

The Authority of Scripture

The Bible holds a unique place within the life of the community of God. It is God's self-revelation, whereby He communicates to us in a manner that we can understand. It is a true revelation of all that is necessary for salvation and living a godly life. Since the Bible is so central to our lives, let us look more closely at what we believe about the Bible by defining some of the terms we use to describe it.

Inspired

2 Timothy 3:16 states that all Scripture is "inspired by God" (NASB), literally "God-breathed". The words we read in the Bible were first breathed out by God. We do not understand this term to mean that God dictated every word of Scripture, nor do we believe that He only inspired some of them. Rather, God prepared the writers of Scripture and supervised their writing in such a way that what is expressed is both the words of the human author and the words of God. The words used express the personalities of the writers and the truth of God at the same time. Therefore, the words of Scripture are truly God's Word. The Bible is *divine*.

Inerrant

When we say that the Bible is inerrant, we mean that it is without error. This accuracy extends to the events, history, numerical descriptions, observations, etc. found within the Bible as well as to the truths expressed. We hold that such expressions remain without deceit, inconsistency or falsehood. The Bible is *true*.

Infallible

The word infallible means unable to fail. When we apply it to Scripture, we mean that we can trust it. It will never let us down. This is more than simply stating that the Bible is without error. The news may report a promise that a politician has made. This report may be given without error. But that does not mean that we can trust the promise itself, no matter how accurately it may have been reported. Such trust depends on the politician. Inerrancy means the Scripture has accurately reported what God has said. Infallibility means that we can trust what God has said. Unlike the aforementioned politician, it is the God of the universe that stands behind the promise. The Bible is *trustworthy*.

Authoritative

Since the Scripture is the Word of God, it is the final authority for all matters concerning faith and practice. It is unrivaled by tradition, intuition, reason or modern world-views. In matters that are not directly addressed by the Bible, we affirm that its authority means that our belief and practice must remain consistent with and be a logical deduction from the Scripture. The Bible is *instructive*.

The above statements apply to the Scripture under two conditions:

First, they are true of Scripture as originally given. We believe that they apply to our translations only in as much as they truly reproduce what is contained in the original writings. At the same

time, we trust that God has sovereignly supervised the preservation and copying of those original writings so that what remains today is a true representation of the original.

Second, these beliefs apply to the Scripture as properly interpreted. The words of Scripture are not themselves magically powerful if used out of context. This is vividly illustrated by the Sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13-16). It is only a proper understanding of what God is communicating in Scripture that is truly God-breathed, inerrant, infallible and authoritative.

With this in mind, let us look at some principles that will help us interpret the Bible correctly:

The Bible is Contextual and Eternal

Scripture consists of different styles of writing and came through a wide variety of authors. These authors were real people who wrote into actual situations. Therefore, information on history, culture and the possible perspective of the writer is helpful to us in interpreting Scripture. However, we recognize that Scripture is God's eternal Word intended to be understood and applied by all people at all times.

The Bible is Consistent

Because God is the ultimate author of the Bible, we believe that the parts of Scripture work in unison and illuminate each other. Each passage must therefore be interpreted in the light of the rest of Scripture.

The Bible is Supernatural

Because the Bible is a divine communication, we must recognize that it is supernatural. As the Holy Spirit is the One who inspired it, so He is the only one who can rightly interpret it. We depend upon Him for our understanding of what it says.

The Bible is Life-Changing

The goal of Scripture is not merely intellectual understanding but also personal change. We have not properly understood any passage of Scripture until it finds application in our lives. Any attempt to interpret the Bible must not end in communication of facts, but in powerful life-change.

For Further Study:

[Understanding and Applying the Bible](#) by Robertson McQuilkin

[Inerrancy](#) ed. by Norman L. Geisler

[Know the Truth](#) by Bruce Milne

Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

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