

THE INERRANCY OF THE BIBLE

Introduction

- I. How did we get here?
 - a. Naturalism and humanism, the German higher criticisms, among other things have led to a general questioning of all biblical authority.
 - b. The influence of reader-centered approaches v. the authorial intent of inspired writers.
 - c. The influence of “rationalism” has also had major impact since eighteenth century – “an optimistic confidence in critical human reason and a disdain for supernatural influences in human affairs” (Brown, Comfort 43).
- II. An illustration of the problem: ACU press published a book in 2002 by Ken Cukrowski, Mark Hamilton, and James Thompson titled *God’s Holy Fire: The Nature and Function of Scripture*. Here are some quotes from that work.
 - a. “Scripture is the Word of God that can alone guide the church. At the same time, one should be cautious about adding the nonbiblical categories to define inspiration that have been at the center of the ‘Battle for the Bible.’ Because Scripture contains both the human and the divine element, it is a mystery that resists our human definitions” (38-39). What does this mean? One should be careful about saying that the Bible is the inerrant word of God?
 - b. “In recent years, the ‘Battle for the Bible’ has been fought over the use of one such definition: inerrancy, a term which was not used in the Bible and was not in common use to define the nature of inspiration for many centuries after the writing of the New Testament. Although we appreciate the sentiments of those who insist on this term and share their desire to maintain the highest view of Scripture, for a variety of reasons their terminology is not helpful” (39).
 - c. “To insist on inerrancy is to apply standards for the authors that they did not claim for themselves” (42). List examples of cosmology, botany, and the other sciences (use of word “firmament”, mustard seed as smallest of seeds). Sequence of events, inconsistency of narrative. Suggest that insisting on inerrancy creates problems of faith for people.
 - d. “The ultimate challenge is not our definition of inspiration, but our willingness to hear the Word of God as it addresses God’s people. To read the Bible, to treat it with reverence, to know the story of God’s endless search for a relationship with humanity is far more important than our explanations. Because knowing the old story is indispensable to the life of faith, the following chapters address our efforts to reclaim the entire Bible for the church and especially to see the richness of the Bible’s story” (45). These writers consider the term “inerrant” to be useless and misleading.

Discussion

- I. Is the Bible full of mistakes and contradictions or not? The question of biblical inerrancy must be settled (Lindsell). THERE ARE THREE EMERGING VIEWS:
 - a. ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED AND TRUE, INCLUDING THE HISTORICAL, GEOGRAPHICAL, AND SCIENTIFIC TEACHING (*inerrant*):
 - i. Chicago Statement by International Council of Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) in 1978.
 - ii. Carl F. H. Henry (1913-2003) – first editor-in-chief of *Christianity Today* magazine; signed above statement; best known for six-volume work *God, Revelation, and Authority* (1983).
- II. THE BIBLE TEACHING ON ONLY CERTAIN ITEMS IS TRUE (*infallible*):
 - a. Salvation-history and doctrine is true. The Bible is authoritative for faith and practice only. Daniel Fuller – *Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan for Humanity* (1992).
 - b. God's intent with Scripture is true. The Bible is inerrant in that God's purpose is always true.
 - c. Third view recently proposed by Steve Wilkens and Don Thorsen, *Everything You Know about Evangelicals Is Wrong (Well, Almost Everything): An Insider's Look at Myths and Realities* (2010). Where God's intent with Scripture is what is inerrant. God's intent is true.
- III. A Biblical Response: Where are the “qualifying statements” in Scripture that tell us what is true and what's not true. The word “all” is used a lot in Scripture. Remember the example of how the NT trusts the OT? Also, this dismisses all of the details of Scripture as simply the “skin” of the fruit. Mistaking a major purpose of Scripture for the only purpose of Scripture. Some object to term inerrancy because not in the Bible (of course no English term is!). But neither is infallible, trinity, or incarnation.
- IV. Defining our terms:
 - a. The WORD OF GOD:
 - i. With reference to Jesus - Sometimes refers to the Son of God incarnate in Scripture (John 1:1, 14; Rev 19:13). Emphasizes communicative role of Son in expressing God's will and character but this is an uncommon expression for Jesus (cf. 1 John 1:1).
 - ii. With reference to God's speech - More commonly refers to God's speech. Grudem describes these expressions as the “decrees” of God where God causes something to happen (Psa 33:6; Heb 11:3). God also speaks through direct personal address in Scripture (as with Adam and Eve in Gen 2:16-17; Israel in Exod 20:1-3; or at baptism of Jesus in Matt 3:17).
 - iii. With reference with God's speaking through the prophets - God even speaks through human mouths (as with the prophet passage in Deut 18:18-

20; cf. Jer 1:9). Many of these words were also written, which leads us to our next point of emphasis.

iv. But especially relevant to this discussion are God's written words. See written words at Sinai that God Himself wrote in Exod 31:18; 32:16; 34:1, 28. Yet also Moses did some writing (Deut 31:9-13). Even though these words were written by humans (lots of examples of men of God being told to write), they were still considered God's words. As indicated in Deut 31:12-13 this would insure a preservation of God's Word for future generations (as compared to oral tradition) and also give more access to more people.

b. INSPIRATION: The term comes from the Latin and English translations of *theopneustos* in 2 Timothy 3:16. Literally means "God-breathed."

i. Geisler argues that four key terms are noteworthy in this text (35): "all" (the entire OT canon Timothy had known from his youth); "scripture" (graphē used 51 times in NT); "inspired" (predicate adjective); and "profitable" (this is an intrinsic quality). Although literally it could be defined as "to breathe upon or into something" from Latin *inspirare* (Comfort 33). So emphasis is not on how Word "inspires" or motivates us (though it does), but rather on how Scripture is a God-breathed divine product.

ii. Breath/Spirit in the OT is involved in creation (Gen 1:2; 2:7; Psa 33:6; preservation (Job 34:14-15); and revelation to and through prophets (Isa 48:16; 61:1).

iii. Geisler's "Theological Definition of Inspiration": (38-39; 192-93)

1. CAUSE - *Divine causality*. God is the originator and authorizer (primary cause). He moved and revealed, while men mouthed and recorded.

2. MEANS - *Prophetic agency*. They are the means by which God spoke (secondary cause). This was likely a "concurrent" process that was divinely controlled while also through and by the writer's own activity. The words of Scripture are the means by which the thoughts are expressed, thus the words are inspired. What about the autographs, copies, or translations (which one is inspired)?

3. RESULT - *Scriptural authority*. This is the final product. Carl F. Thus, "verbal plenary inspiration" is the view that every word is inspired! *Verbal* (word), *plenary* (full), *inspiration* (breathed-out by God).

V. INFALLIBLE (generally trustworthy) AND INERRANT (transmitted accurately)

a. Infallible and inerrant are synonymous (Lindsell 27). Infallibility "defines Scripture as reliable and trustworthy" (Brown in Comfort, 38). It is without defect

and cannot fall from the standard of truth. Inerrancy is similar in that it means “the Bible contains neither errors of act (material errors) nor internal contradictions (formal errors).” So, infallibility is the broader term as inerrancy is more about the trustworthiness of the transmission than general reliability.

- b. Next question is what is inerrant? Autographs, KJV, TR, etc. Since early 1960s *inerrant* has been identified with the conservative position on the Bible and *infallible* with the other. Be aware of the creedal functions of these words! This is where Harold Lindsell’s book, *The Battle for the Bible* (1976), plays a big role.
 - c. Grudem defined inerrancy: “Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact” (90). Or “the Bible always tells the truth” “in everything it talks about” (91). Biggest questions in science and history. Grudem address the nature of human perspective, numbers and measurements, or the nature of vague statements. None of these make anything untrue, just perhaps not as specific as some would like.
 - d. Main point is made on Geisler page 55 “The Bible is the Word of God; God cannot err (Heb 6:18; Titus 1:2); therefore, the Bible cannot err.”
- VI. How has this discussion impacted the Restoration Movement/churches of Christ?
- a. L.L. Pinkerton (1812-1875) was the editor of the Christian Standard who suggested that there were errors in the Bible at the 1883 Missouri Christian Lectureship.
 - b. William Webb Freeman (1887-1954) was a teacher at Abilene who took a leave to pursue his PhD at Yale. He wrote in the *Firm Foundation* that the Bible was infallible in the area of religion but not in science. Freeman was fired from ACC and the storm was quieted until the 60s, when schools again being influenced by these ideas/teachers.
 - c. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), *The Christian System* - “The Bible, or the Old and New Testament, in Hebrew and Greek, contains a full and perfect revelation of God and his will, adapted to man as he now is” (15).
 - d. J.W. McGarvey (1829-1911) was one of the leading voices in standing for inerrancy. He sought to encourage colleges not to hire men who believed in higher criticism and wrote books and a weekly column in the Christian Standard challenging these ideas.

Conclusion

- I. The words of the Bible are God’s words (2 Thess 3:14; 2 Peter 3:2)
- II. God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2)
- III. God’s word is true and without error (Psa 12:6; Matt 24:35; John 17:17)
- IV. The Word of God is the final standard – we don’t have to go behind the text for meaning (whether Gospel studies, what Paul really thought, Jesus Seminar, etc.)

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