

INTRODUCTION

In 1984, Francis Schaeffer published a work entitled, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*. Schaeffer's main thesis was that the evangelical church in the West had become seriously compromised. He explained his concern as follows:

Here is the great evangelical disaster—the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this—namely *accommodation*: the evangelical church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age. First, there has been *accommodation on Scripture*, so that many who call themselves evangelicals hold a weakened view of the Bible and *no longer affirm the truth of all the Bible teaches*—truth not only in religious matters but in the areas of science and history and morality. As part of this, many evangelicals are now accepting the higher critical methods in the study of the Bible. Remember, it was these same methods which destroyed the authority of the Bible for the Protestant church in Germany in the last century, and which have destroyed the Bible for the liberal in our own country from the beginning of this century. And second, there has been accommodation on the issues, with no clear stand being taken even on matters of life and death. (*The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 37; emphasis added).

He believed that evangelicals were at a “watershed” moment in history—likening their position to that of standing on a watershed in Switzerland where lines of snow lying next to each other melt and run off either to the north through Germany and then into the cold North Sea, or to the south through France and into the warm Mediterranean. He stated,

Evangelicals today are facing a watershed concerning the nature of biblical inspiration and authority. It is a watershed issue in very much the same sense as described in the illustration. Within evangelicalism there are a growing number who are modifying their views on the inerrancy of the Bible so that the full authority of Scripture is completely undercut. But it is happening in very subtle ways. Like the snow lying side-by-side on the ridge, the new views on biblical authority often seem at first glance not to be so very far from what evangelicals, until just recently, have always believed. But also, like the snow lying side-by-side on the ridge, the new views when followed consistently end up a thousand miles apart. (44)

The watershed, of course, was the issue of the Bible's truthfulness. He summed up the consequences of falling on the wrong side of this dividing line with these words:

Unless the Bible is without error, not only when it speaks of salvation matters, but also when it speaks of history and the cosmos, we have no foundation for answering questions concerning the existence of the universe and its form and the uniqueness of man. Nor do we have any moral absolutes, or certainty of salvation, and the next generation of Christians will have nothing on which to stand. (46)

Schaeffer wrote his warning to evangelicals in the early 1980's, when the evangelical church was at crucial moment in the battle for the Bible. The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) had been convened just a few years earlier, in 1977, to respond to the rapid erosion taking place in many evangelical seminaries related to the doctrine of Scripture. Skepticism toward the Bible's historical accuracy was spreading as seminary professors embraced higher criticism and then propagated it among young pastors-in-training, who would then unleash such views—often very subtly—on the members of their churches. In 1978, the ICBI released the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy”—a landmark declaration signed by more than 200 evangelical theologians and pastors in defense of Scripture's veracity. Francis Schaeffer was part of that effort, but he believed that the release of the Statement was only just part of the battle. He warned that the need to defend the trustworthiness of the Bible was not just a necessity in the 1980s. The defense of biblical

inerrancy, though often expressed with different terminology, has been the never-ceasing need of the hour.

Indeed, understanding, defending, and promoting the veracity of Scripture is always the need of the hour. Although we today benefit from all the resources produced by inerrantists during the battle for the Bible waged in the 1970s and 1980s (not least of which is the “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy”), the responsibility to engage remains. In fact, undermining the trustworthiness of God’s word is the oldest of threats. Mark Thompson summed this up well when he wrote in 2022,

The truthfulness of Scripture, its correspondence to reality, and its internal coherence have been under attack since the incident in the garden of Eden. “You will not surely die,” the serpent told the woman in the face of God’s warning to the contrary (Gen 3:4). Doubt about the veracity of God’s word was deliberately sown in order to cast doubt on God’s character and intention. (*The Doctrine of Scripture*, 155)

Review

It is important first to relate the doctrine of the Bible’s truthfulness to the doctrines of the Bible we have already studied:

→ The doctrine of **revelation** explains **that** God has made His knowledge known, most decisively in *the Scriptures* (see Lesson #1, “The Bible Is Revelation”).

→ The doctrine of **inspiration** explains **how** God has made this knowledge known in the Scriptures (see Lesson #2, “The Bible Is Inspired”). Inspiration is:

- 1) **plenary** in nature—it is a characteristic of *all* that is properly called “Scripture”;
- 2) **concurative** in nature—Scripture is the product of both God and man, so that it is equally divine and human; and
- 3) **verbal** in nature—it extends to the very choice of individual words and their grammatical functions.

That the inspiration of the Bible was *concurative* is what leads to the Bible’s quality of *clarity* (see Lesson #3, “The Bible Is Clear”). **That the inspiration of the Bible was *plenary* and *verbal* is what generates the Bible’s quality of *truthfulness*.** B. B. Warfield summed up well this connection between *plenary*, *verbal inspiration* and *truthfulness* when he wrote,

[Inspiration is] a doctrine which claims that by a special, supernatural, extraordinary influence of the Holy Spirit, the sacred writers have been guided in their writing in such a way, as while their humanity was not superseded, it was yet so dominated that their words became at the same time the words of God, and thus, in every case and all alike, *absolutely infallible*. (*Works*, 1:399, emphasis added)

THE NATURE OF TRUTHFULNESS

We must now consider the key terms related to the doctrine of Scripture’s truthfulness. To begin with, we must ask the question, “**What is truth?**” Simply stated, “truth” is **that which corresponds to reality as determined by God**. In other words, “truth” and “fact” are determined by God, not by the creature. Tim Challies writes, “Truth is what God thinks; it is what God does; it is what God is; it is what God has revealed of Himself in the Bible. Truth is found in its fullest form in God, for He is truth; He is the very source and origin of all truth” (*The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, 94).

But there are two specific terms that are crucial to the discussion of Scripture’s truthfulness:

What It Means

A. Infallibility

To be “infallible” means “to be incapable of failing.” Stated positively, the term means “to be trustworthy.” J. I. Packer defines it as “the quality of neither deceiving nor being deceived” (*God Has Spoken*, 111). The quality is expressed in such simple statements as:

→ **John 10:35** – “the Scripture cannot be broken.”

→ **1 Peter 1:25** – “the word of the Lord endures forever.”

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy provides this helpful definition: “*Infallible* signifies the quality of neither misleading nor being misled and so safeguards in categorical terms the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe, and reliable rule and guide in all matters.”

B. Inerrancy

To be “inerrant” means “to be without error.” Stated positively, to be “inerrant” means “to state that which is entirely true or consistent with reality.” Once again, J. I. Packer helpfully defines the term as “freedom from error of any kind, factual, moral, or spiritual” (*God Has Spoken*, 111). It is implicit in such a statement as:

→ **John 17:17** – “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy defined “inerrancy” as follows: “*inerrant* signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.”

What It Does
Not Mean

C. Qualifications

Like any important concept, the infallibility/inerrancy of Scripture must be carefully qualified so as not to be wrongly construed. The following qualifications have been provided by Paul Feinberg (“The Meaning of Inerrancy”) with a few additional ones added:

- “Inerrancy does not demand strict adherence to the rules of grammar.”
- “Inerrancy does not exclude the use of either figures of speech or literary genres.”
- “Inerrancy does not demand historical or semantic precision.”
- “Inerrancy does not demand the technical or observational language of modern science.”
- “Inerrancy does not require verbal exactness in the citation of the OT by the NT.”
- “Inerrancy does not guarantee the exhaustive comprehensiveness of any single [historical] account or of combined accounts where those are involved.”
- “Inerrancy does not demand the infallibility or inerrancy of the non-inspired sources used by biblical writers.”
- Inerrancy does not automatically extend to the copies made of the original, inspired manuscripts.
- Inerrancy does not automatically extend to any interpretation of the biblical text.

“When all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences.” —P. Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” 294

THE
TESTIMONY TO
TRUTHFULNESS

The evidence for the truthfulness of Scripture is found in three primary areas:

A. It is a necessary consequence of God’s character. An infallible, inerrant Bible is the necessary consequence of a God who “cannot lie,” but is both *omniscient* (not ignorant) and *righteous* (not deceitful):

→ Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18

In fact, the agent of inspiration—the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:10–13; 2 Pet 1:21)—is specifically called “the Spirit of *truth*”:

→ John 15:26; 16:13

B. It is explicitly stated in Scripture’s self-descriptions. Scripture itself says that the words of God are infallible and inerrant:

→ 2 Samuel 7:28; Psalm 12:6; 18:30; 19:7–9; 119:140, 142, 151, 160; Proverbs 30:5–6; John 17:7

C. It is the authoritative assessment of Christ. Most of the criticism of the Bible's trustworthiness is leveled against the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. The One who rises to respond to such criticism is none other than Jesus Christ. As John Wenham states, "[Jesus] consistently treats the historical narratives as straightforward records of fact" (*Christ and the Bible*, 17). This assessment is seen in Christ's treatment of the three categories of Old Testament history:

1. Primeval (the earliest) History

- The Creation of Man (Matt 19:4–6 → Gen 1–2)
- Noah and the Flood (Matt 24:37–39 → Gen 6–9)

2. Patriarchal History

- Abraham (John 8:56); Isaac and Jacob (Matt 8:11; Luke 13:28)
- Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt 10:15; 11:23–24; Luke 10:12)
- Lot and His Wife (Luke 17:28–32)

3. Israelite History

- Moses (Matt 8:4; 19:8; Mark 1:44; 7:10; 10:5; 12:26; Luke 5:14; 30:37; John 5:46; 7:19, 22)
- Manna and the Wilderness Wanderings (John 6:49 → Num 11)
- The Wilderness Serpent (John 3:14 → Num 21:6–9)
- David and the Showbread (Mark 2:25–26 → Lev 24:9; 1 Sam 21:6).
- Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (Matt 6:18–29; 12:42 → 1 Kings 10)
- Elijah and Elisha (Luke 4:25–27)
- Jonah (Matt 12:39–41 → Jonah 1:7)
- Abel to Zechariah (Luke 11:49–51 → Gen 4:8 through 2 Chron 24:20–21)

IMPLICATIONS
OF
TRUTHFULNESS

Truth always brings practical implications, and the doctrine of biblical infallibility/inerrancy certainly does as well:

- A. The Bible provides the trustworthy justification for our *belief*.**
- B. The Bible exercises an unassailable authority over our *conscience*.**
- C. The Bible provides the necessary mandate for our *proclamation*.**
- D. The Bible is the powerful motivation for our *praise*.**

DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS

Discuss these questions in your small group:

1. In your own words, define the terms "infallibility" and "inerrancy." In your definition, include some of the qualifications of what these terms do *not* mean.
2. Refer to the quotations by Francis Schaeffer on the first page. Why must the Bible be without error not only when it speaks of salvation, but when it also speaks "of history and the cosmos"?
3. Why is Jesus' affirmation of the Old Testament's truthfulness so important?
4. Explain the relationship between inerrancy and authority. Why is it that those seeking to limit the Bible's authority almost always try to undermine its inerrancy?
5. How does an inerrant Bible serve to increase our adoration for God?

FURTHER
STUDY

For further study this week:

1. Memorize Psalm 119:151 and John 17:17.
2. Watch the sermon by R. C. Sproul, "Inspiration, Infallibility, and Inerrancy: Hath God Said?" available at this link: [Inspiration, Infallibility, and Inerrancy: Hath God Said? with R.C. Sproul \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).
3. Read more about "inerrancy" in MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, pp. 107–113, or in John MacArthur, *Essential Christian Doctrine*, pp. 73–77.
4. Read the "Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy," available at this link: [ICBI_1.pdf \(dts.edu\)](https://www.dts.edu/ICBI_1.pdf).

Audio, video, and handouts for this session: www.gracechurch.org/motw

Next meeting: October 16, Q&A at 7pm (refreshments and fellowship on the patio at 6pm)