

BIBLICAL INERRANCY

A Position Statement by The Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary

"TO KNOW CHRIST AND TO MAKE HIM KNOWN"

THE INERRANT SCRIPTURES

Grace Theological Seminary's Covenant of Faith is annually signed by each member of the Seminary Faculty and the Board of Trustees. The first article of this Covenant is an affirmation about the inerrant Scriptures.

We believe in THE HOLY SCRIPTURES: accepting fully the writings of the Old and New Testaments as the very Word of God, verbally inspired in all parts and therefore wholly without error as originally given of God, altogether sufficient in themselves as our only infallible rule of faith and practice (Matt. 5: 18; John 10:35, 16:13, 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2Peter 1:21).

Importance

Since the founding of our Seminary, this article has served as an adequate statement of our faith in God's Word. For us and for those of like precious faith it clearly and explicitly affirms the teachings of our Lord and His apostles, as well as the consensus of orthodox Christianity through the centuries. In recent years, however, scholarly arguments have appeared, even within evangelical Christianity, which have employed sophisticated semantic techniques in redefining certain key concepts included in this definition. The purpose of this position paper is to respond to these attempts at redefinition by clarifying our own convictions in light of contemporary discussion. Accordingly, the key terms in our Covenant of Faith article will be amplified and defined in expressing our commitment to the inerrancy of God's Word.

We believe . . .

Beginning propositionally with the Biblical testimony that all Scripture is of God and therefore true (John 17:17), we affirm that there is no authoritative source, other than the Scriptures themselves, from which an adequate doctrine of Scripture can be established. Errors in the area of religious knowledge are not due primarily to academic or intellectual deficiencies. According to our Lord Himself the serious theological errors of men are due to the fact that they neither know the Scriptures nor the power of God (Mark 12:24). It is our conviction that one who chooses to call himself a Christian should follow Christ in His view of Scripture. Jesus once said that if people would believe the Scriptures, they would also believe Him (John 5:39-47). We are affirming that if people would believe Him, they would also believe the Scriptures. His view of Scripture is written plainly in the Gospels. For Him, the Scriptures are the final inerrant authority in all matters (Matt. 5:17-19; Luke 16:17; John 10:31-39).

The Holy Scriptures . . .

The title "Holy" Bible is rightly derived from the fact that the Holy God is its author. The human authors of Scripture were so superintended by God's Holy Spirit that God's Word can affirm that they "spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). Consequently, with Jesus, we too can affirm that what the Scriptures have said can be described as what God has said (Matt. 19:4-5; cf. Rom. 9:17). Thus, the holy character of the Scriptures (Rom. 1:2; 2 Tim. 3:15) is derived from the holy character of their Divine Author (2 Peter 1:15-16). The Bible does not merely become revelational in encounter nor is it merely a witness to revelation. It is God's objective revelation to man.

The Old and New Testaments . . .

Only those 66 books traditionally identified as comprising the Old and New Testaments are considered as canonical. Divine inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16) was the sole criterion for canonicity. The test for canonicity was prophetic or apostolic authorization. Thus, our Lord refers to the Old Testament as "the Scriptures of the prophets" (Matt. 26:56; cf. Luke 16:16, 29, 24:27).

Similarly, the New Testament could be described as "Apostolic Scriptures" since these 27 books were either written or recognized by those whom Christ personally chose as authorized representatives to act in His behalf with His authority (John 14:26; Matt. 10:1, 40). No normative revelation has been given since the apostolic age.

Very Word of God . . .

The Old Testament actually affirms thousands of times that it is the Word of God. Phrases such as "the Lord spoke . . .," and "thus saith the Lord . . .," are characteristic. Likewise, the New Testament asserts that it was God who spoke through the prophets (Heb. 1:1; Acts 1:16; 1 Peter 1:11). It also affirms that the New Testament writings from the apostolic circle are to be accepted as the very words of God (2 Peter 3:2). Paul argued that the mark of a spiritual man was

his acceptance of Paul's writings as the words of God (1 Cor. 14:37)! To those who aver that there may be errors in God's Word, we respond that since the very words of Scripture originated with God (1 Cor. 2:13) and since God cannot err (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2), then neither can the Scriptures err. The Scriptures thus receive their authority from God Himself and not from the church or any other human source (1 Thess. 2:13).

Verbally inspired . . .

The term "verbally" indicates that all of the individual words of the Bible, not merely its general concepts, are inspired. The term "inspired" does not refer to heightened forms of human insight or to an intensified appreciation for divine truth, rather it means that the Scriptures are to be considered as the very "breath" of God. Just as spoken words are the product of human breath, so the written Scriptures are the product of the divine "breath"—that work of God in superintending the human authors so that what they recorded was in reality His Word. This was accomplished without overriding their human personalities or their distinctive literary styles. The men were not employed as machines but were "borne along" by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21) with the result that the Scriptures may be said to be "God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16).

Wholly without error . . .

It is sometimes argued that the Bible is without error "in its teaching," and that it attempts to teach only in matters of religion. This allows for errors in history and science. This seems bluntly to contradict our Lord's concern for every jot and tittle of the Scriptures (Matt. 5:18; cf. John 10:35). If the Bible contains errors in matters which are subject to investigation, how can we depend on its statements concerning spiritual, heavenly, or eternal matters which cannot be empirically investigated (John 3:12)? While God's revelation in the Scriptures was progressive, later revelation never corrects or contradicts any previous revelation (Deut. 13:1-5; Ps. 19:8-9). In opposition to many contemporary interpretations of Genesis, we specifically affirm our belief in the Biblical accounts of a recent creation and a worldwide flood.

It will not do to define an error as consisting only of willful deception, as some have done. The Bible clearly teaches that error and sin may be unintentional (Lev. 5:18; Job 6:24). The term "inerrancy" is, therefore, used in our statements about Scripture to insist that the Bible is wholly true in all that it affirms on any subject.

As originally given of God . . .

The Bible asserts that the Scriptures were originally written under the control of the Holy Spirit of God (2 Peter 1:21). Since God cannot err, the Scriptures, as originally recorded, were without error. However, the Scriptures never promised that subsequent transmissions of the Bible would be without error nor that the autographs would be completely preserved in any one manuscript or family of manuscripts. Accordingly, we insist that any alleged contradictions or errors involve either errors in interpretation or in transmission.

The Bible is unique among all ancient literature in that there are far more extant Biblical manuscripts than for any other ancient documents. The time interval between the original writing and the nearest extant copies is also significantly less than with most ancient literature. To our satisfaction, the Bible has been substantially recovered in its original form so that no doctrine of Scripture rests on a disputed textual variant. Consequently, careful translations such as the Authorized Version, the American Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, and the New International Version can be used with confidence.

Infallible . . .

By the term "infallible" we do not mean merely that the Scriptures "infallibly point men to Christ." While this is true, the term indicates far more. It means that the Scriptures cannot be proven false, erroneous, or mistaken, and are therefore absolutely trustworthy. The use of approximations, generalizations, hyperbole and the language of appearance must be recognized in accordance with their intended purposes and in no way lessens the truths being affirmed.

Sufficient . . . Rule of Faith and Practice

This traditional phrase fully acknowledges that Biblical revelation is our only source of information in matters of faith and practice. This does not, however, limit the Bible's authority to these areas. The Bible alone provides us with authoritative information about God, origins, salvation, human destiny, and the proper conduct for human life, but it also provides us with the only authoritative framework for the interpretation of all other data. Due to man's fallen nature all spiritual, physical and experiential data can be viewed in proper perspective only when evaluated in harmony with God's revelation (Isa. 55:8-9). The Bible is wholly true in everything it affirms, whether its affirmations concern doctrine, Christian practice, history, geography, or science.

Summary

We hereby reaffirm our belief in the trustworthiness of Holy Scripture and, as faculty members of Grace Theological Seminary, we pledge ourselves to uphold, by our life styles and our ministries, the statement on Scripture found in our Covenant of Faith.

(Adopted by the faculty of Grace Theological Seminary, November 14, 1978)

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