in any canonical Scripture (*In Job* 13. Lect. 1)."¹⁰

Martin Luther bases the truthfulness of the Bible on the nature of God.

My friend, God's Word is God's Word; this point does not require much haggling! When one blasphemously gives the lie to God in a single word, or says it is a minor matter if God is blasphemed or called a liar, one blasphemes the entire God (Pelikan and Lehman *Works*, 37:26).¹¹

Advocates of full inerrancy among evangelicals in modern history include such men as J.I Packer, Paul Feinberg, Roger Nicole, and Milliard Erickson. Many evangelical churches today would espouse this view of the Scripture. They join the witness of the church through the centuries that have continuously avowed that the canonical Bible is fully trustworthy. The term "inerrant" only goes back about 150 years, but the concept of inerrancy is as old as the church in history.

The remarkable accuracy of the Bible in areas where we can check it gives confidence that it is true in all areas. *TIME* (Dec. 30, 1974) concluded, "After more than two centuries of facing the heaviest

⁸Geisler, *Decide for Yourself*, 32.

⁹Ibid, 36.

¹⁰Ibid, 38.

¹¹Ibid.

guns that could be brought to bear, the Bible has survived-and is perhaps the better for the siege. Even on the critics' own terms - historical fact - the Scriptures seem more acceptable now than they did when the rationalists began the attack."¹²

The accuracy of the Bible is acknowledged by many scholars, scientists, and archaeologists who have done years of research in ancient languages and ancient history. Their research leads them to the conclusion that the Bible is worthy of confidence because it has shown itself to be inerrant.

A telling example of the Bible's accuracy is the transliteration of the names of foreign kings in the Old Testament as compared to contemporary extra-biblical records such as monuments and tablets. The Bible is accurate in every detail in the 36 instances of comparison, a total of 183 syllables. To see how amazing this is, Manetho's ancient work on the dynasties of the Egyptian kings can be compared within 140 instances. He is right 49 times, only partially right 28 times and in the other 63 cases, not a single syllable is correct! The Bible's accuracy is shown not only in the original work, but in its copies as well. (Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 170-171)¹³

Many people who do not claim to be evangelical Christians never-the-less espouse the inerrancy of Scriptures. The courts use Bibles as a symbol of truth when they ask people to place their hand on it and swear to tell whole truth and nothing but the truth. Not all of those people would agree that it is wholly true, but others would say that it is God's word and therefore inerrant.

DEFENSE OF FULL INERRANCY

Many people would argue that phenomena or factual details in the Bible, which appear to disagree, keep them from accepting the doctrine of inerrancy. Harold DeWolfe writes,

¹²Gerry Breshears, "Holy Bible-Wholly True" (Portland: Western Seminary).

¹³Gerry Breshears, "Inerrancy: The Testimony of Archaeology", (Portland: Western Seminary).

In regard to many facts of minor importance there are obvious contradictions within the Bible. For example in Exodus 37:1-9 we read that Bezaleel made the Ark of the Covenant, while in Deuteronomy 10:1-5 Moses reports that God commanded him to make the Ark and he says, 'So I made an ark of acacia wood.' (Harold DeWolfe, *A Theology of the Living Church* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953], p. 69).¹⁴

Philip Wise wrote,

The simple view that the Bible has no contradictions is simply not confirmed by close reading of the Bible. For example, in which order did the temptations come to Jesus in the wilderness? Compare Matthew 4:1-11 with Luke 4:1-12. Are both of these accounts accurate? Apparently not.¹⁵

Specific problem passages and the phenomena of Scripture are not easily answered in every case. Paul Feinberg made these observations: 1. No doctrine of inerrancy can determine in advance the solution to individual or specific problem passages. 2. Inerrancy is a doctrine that must be asserted, but which may not be demonstrated with respect to all the phenomena of Scripture.¹⁶

To err in ignorance was still sin according to Leviticus 5:18 and needed a guilt offering. Hebrews 9:7 also speaks of a sin committed in ignorance. In both cases there was need for atonement. To have error in the Bible would be to accept that there is deception in Scripture whether it was or was not intentional and that would seem to imply that God approved of it as His word. How could God allow any kind of sin to represent Himself? It is not a logical conclusion to accept error. The Bible has seeming contradictions, but to allow them as actual error is not consistent with the character of God. Feinberg concluded,

¹⁴Geisler, *Decide for Yourself*, 59.

¹⁵Philip D. Wise, "Biblical Inerrancy: Pro or Con?" *The Theological Educator*, no. 37 (Spring, 1988). 41.

¹⁶Norman L. Geisler, ed. *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 295.

There are really only these two choices: either the theologian will trust the word of an omnipotent, omniscient God, who says that He controlled human agents, making it necessary for the theologian to admit his fallibility as critic, or in some sense he will declare that the aforementioned control is restricted and will affirm his own relative and finite omniscience as critic.¹⁷

Many of the discrepancies of the Bible can be satisfactorily explained. Those that can't, may need to wait for more evidence from archeology, linguists, or historians. New data is proving more of the Bible every year. In the meantime there is more support for full inerrancy from Scripture, history, and research than against it.

Karl Barth claimed that the Bible had error due to its authors. "The prophets and apostles as such... were real, historical men as we are, and therefore sinful in their action and capable and actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word (Dogmatics, 1:2.529)."¹⁸ C.S. Lewis also pointed to error from human authors. "The human qualities of the raw materials show through. Naivety, error, contradiction, even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness are not removed. (*Reflections on the Psalm* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958], 111-112)."¹⁹

In answer to those objections, the inspiration of Scripture must be asserted. Scripture is the very word of God. He is a truth and faithfulness and cannot lie. He is also omnipotent and guided in the content of His word that was written.

Again, if only human fallibility were to be reckoned with in the drawing up of the biblical text, how could we discern the true from the false - we who are fallible ourselves? In that case there would be nothing left to us but skepticism.²⁰

Some would say that modern science has destroyed the idea of a perfect Bible. Philip Wise would say there are scientific

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Geisler, *Decide for Yourself*, 81.

¹⁹Ibid, 96.

²⁰Pache, 128.

errors. Jack Rogers would agree with him. Many scientists do believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. Scientific declarations are often altered as new discoveries are made and the conclusions of science should not be considered absolute.

Here is the opinion of Professor Robert Dick Wilson of Princeton, who held several doctorates and who knew forty-five languages and dialects of the Near East, including all of the Semitic languages: 'I have come to the conviction that no man knows enough to attack the veracity of the Old Testament. Every time, when anyone has been able to get together enough documentary 'proofs' to undertake an investigation, the biblical facts in the original text have victoriously met the test. (Luscher, *Die letzten Zeiten und das inspirierte Wort* [Kangenthal, Germany: Pflug Verlag, 1954], 64.²¹

There are those who look at the copies and the translations available today and say that the Bible is no longer trustworthy. They point to the mistakes and variations in different manuscripts. Sometimes they will also use the uncertain interpretations as a reason for rejecting inerrancy.

Full inerrancy claims that the original manuscripts were perfectly factual and accurate to the letter. The errors found now are no more than about one-thousandth part of the Bible and the number of manuscripts now available, combined with the advances in Ancient Eastern languages, means that the newer translations are getting more accurate. Pache says, "If the original text was faulty, the streams of potential error flowing out from it would only tend to increase constantly."²² It was important that the original was not misleading to copyists. Their care in making exact copies conveys their reverence for the Word of God which they considered inerrant.

Some claim that the Bible could not be accurate historically and report wrong names for places and rulers. W.F Albright

²¹Ibid, 128.

²²Ibid, 137.

started out with that position but with a lifetime of study has been convinced otherwise. Sir William Ramsey, initially a liberal archaeologist, also came to the conclusion of its truth. That has happened with a number of liberal scholars who have been awed by the accuracy of Scripture. John Bright writes,

the patriarchal age has been illumined in a manner unbelievable. We now have texts by the literal tens of thousands contemporaneous with the period of Israel's origins... And, as the early second millennium has emerged into the light of day, it has become clear that the patriarchal narratives, far from reflecting the circumstances of a later day, fit precisely into the age of which they purport to tell." (History of Israel, 69-70).²³

Some would point to uncertainty in interpretation as proof that the Bible is not wholly true. Certainly translation means there is room for some questions to arise in interpretation, but that does not affect the accuracy and inerrancy of the original documents.

Many liberal theologians claim inerrancy of purpose only. They point to the soteriological (salvation) purpose found in 2 Timothy 3:15-17 where the Scriptures make one "wise unto salvation". Jack Rogers states, "to confuse 'error' in the sense of technical accuracy with the biblical notion of error as willful deception diverts us from the serious intent of Scripture... The purpose of the Bible is to warn against human sin and offer us God's salvation in Christ."²⁴ Other proponents of this stance include Howard Marshall, Stephen Davis, and Dewey Beegle.

Certainly the Scriptures do point to salvation and have a redemptive purpose. But much more than that must be claimed for the Bible. To expect an unholy record to lead to holiness and a knowledge of the holy God is unrealistic. Scripture reflects the holiness of God in being inerrant. Any lesser claim negates the

²³Gerry Breshears, "Inerrancy: The Testimony of Archaeology" (Portland: Western Seminary).

²⁴Jack Rogers, ed. *Biblical Authority* (Waco, Texas: Word, Inc., 1977), 46.

claim of "Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei" (Sacred Scripture is God's Word).

In conclusion, full inerrancy of Scripture is confirmed through the doctrine of inspiration, through the character of God, through the character of the prophets, through the way Jesus used and regarded the Bible, through the way the Bible interprets itself, through history, and through its accuracy.

The word of God is available for us to study and interpret with good hermeneutical methods. The inerrancy of Scripture should impress upon us to be obedient to 2 Timothy 2:15. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."

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