

The Lord and The Scriptures:

The inspiration and authority of Scripture cannot be separated from each other or from the authority of Jesus Christ. The Lord's view and use of Scripture bears this out - He treats it as inspired, and imparts to it His authority. "The fact we have to face is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, who claimed divine authority for all that He did or taught, both confirmed the absolute authority of the Old Testament for others and submitted to it unreservedly Himself." J.I.Packer, Fundamentalism and The Word of God, p.55. The Lord had the highest possible regard for the Scriptures (OT) and recognized in them the voice of God. The gospels make it clear that "the historic Israelite belief in the divine authority of the Old Testament was the foundation of Christ's whole ministry. He challenged the current interpretations of Scripture, but shared and endorsed the accepted view of its nature and status as an authoritative utterance of God." J.I.Packer, Fundamentalism and The Word of God, p.58.

Any attempt to deny the Scriptures as God's inspired Word, to question the authority of Scripture, to question the historicity of the Old Testament and the events and people of it is in reality a rejection of Christ himself, for His ministry and saving work, and his teaching and authority stands or falls on His (and our) view of Scripture. The Lord confirms for us that the whole of Scripture is the authoritative word of God.

Consider what the Lord says concerning the Scriptures:

"Do not think I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have come to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, 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. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the Kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:17-19) "The Word of God...Scripture cannot be broken." (Jn 10:35) To the Pharisees: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:39,40)

The Lord maintained He was bringing the Scriptures to fulfillment (not abolishing them or setting them aside, rather underlining them). Luke 4:18ff (upon reading Isa 61 in the Synagogue) "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Matt 11 :5 (Cf. Isa 35). Luke 18: 31f (Cf. Mark 8:31). Matt 26:53 56. Luke 24:25-27, 44-47. "And beginning with Moses, and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. "

The Lord defends the historicity of scriptural events and people (many of which modern critical scholarship, with its bias against the supernatural has written off as "myths") to the point His redemptive work rests on them : Daniel (Mt 13:4, 24:15), Jonah (Mt 12:10, 39-41), Moses (John 3:14,15,45-47), Adam and Eve (Mt 19:4 cf. Rom 5:12ff), Noah (Luke 17:26) and Lot's wife (Luke 17:32).

The Lord submitted to the Scriptures as authority: At the temptation (Matt 4:1-11, Luke 1 :1-12), He used Scripture to resist temptation, and resisted the Devil's misuse and misinterpretation of Scripture. When Jesus says: "It is written..." it settles the matter for him. Jesus, as a child astonished the temple scholars and His teaching was with authority throughout His ministry. Jesus kept the Law perfectly, not the law of the scribes and Pharisees, but the Law of God.

The Lord challenged the misinterpretation and misuse of Scripture: Jesus' words in the sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) " But I say to you..." were not contradicting the Old Testament, but the misuse and misinterpretation and additions of the legalism of Pharisaical teaching. Example: Mt 5:43 (Cf. Lev 19:18) "Hate your enemy" an addition (Cf. Lev. 19:17,34). "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." (Mark 12:24) Mt. 15: 3-9. "You break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition... you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition... Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you..."

The Lord argued on the basis of the inspiration of Scripture even of the words and grammar of it. Matt 19:3-6 (Gen. 2:24 - the creator said). Mark 12:36 "David himself speaking by the Holy Spirit" gives the Lord an argument that the Christ (the Lord) is the Son of David - the whole argument hinges on the verse from Psa 110 being David's. (Cf. Mt 22:43f). In John 10:24-39, Jesus defends himself against blasphemy on the basis of one word in Psa 82:6. In Matt 22:29 the entire argument hinges on the verb tense of the word "I Am".

The Lord claimed complete authority for His own teaching, placing it on a par with the rest of Scripture. Matt 7:28-29 "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words will never pass away." John 7:16,17 "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. If any one chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." (Cf. the following discourse in Jn 7) "No one ever spoke the way this man does " (vs. 46) was the reaction to Him in John 5:30-47. John 5:24: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned . . ." In Mt 7:24ff, building on Jesus' words is building a house on the rock.

Other Scriptural testimony to its inspiration and authority : The Epistles

The Old Testament (whose canon of 39 books was fixed in Christ's day) and the Gospels are clearly established by the testimony and authority of Christ. What about the rest of the Bible - the New Testament epistles and Acts? The Lord reveals that The Disciples (Apostles) would have a part - The Holy Spirit would bring Christ's words to their remembrance (John 14:26) and in His prayer in John 17, The Lord prayed concerning the word given the disciples, which was to have a part in their sanctification and the words of the disciples by which others would believe. (vs. 8:17-20)

Paul speaks of "the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets," which appears a reference to their writings. (Eph 2:20) Certainly the office of Apostle included that of proclamation of the word of God. (II Cor 5:18-20). Peter speaks that he writes to enable the readers to call these things to mind after his departure. (2 Peter 1:12f). The Thessalonians were commended for receiving the word of the missionaries as the word of God. (1 Thess 2:13). The Apostle Paul did not hesitate to command in the Lord's name (2 Thess 3:6, I Cor 14:37). Peter commends Paul's writings, along with the "rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15f) as being hard to understand, but nevertheless written "with the wisdom God gave him."

"If God had caused His earlier, preliminary revelation to be written, then without doubt He would cause His final, crowning revelation to be recorded in writing. If the New Covenant was the completion and fulfillment of the Old, then it was natural to expect from the God who inspired an authoritative account of the one an authoritative account of the other ... it would have been strange indeed had there been no New Testament, proclaiming God's full and final revelation in Christ, to complete and elucidate it." J.I. Packer, Fundamentalism and The Word of God, p. 67.

The Question of Inerrancy

The great watershed of the Bible is inspiration! Is it God's inspired word, as the Christian faith has maintained up until the middle of the last century without dissent? Or is it, as the historical-critical theologian, the form or source critic, or the advocate of the "New hermeneutic" maintain, a human montage of various writings, accounts, fables, traditions that must be approached critically, sorted out, "de-mythologized", and translated into modern science and philosophy? A lesser watershed has developed within those who claim the Bible is inspired - these who claim inerrancy for all Scripture in all that it teaches and affirms and those who claim "limited inerrancy allowing room for errors in science, history and other "unessential" matters to the Bible's religious teaching.

"However stated and however limited, the difference between the two views at present is that some of Scripture, but not all, comprises the revelation of God, and that portion of Scripture that does this can be trusted and is true and free from error ... the errancy camp is divided and can be expected to be divided, over questions that may or may not bear upon matters of faith. Does the belief or disbelief in a historical Adam and Eve have anything to do with the "infallible rule of faith?" Does the acceptance of Jonah as a novella rather than history, the "non-messianic authorship" of the Pentateuch, the non-historical character of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, the theory of two Isaiahs, the late dating of the book of Daniel, the non-Pauline authorship of books like Ephesians and the Prison Epistles, and the non-Petrine authorship of 2 Peter relate to non-revelational matters or do they involve the "rule of faith"? Who is to decide, and on what basis, what constitutes the material that is to be trusted and that which is not to be trusted? Does it make any difference whether one believes in the virgin birth of Christ and the physical resurrection from the dead? No one can escape these questions and answers must be provided for them by those who deny inerrancy" Lindsell, The Battle for The Bible, pp. 138,139.

Here are some examples of ways that "limited inerrancy" (infallible, yet errant) has been expressed by individuals within Evangelicalism:

"There are two kinds of Scripture revelational and non-revelational. Non-revelational Scripture has errors in it; revelational Scripture can be fully trusted Scripture that doesn't involve matters of faith and practice is not inerrant."

"It doesn't matter if the Bible contains error, since error doesn't invalidate the message of law and Gospel. God can work through error." "The thing that matters about any book of the Bible is not who wrote it, but whether the voice of God is heard in it."

"Paul's reference to Adam, as well as the words of Jesus in Matt 19:4-9 may be taken as a revelational presentation of the truth of God inherent in the Genesis account without necessarily giving sanction to the literal historicity of the details of the account."

"Some people still argue that the Bible is a perfect authority even in scientific matters. But if that were so, how does it happen that the conception of the earth's shape found in Scripture has been shown not to be a literal fact? The purpose of the Bible is not to tell men the shape of the earth. Its purpose is to lead men to God."

The crucial question that must be asked any proponent of "limited inerrancy" is "how do you determine what is essential?" Who or what is to be the Judge of the Scriptures? It is significant that using arguments like the above-the important doctrines of the Bible have been compromised with use of the historical-critical method (which has an anti-supernatural bias at its very heart), accommodation of Scripture to modern scientific views (such as evolution), rejection and reconstruction of historical events in the Bible, even reconstructing the Gospels as collected traditions and stories circulated in early Christianity, not true accounts. Only a fully inspired, inerrant Scripture can be trusted as the Judge and corrector of our faith and practice. The Gospel message can not be divorced from its context in real history and true science.

J. I. Packer says: *"It is not enough to fight and win the battle for biblical inerrancy if we are then going to lose the battle for understanding the Bible and so for living under its authority. We must be clear therefore on the rules of interpretation, and with that be working constantly to get the blinkers off our spiritual eyes so that breadth of practical insight may be ours."*

THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY, Oct. 28, 1978 Three hundred scholars from various denominations and theological schools met in Chicago in October, 1978 to articulate the common understanding of inerrancy which they believed themselves to have. The substance is in this statement:

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order 'hereby to reveal Himself to feath mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.
3. The Holy Spirit, its divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation and the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.
5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

A balanced system of interpretation is needed. At the heart is a proper view of Scripture as the revealed and written Word of God, inspired and inerrant. The due consideration must be given to its language and literary forms, its historical context and content, and the unity of its doctrinal teaching. In all this the perspective of the reader is important as well, the need for submission to the Word as God's revelation and the illumination of the Spirit which comes through a heart of faith.