

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation and Scripture, Session 18, Scripture, Results of Inspiration, Distinction between Inerrancy and Infallibility

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Revelation and Holy Scripture. This is session 18, Scripture, Results of Inspiration, Distinction between Inerrancy and Infallibility.

We're studying the doctrine of Scripture as special revelation, and our first point as far as the results of inspiration is Scripture is God's Word.

We said that we affirm that Scripture is God's Word for four reasons. It is routinely called that or the sacred writings in the Bible itself. Secondly, was God directed to writers so that the scriptures were inspired by him? Thirdly, Scripture bears characteristics of God and performs key functions for God. Hence, it's God's Word.

Fourth, Jesus and the apostles attribute to God many Old Testament statements not originally attributed to him. In other words, when the scripture speaks, God speaks or the Holy Spirit speaks. We believe that Scripture is God's Word and that the Bible is simultaneously a human book.

God gives us scripture through human authors in human language to human beings so that people would come to know and love him. It is one book composed of 66 books, grounded in history and written over 1,600 years on three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe. It's written by 40 authors from all walks of life with various gifts, styles, and personalities.

Written in human languages, Hebrew, Greek, and a little Aramaic, in ordinary speech with loose quotations and approximations, Scripture uses various literary genres as Carson lists, quote, poetry and prose, narrative and discourse, oracle and lament, parable and fable, history and theology, genealogy and apocalyptic, proverb and psalm, gospel and letter, law and wisdom, literature, missive, and law and wisdom literature, excuse me, missive and sermon, couplet and epic. The Bible is made up of all of these and more. Covenantal patterns emerge with some likeness to Hittite treaties.

Tables of household duties are found with startling resemblances to codes of conduct in the Hellenistic world. These realities, a byproduct of the humanness of the Bible, necessarily affect how we approach the Bible to interpret it correctly. The Bible addresses a wide range of subjects, such as history, psychology, child rearing,

poetry, music, moral law, political law, military strategy, philosophy, science, and primarily salvation.

Over time, it progressively tells the story of God and his relationship with people. It bears human witness to God through stories of love and joy, pain and persecution, fear and hope. Scripture is collected from its beginning to the first century AD, and the church progressively recognizes it.

It is written for us to know God, love him, love others, and live according to his purposes. Despite its diversity in authors, times, genres, and topics, it has an amazing unity of message. This is because Scripture is the very Word of God in human words.

That was our first ramification or result of the Bible being inspired by God. A second one is that Scripture is authoritative. Here is a voice from the global church, from Conrad Mubewe of Zambia.

He wrote the Bible is God's Word to humankind, revealing heaven's great plan of salvation. Scripture, therefore, comes to us from above, calling for reverence. As we read then, we are to sit under the Word of God, not stand over it.

We must receive with meekness the implanted Word, James 1:21, compared John 12:48. When the commands of God contradict our own desires, we must submit to what God has revealed to us. This requires a deliberate humility to receive the Bible in its entirety, whatever it says.

Such is the reverence called for by the sacred nature of Scripture. This is Conrad Mubewe, *How to Read and Understand the Bible*, in this book, the ESV Global Study Bible. Because God gives Scripture, it possesses His authority.

By authority, we mean the right to teach truth and command obedience, and hence biblical authority means the right to teach God's truth and command obedience. Scripture has supreme authority because it is the Word of God, written to us and for us. In Psalm 19, quoted a number of times in these lectures, the psalmist likens the Word to God's instruction, His witness, His precepts, His command, His fear, and His ordinances.

It carries His authority. In 2 Timothy 3, treated previously, Paul teaches that God gives Scripture for four purposes, as we have seen, teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness, 2 Timothy 3:16. The Bible is given to teach us what to believe, what not to believe, what not to do, and what to do. It is authoritative over our beliefs and behavior, which is also why Paul urges Timothy to preach the Word, 2 Timothy 4:1-5. In 2 Peter 1, also treated previously, Peter teaches concerning Scripture and warns the church accordingly, quote, you will do well to pay attention to the prophetic Word, the Word of God, verse 19.

God inspires Scripture, so naturally, we should listen to it and follow its teachings. Christ and the apostles regard Scripture as our authority for theology and ethics. The degree to which we refuse to submit to biblical authority is the degree to which we create our own beliefs and rules for living.

The degree to which we refuse to submit to biblical authority is the degree to which we create our own religion. And the degree to which we do not study Scripture is the degree to which we may inadvertently follow our culture's theologies and ethics. That Scripture bears God's authority also means we do not get to pick and choose what we like or do not like in it.

The Word of God is over us. We respect it, believe it, and obey it, even if we initially do not prefer it. We remain humble listeners, not the words critics, editors, or redactors.

If we pick and choose what we want to believe from Scripture, we assert ourselves as the chief authorities rather than God. Scripture is inerrant. Scripture is inspired by God and is His Word.

As we have seen, God inspires the biblical writers. As Peter explains, no prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation because no prophecy ever came by the will of man. Instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, 2 Peter 1:20 and 21.

And God inspires the biblical writings, 2 Timothy 3:16. All Scripture is inspired of God. He uses the experiences, personalities, and thoughts of the prophets and apostles, yet He directs when they speak and write.

Thus, inspiration is dynamic. God actively works through the active human authors. This inspiration is also verbal, referring to the actual writings, 2 Timothy 3, 16, and words, not merely the ideas that the prophets spoke, 2 Peter 1:20 and 21.

And it is plenary, full, as God inspires all Scripture, not merely its parts, Psalm 119 and 160. The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever. The result is that Scripture is inerrant, truthful in all that it affirms.

Carson summarizes. Inspiration is, quote, the supernatural work of God's Holy Spirit upon the human authors of Scripture, such that what they wrote was precisely what God intended them to write in order to communicate His truth. Carson adds that the definition speaks both of God's action by His Spirit in the human author and of the nature of the resulting text, close quote.

Thus, inspiration includes God's verbal revelation and historical human witness, quotes, words of human beings and words of God, the truth that God chose to communicate, and the particular forms of individual human authors. Again, Carson, inspired by God, Scripture is truthful, authoritative over our beliefs and lives, and one way God acts in the world to accomplish His mission, 2 Timothy 3:15 through 4:5, so that people glorify God through faith in Jesus, the Lord, and Savior, John 20:28 to 31, 1 John 5:12 and 13. Regarding Scripture as fully truthful brings confidence but also demands clarification.

Inerrancy is ascribed to the autographs, the original text, not the copies of the Bible. We respect historical process and value textual criticism because textual variants are undergirded by an inerrant original text. Inerrancy is rooted in the belief that the Bible is simultaneously a human book and the Word of God.

Therefore, we prize the human aspects of the Bible. These aspects do not diminish the Bible's truthfulness but show that God uses real people in historical contexts to write to real people with real needs. The biblical authors were in ordinary form and style, and as such, there are certain things not required for inerrancy.

Here, I want to share the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy with us. Here we go. There, first of all, is a short statement, and then a list of affirmations and denials.

The short statement, God, who is himself truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal himself to lost humankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to himself. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by the Holy 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, obeys as God's command in all that it requires, and embraced as God's pledge in all that it promises. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine author, authenticates it to us through his inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less than what it states about God's acts in creation, about 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.

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. Then we have the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy and Articles of Affirmation and Denial. This was the result of the International Congress of Biblical Inerrancy meeting in the, I'm going to say 1980s to produce an agreement, a written agreement among evangelicals of many stripes and backgrounds and churches

concerning the inerrancy of the Bible, then the interpretation of the Bible, and finally the application of the Bible.

They had great unity on the first task, defining inerrancy. They had considerable unity on the second one, interpretation. They really struggled with interpretation.

There are books published by Zondervan that are the products of this Congress on Biblical Inerrancy. The Chicago Statement was an early production because it was part of the first task of defining, affirming, and clarifying inerrancy. The Articles of Affirmation and Denial clarify as you will see.

In article One, we affirm that the holy scriptures are to be received as the authoritative word of God. We deny that the scriptures receive their authority from the church, tradition, or any other human source. Article two, we affirm that the scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience and that the authority of the church is subordinate to that of scripture.

We deny that church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible. It doesn't mean we disregard them or treat them as no authorities at all, but so a scriptura means we consistently and deliberately elevate the Bible even over ecumenical councils in their decisions. Article three, we affirm the written word in its entirety is revelation given by God.

That's plenary inspiration. We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation or only becomes revelation in encounters or depends on the response of men for its validity. Some of that denial, at least, is directed toward neo-orthodoxy.

Article four, we affirm that God, who made humankind in his image, has used language as a means of revelation. Part of the image of God means we are language users and language receivers. We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation.

We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration. Article five, we affirm that God's revelation in the scriptures, holy scriptures was progressive. We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it.

We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings. Those kinds of statements are meaningful when you realize that the committee consisted of believers of many different stripes: Baptist, Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Charismatic, and Pentecostals. And so, what they're doing is saying that the Bible sits in judgment on all, even those who believe in contemporary spiritual gifts that others would not accept as being valid for today.

They're all subordinate to scripture, a very wise move. Article six affirms that the whole of scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration. We deny that the inspiration of scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts or of some parts, but not the whole.

Article seven affirms that inspiration was the work in which God, by his spirit through human writers, gave us his word. The origin of scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.

The Bible's teachings are much more concerned with the product, the result of inspiration. God's word in human's words, rather than the means or mode of God's inspiring it, how he actually did it. We deny, still article seven, that inspiration can be reduced to human insight or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

Denying some of those intuition and illumination theories of inspiration, which we covered earlier. Article eight, we affirm God in his work of inspiration, utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom he had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that he chose, overrode their personalities.

Article nine, we affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, granted true and trustworthy utterances on all matters of which the biblical authors were moved to speak and write. And that includes when it gives the words of Satan or evil men, and it truthfully records their lies. Article 10, we deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, still article nine, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's word.

10, we affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of scripture, which, in the providence of God, can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of scripture are the word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of autographs.

We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant. We affirm that scripture, article 11, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible so that far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses. We deny that it's possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions.

Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished but not separated. Its words are true: inerrancy. Its words and teachings are infallible.

They are reliable. The words communicate the truths and teachings that God desired. Article 12, we affirm that scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of scripture on creation and the flood. I might add evangelical Christians certainly take different views as far as the age of the earth and the scope of the flood, and my own understanding would be the Bible does not limit us in those areas and that we should respect those who disagree with us and listen to the arguments that they set forth.

Good people disagree as to the age of the earth, and good people hold to a local flood as well as a universal flood. That same universal language is used by Paul; for example, he took the gospel to the ends of the earth. Well, it means the ends of the earth that he understood that the earth had at the time, and likewise, the language in Genesis 6 through 9 with the flood speaks of the Mediterranean world that Moses understood to exist at that time.

Article 13, we affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of scripture. We deny that it's proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by biblical phenomena that's such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational description of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material and parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

You say these are significant qualifications. They are, and they are an attempt to listen to the Bible itself. As later material, I will read from the big book, the big book on the authority of the Bible, which has become the standard.

The frequently asked questions at the end address that very issue. Does not inerrancy die the death of a thousand qualifications? We'll revisit that one. Article 14, we affirm the unity and internal consistency of scripture.

We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible. Article 15, we affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration. We deny that Jesus teaching about scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitations of his humanity.

Some say, oh, Jesus knew better, but he just accommodated himself to the erroneous views of his age. Jesus didn't accommodate himself to any kind of errors. He blasted the Pharisees for their appeals to the traditions of the elders.

No, and the limitations of his humanity are such that he's the God-man, and he always speaks the truth using his divine powers as the Father wills. Article 16, we affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the church's faith throughout its history. We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by scholastic Protestantism or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

17, we affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written word. We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against scripture. Article 18, we affirm that the text of scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that scripture is to interpret scripture.

We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship. And finally, article 19, the final one, we affirm that a confession of faith of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to an increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the church. I appreciate the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy so much.

It is not perfect. It is more than a step in the right direction. It is many steps in the right direction.

That was a little excursus dealing with this matter. The biblical writers write in ordinary form and style. And as such, there are certain things not required for inerrancy.

I worked with those qualifications in the affirmations and denials of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. Now, more still under the authority of scripture. Excuse me, the inerrancy of scripture.

Inerrancy informs exegesis. Since the word of God comes to us in the language of human authors, we must pay attention to the words, sentences, context, genres, arguments, and themes of any passage. The Bible's meaning is related to its author's intention.

Intentions. Inerrancy relates to hermeneutics, the approach to interpretation. A commitment to inerrancy involves not only appreciating the Bible's diversity, but also recognizing its unity and doctrinal consistency.

This also leads us to the hermeneutical analogy of faith, *analogia fidei*, or *regula fidei*, the rule, the analogy of faith, the rule of faith, whereby we compare scripture with scripture and interpret it in harmony with its overall message. The analogy of scripture says the rule of scripture says the Bible does not contradict itself. Its message is one.

So, it is legitimate to compare scripture with scripture. It is its own best interpreter. It certainly is not its own, its only interpreter.

I should have said a word or two about canon because it is very important, and I do not do justice to it in these lectures. I was helped by my friend David G. Dunbar's solid essay, extensive essay, in some ways the best thing we have, the biblical canon in the book, one of the products of the Chicago, one of the products of the International Congress on Biblical Inerrancy, or is it the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy? One of those. The biblical canon in hermeneutics, authority, and canon.

Dunbar suggests that the church recognized the canon, the authoritative books of the Bible, rather than established the canon, as the church father Irenaeus had already taught. That the canon is not only apostolic but fundamentally Christological or redemptive-historical. That the words and deeds of Jesus interpreted to the community of apostles formed the standard for the early church.

The church regarded apostolicity as the qualifying factor for canonical recognition, not strictly authorship by an apostle, but content and chronology. And that we acknowledge God's providential control of history during this process. Scripture is not only authoritative and inerrant but also infallible.

Until the mid-19th century, the term infallible was used synonymously with inerrant. Inerrant meant incapable of error or truthful. Inerrant meant without error or truthful.

Infallible meant incapable of error or reliable, truthful. In light of recent developments in the study of language, Kevin Van Hooser proposes a broader definition. Inerrancy is a subset of infallibility.

Let me say first of all, Van Hooser affirms the full inerrancy of the Bible. But he claims infallibility is a bigger set of which inerrancy is a subset. Inerrancy, all the Bible is inerrant in all its types of literature.

But if we say the proverb is inerrant or the parable is inerrant, are we saying enough? The answer is no. The main purpose of the parable is not to teach truth but to impart wisdom for living and the correct folly. And the parable creates a whole tableau by which the readers are drawn in and forced and confronted with a decision.

Are parables inerrant? Yes. Parables in every other genre in the Bible is inerrant insofar as inerrancy applies. That is, insofar as it's a matter of truth or error.

But the Bible is bigger than a matter of truth and error is Van Hooser's point. Infallibility means, according to him, that God's word by means of its different genres accomplishes many things unfailingly. Scripture aims at more than communicating truth.

It does aim at communicating truth, and it is inerrant. Kevin Van Hooser acknowledges no errant scripture. But scripture is bigger and better than the category of an inerrancy can describe.

Whatever truth scripture communicates in any genre, it's always inerrant, but it's also other things. It has other purposes. It does each of these inerrantly, but it also gives wisdom.

It warns. An inerrant warning? Sure, there's no error in that warning. But don't you understand? A warning is more than being truthful.

It's a warning. This has great potential fruitfulness for ministry, for understanding the Bible, for hermeneutics, and also for applying the Bible. My goodness, the Bible encourages.

It offers hope. Does it do so inerrantly? Absolutely. But to say that does not exhaust the purpose of those hope-inspiring passages.

It energizes and on and on. God uses many types of biblical literature, all the different types, to achieve his many purposes. For example, in Isaiah 55, 10 and 11,

For as the rain and snow come down from heaven, the Lord says, and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word that be that goes out from my mouth. It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. Does that include teaching truth? Yes.

But here's Kevin Hoosier's point. It includes more than merely teaching truth. Romans 1 16.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Is that inerrant? Absolutely.

But it has a more rhetorical purpose than merely teaching truth rather than error. It affirms that God has so connected his power to this message that this inerrant word contains incredible meaning. Romans 10:17.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ. Hebrews 4:12 and 13. Unlike the Jews who died in the wilderness and did not get to the promised land, the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews are to believe and obey God.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. I'll say it once again.

Then Hoosier's proposal does not undermine inerrancy in any way. It is just saying inerrancy deals with the spectrum of truth and error. And the Bible is true, as we said earlier.

And that's a Chicago statement that even implied it truthfully records the lies of Satan. But the diverse literary forms of the Bible, while all of them are inerrant insofar as that description applies, have other purposes too. Van Hoosier suggests we use infallibility to speak of those elocutionary forces that God unleashes in the giving of his inerrant and holy word.

In our next lecture, let us take up the matter of the sufficiency of Holy Scripture.

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