

The Inerrancy of Scripture: What's at Stake

Ben Giselbach
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Every now and then, people will kick around the idea of the “inerrancy” of Scripture. What does *inerrancy* mean, and why is it such a big deal?

What is inerrancy?

When we say something is *inerrant*, we mean it is without error, mistake, contradiction, or falsehood. *Inerrant* means “true, trustworthy, reliable, accurate, and infallible.” Thus, if the Bible is inerrant, it is totally trustworthy and without error in everything it says. This isn't some new theory. If the Bible is God's Word, we expect it to be inerrant (and we make no apology for this word).

The Bible claims *verbal inspiration*. By this we mean that God approved every word of Scripture. Every single word is inspired by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:13), and thus carries God's divine authority. It isn't merely the general *thought* behind the words that are inspired, but the very *words* of the Bible that are inspired. Jesus Himself implied that there is not a single word that is insignificant in Scripture (cf. Matt. 5:18; 22:32; Gal. 3:16).

The Bible claims *plenary inspiration*. This means Scripture is entirely true - not only in

what it specifically teaches, but also in everything it *mentions* as it teaches. What I mean is, even though God did not design the Bible to be a history or science textbook, when the inspired writers do happen to mention something scientific or historical, their words are entirely factually true (cf. John 3:12). The historical accounts of places, the events, and people, along with any references to nature or biology, are true.

The Bible claims *infallibility*. Scripture can never fail or make a mistake. God “never lies” (Titus 1:2), therefore there can be no *deliberate* errors in Scripture. God “knows everything” (1 John 3:20), therefore there can be no *accidental* mistakes in Scripture. Proverbs 30:5 says, “Every word of God proves true.” Jesus prayed to the Father, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). Jesus happened to believe in the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible when He said that “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

What inerrancy isn't.

Inerrancy doesn't mean man hasn't made mistakes in copying the ancient manuscripts. The printing press has only existed for 5 centuries or so, meaning for the majority of human history, Scripture had to be copied by hand (people who made duplicates of Scripture were called “scribes”). Sometimes the scribes made mistakes (mostly by accidentally leaving out/duplicating a word or forgetting to punctuate something). But, because of the rich pool of ancient copies in our possession today (we have thousands upon thousands), it is remarkably easy to pinpoint where the scribes made mistakes.

The term “inerrancy” only applies to the autographs of Scripture (the original writings), not the manuscripts (the copies). When we talk about the inerrancy of Scripture, we are affirming that the original transmission of God's revelation is without error.

Inerrancy doesn't mean God didn't use the unique writing styles of the prophets. The inspired writers of the Bible weren't exactly automatons. A cursory study of the 66 books of the Bible will reveal that Moses, Paul, and Peter read somewhat differently (as you would expect from different writers). Additionally, a casual glance at Scripture will also show that the inspired writers used different literary styles (such as parables, poetry, metaphor, anthropomorphism, and hyperbole).

Yes, God utilized the unique personalities of the prophets and the apostles when transmitting Scripture. But because the Bible is inerrant, we know God's inspiration insured what the prophets and apostles wrote was exactly as God intended.

Inerrancy doesn't preclude the use of layman's terminology. For example, sometimes the Bible uses non-technical phraseology, such as "from the rising of the sun" (Psalm 113:3). Scientifically speaking, the sun doesn't rise (that's impossible). But in layman's terms, it does. As another example, sometimes the Bible uses round numbers and inexact measurements, just as we do today in everyday conversation (Did literally all of Israel gather around Jeremiah in the temple in Jeremiah 26:9? I doubt it). This is just an example of God speaking rhetorically, with His words being no less true.

What if the Bible were not inerrant?

If the Bible is not inerrant, God either made a mistake or He lied. If there were errors in the original autographs of Scripture, then either God purposefully or accidentally misled us. Are you ready to serve a God who lies or makes mistakes?

If the Bible is not inerrant, there is no reason to trust God. If God can lie or make a mistake in small areas of Scripture, why should we trust His words in the more important areas? When we can't rely on the specific words and historical/scientific accuracy of Scripture, then we are robbed of our trust in God Himself.

If the Bible is not inerrant, the wisdom of man becomes a higher standard of truth than Scripture. It bothers me how some deny the inerrancy of Scripture on the basis of their feelings. "I fear it turns people off." "I am uncomfortable describing the Bible with such a concrete word." But God doesn't ask us to follow Him with our feelings - He asks us to submit Him with our mind on the basis of facts and objective truth. It doesn't matter what you like. Feelings are deceptive (cf. Prov. 12:15; Eze. 13:3). We must define ourselves by the Bible, not the Bible to our own comfort level.

If the Bible is not inerrant, then we cannot rely on the spiritual truth it teaches. The moment you admit the inspired Scripture contain historical/scientific/peripheral mistakes, you have put a dangerous crack in the dam. How can you argue the doctrine of Scripture is true (eternal judgment, sin, salvation, the deity of Christ, etc.) if you cannot also argue that the smaller, intricate details of Scripture are also true?

Conclusion

Some feel uncomfortable using the term inerrancy. They say they do not want to use words the Bible doesn't use (To be consistent, they shouldn't use words like "Trinity" or "Bible," either). One writer prefers to describe the Bible as "reliable and true;" others prefer to use

the word “inspired.” But this is a false distinction between words. **If the Bible is truly inspired - and if it is reliable and true - then it is inerrant. And if there is any part or degree to which the Bible is not inerrant, it is also to that extent not inspired, reliable, and true.**

After we have properly defined the word “inerrant,” we must unapologetically embrace the fact that the Bible is inerrant. We love inerrancy. It is what gives us hope, peace, and confidence in the Word of God.

Hey, here’s a good place to shamelessly [plug my book!](#)



If you want to know more about how we got the Bible and how it is authoritative in our lives, [You Are A Theologian: Thinking Right About The Bible](#) is a good place to start. Use it as a class at your church, or use it so you can hold your own when a skeptic tries to minimize the inerrancy of God’s word. Don’t let anyone ‘muddy the water’ about this topic - it is far too important.

Your comments are welcome and encouraged, even if they are in disagreement. However, please keep your comments relevant to the article. For my full comment policy, [click here.](#)