

Doctrines of the Faith Sermon Series

Noel R. Vincent, Pastor
Compass Community Church
Winter 2008-2009

Series 1: The Word of God

Sermon 2: The Inerrancy and Authority of Scripture (12/14/2008)

Key Texts - 2Ti 3:16-17, 2 Pet 1:20-21

- **INTRODUCTION:** Last week, we began a new sermon series on the Doctrines of the Christian Faith. As I said then, I owe much to my professors at seminary, especially Dr. Ben Phillips, who helped me prepare the outline for this series.
- If we are to be a biblically literate church that understands our mission and is useful to God in the advancement of His Kingdom, then we need to spend some time learning about the core doctrines of our faith: The Doctrines of God, His Essence, His Word, His Works, His Salvation, His Church, His Plan.
- The first message in the series was: The Inspiration of Scripture. This week, we will build on that message with the subjects of The Inerrancy and Authority of Scripture.
- Inerrancy, what does it mean? The doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture simply means that the Bible is without error in the original autographs. That is to say that the original texts which were written by the biblical authors were without error.
- The doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture does not include in its definition the claim that all modern translations are without error. Human translations without doubt contain some error on the basis that the original autographs are inspired, but that translations are not inspired. To restate the point differently, the Bible is 66 books written by 40 authors in 3 languages over 15 centuries on 3 continents. Those original writings do not contain any errors. Through the centuries, as humans have sought to make copies of the original autographs or translate them into languages other than the languages in which they were written, some error has crept in.
- Now, this begs the question, if only the originals were inerrant, and we don't have the originals, isn't the doctrine of inerrancy meaningless? No. Textual criticism, which is the scientific approach to certifying ancient manuscripts, is concerned with the identification and removal of transcription errors in the texts of the biblical manuscripts. Ancient scribes often made errors or alterations when copying manuscripts by hand. They may have misspellings, repeated words or lines, transposed words or letters, etc. But a comparison of the copies we have today renders for us a **HIGHLY** accurate text. By comparing all the ancient manuscripts available, it is possible to determine where the variant errors are. If nearly all of the 5,000 manuscripts render a verse the same way, except for 20-30 manuscripts which drop a word or misspell a word or rearrange a phrase, it becomes clear that the 20-30 are the variant errors, and the remaining nearly 5,000 copies are accurate. If a later manuscript copy includes words or phrases that the older and more reliable manuscript copies do not contain, then the added words of the later manuscript copy are considered accretions (make larger through growth).

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- The quantity of New Testament manuscripts is unparalleled in ancient literature. There are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts, about 8,000 Latin manuscripts, and another 1,000 manuscripts in other languages (Syriac, Coptic, etc.). In addition to this extraordinary number, there are tens of thousands of citations of New Testament passages by the early church fathers. In contrast, the typical number of existing manuscript copies for any of the works of the Greek and Latin authors, such as Plato, Aristotle, and Caesar ranges from 1 to 20.
- Then we have the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were found in 1947. These scrolls were ancient manuscripts of the OT text. 38 of the OT's 39 books were included in the scrolls (Esther was the only one not in the collection). These manuscripts predated the latest copies in existence at the time by around 10 centuries. The conclusion of decades of comparative study since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls is that the scrolls validated the accuracy of the manuscript copies we already had in existence at the time of the discovery of the scrolls. This was the most significant archaeological find of the 20th century.
- So, what about errors in translations? How do we know that our NASB, NIV or KJV are accurate? A brief comparison of the major scholarly translations of the Bible into the English language shows that they all say the same thing. Translation variations do not vary as broadly as changing events or doctrines. Translation variations usually involve such variations as the order of words in a verse, or the use of different words which convey the same meaning. For example:
 - NASB Heb 4:12 For the word of God is **living and active** and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and *able to judge* the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
 - NIV Heb 4:12 For the word of God is **living and active**. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it *judges* the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.
 - KJV Heb 4:12 For the word of God is **quick, and powerful**, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is a discernor* of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
- Ultimately, the issue is - Can we get at a reliable copy of the original manuscripts and are modern English translations accurate? The answers are yes and yes. The processes of textual criticism and comparative studies confirm for us a reliable and accurate facsimile of the original autographs.
- The "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" was produced at an international Summit Conference of evangelical leaders, held at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Chicago in the fall of 1978. This congress was sponsored by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. The Chicago Statement was signed by nearly 300 noted evangelical scholars, including James Boice, Norman L. Geisler, J. I. Packer, and R. C. Sproul, to name a few.

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Chicago Statement (Short)

- God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind 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 His 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, obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.
- The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by 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 in 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.
- Now, let us consider the biblical evidence for inerrancy. First, as we concluded last week, the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture follows logically from the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. Last week, we established that God's Word is inspired. The theological term for the evangelical view of the inspiration of Scripture is "Verbal Plenary Inspiration" (VPI). Verbal - the actual words. Plenary all of it. Inspiration - from the Greek word "theo-pneustos," meaning literally God-breathed.
- Scripture originates with God. Let's look again at two biblical texts:
 - 2Ti 3:16 - 17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
 - 2Pe 1:20-21 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.
- The inerrancy of God's Word is inferred from its inspiration. If God's Word is inspired by Him (that is, literally God-breathed), then it is also without error. Truthfulness is an attribute of God. God

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speaks truthfully; He does not lie. The Word of God, then, is true. Scripture is the Word of God. Scripture then is true. Heb 6:18 "...it is impossible for God to lie..."

- Inerrancy is declared through Doctrine of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology). 1Co 2:13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.
- The Holy Spirit is the **Spirit of TRUTH**. He would: a). show the Apostles what the truth is; b). explain it to them; and c). cause them to remember it completely and accurately. John 14:26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Joh 16:13 "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.
- When the Apostle wrote the gospels and the epistles of the NT, they were inspired, guided, taught and caused to remember the truth as they wrote it. Thus, the Scripture is truth.
- In addition to the statements Jesus made in John 14 and 16, He made other statements about the inerrancy of God's Word.
 - John 10:35 "...the Scripture cannot be broken"
 - Matt 5:17-18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished."
 - John 17:17 "...Your word is truth"
- Some people claim that there are errors in the Bible. I encourage them to show me one. There are no errors.
- Some people claim that the Bible has unanswered questions. But, that certain questions are presently unanswered does not mean they are ultimately unanswerable.
- Some people claim that the doctrine of inerrancy is a new doctrine recently invented by Protestant Scholasticism. This is factually incorrect.
 - Irenaeus – an early church father (c.130-c.200): "We must believe God, who has given us the right understanding, since the Holy Scriptures are perfect, because they are spoken by the Word of God and the Spirit of God." (Adversus Haereses 2,47)
 - Jerome – who made the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible (c.342-420): "The apostles are one thing, other writers another: the former always tell the truth, the latter - as being mere men - sometimes err." (cited in Lewis, Rome, 49).

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- Augustine – the greatest theologian of the early church fathers (354-430 AD): “For I confess to your charity that I have learned to defer this respect and honor to those Scriptural books only which are now called canonical, that I believe most firmly, that no one of those authors has erred in any respect in writing” (Epistolae 82,1,3). “As to all other writings... I do not accept their teaching as true on the mere ground of the opinion held by them; but the canonical writings are free from error.” “The most calamitous consequences will follow the belief that there is any false thing found in the holy books - that is, that the men through whom the Scripture was given to us would put anything false in these books. If even one time, you admit a false statement in this high temple of authority, not one sentence would be left in these books.”
- Thomas Aquinas – the greatest Catholic theologian of the middle ages (1224-74): “The Sacred Scriptures, must manifest the truth correctly, without error of any kind” (Summa Theological, I.1.10, ad.1). “Nothing false can be behind the literal meaning of Scripture” (Ibid., I.1.10. ad.3). “It is heretical to say that any falsehood whatsoever is contained either in the gospels or in any canonical Scripture.” (In Job. 13, lect.1)
- Martin Luther the great Protestant reformer (1483-1546) “I have learned to ascribe this honor of infallibility only to those books which are accepted as canonical. I am profoundly convinced that none of these writers has erred.” (Werke, ed. J. Knaake, Weimar, 2:618) Repeatedly, Luther insisted that “Scripture does not lie.” (Luther’s Works, eds. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann, Concordia, 1953-60, 2:223; cf. 23:236; 27:258; 32:11, etc.) “Consequently, we must remain content with them and cling to them as the perfectly clear, certain, sure words of God, which can never deceive us or allow us to err.” (Ibid., 47:308)
- John Calvin: The Bible is the “pure word of God” and “the infallible rule of His holy truth” (Institutes, I, 149). One of his original accusations against Servetus (who denied Christ’s deity and the Trinity) was his ascribing a geographical error to the Bible; Servetus escaped the Catholic inquisition but was finally imprisoned by Calvin. Refusing to recant, he was burned as a heretic.
- John Wesley – founder of the Methodist church (1703-91): Against the rationalism of his day: “If there be one error in Scripture, there might as well be a thousand. If there was any error in this book, it did not come from the God of truth.”
- Vatican I (1869-70): “It is to be ascribed to this divine revelation, that such truths among other things divine as of themselves are not beyond human reason, can, even in the present condition of mankind, be known by everyone with facility, with firm assurance, and with no admixture of error.” (Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council, 137)
- What is at stake in the doctrine of inerrancy? Biblical authority. If the Bible is inspired, then it is without error. If it is without error, then it is true. If it is true, then it is authoritative. Your view of

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the authority of the Bible is the single most important factor in determining your world-view and in guiding your daily Christian life.

- If the authority of God's Word is in question, then God's character is in question.
- If the authority of God's Word is in question, then all prophecy and revelation is in question.
- If the authority of God's Word is in question, then the foundation of Christianity is in question.
- If the authority of God's Word is in question, then our submission to God is in question.
- We must embrace Gods Word as inspired, without error, and fully authoritative for faith and practice or we will suffer the consequences of spiritual indifference and complacency, and most of all, the judgment of God.
- Quote from Unknown Author:

This Book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions immutable. This Book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions immutable.

Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter.

Christ is its subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently and prayerfully. It is given to you in life, will be open in the judgment, and be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, rewards the greatest labor, and condemns all who trifle with its holy precepts.

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Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy with Exposition

Background

The "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" was produced at an international Summit Conference of evangelical leaders, held at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Chicago in the fall of 1978. This congress was sponsored by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. The Chicago Statement was signed by nearly 300 noted evangelical scholars, including James Boice, Norman L. Geisler, John Gerstner, Carl F. H. Henry, Kenneth Kantzer, Harold Lindell, John Warwick Montgomery, Roger Nicole, J. I. Packer, Robert Preus, Earl Radmacher, cis Schaeffer, R. C. Sproul, and John Wenham. The ICBI disbanded 1988 after producing three major statements: one on biblical inerrancy in 1978, one on biblical hermeneutics in 1982, and one on biblical application in 1986. The following text, containing the "Preface" by the ICBI draft committee, plus the "Short Statement," "Articles of Affirmation and Denial," and an accompanying ""Exposition," was published in toto by Carl F. H. Henry in *God, Revelation And Authority*, vol. 4 (Waco, Tx.: Word Books, 1979), on pp. 211-219. The nineteen Articles of Affirmation and Denial, with a brief introduction, also appear in *A General Introduction to the Bible*, by Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix (Chicago: Moody Press, rev. 1986), at pp. 181-185. An official commentary on these articles was written by R. C. Sproul in *Explaining Inerrancy: A Commentary* (Oakland, Calif.: ICBI, 1980), and Norman Geisler edited the major addresses from the 1978 conference, in *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980). Clarification of some of the language used in this Statement may be found in the 1982 Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics <<http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago2.html>>

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

Preface

The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority. The following Statement affirms this inerrancy of Scripture afresh, making clear our understanding of it and warning against its denial. We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word which marks true Christian faith. We see it as our timely duty to make this affirmation in the face of current lapses from the truth of inerrancy among our fellow Christians and misunderstandings of this doctrine in the world at large. This Statement consists of three parts: a Summary Statement, Articles of Affirmation and Denial, and an accompanying Exposition. It has been prepared in the course of a three-day consultation in Chicago. Those who have signed the Summary Statement and the Articles wish to affirm their own conviction as to the inerrancy of Scripture and to encourage and challenge one another and all Christians to growing appreciation and understanding of this doctrine. We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do

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not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight. Yet we rejoice in the deepening of our own convictions through our discussions together, and we pray that the Statement we have signed may be used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the Church in its faith, life, and mission. We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word. We invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak. We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help which enables us to strengthen this testimony to God's Word we shall be grateful. - The Draft Committee

A Short Statement

God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind 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 His 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: obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.

The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by 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 in 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.

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Articles of Affirmation and Denial

Article I.

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 II.

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.

Article III.

WE AFFIRM that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.

WE DENY that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

Article IV.

WE AFFIRM that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

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 V.

WE AFFIRM that God's revelation within the 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.

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Article VI.

WE AFFIRM 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 VII.

WE AFFIRM 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.

WE DENY that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

Article VIII.

WE AFFIRM that 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 IX.

WE AFFIRM that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.

WE DENY that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

Article X.

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 the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

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Article XI.

WE AFFIRM that Scripture, 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 is 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.

Article XII.

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.

Article XIII.

WE AFFIRM the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

WE DENY that it is 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 such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

Article XIV.

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 XV.

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 limitation of His humanity.

Article XVI.

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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.

Article XVII.

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 XVIII.

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.

Article XIX.

WE AFFIRM that a confession 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 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.

Exposition

Our understanding of the doctrine of inerrancy must be set in the context of the broader teachings of the Scripture concerning itself. This exposition gives an account of the outline of doctrine from which our summary statement and articles are drawn.

Creation, Revelation and Inspiration

The Triune God, who formed all things by his creative utterances and governs all things by His Word of decree, made mankind in His own image for a life of communion with Himself, on the model of the eternal fellowship of loving communication within the Godhead. As God's image-bearer, man was to hear God's Word addressed to him and to respond in the joy of adoring obedience. Over and above

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God's self-disclosure in the created order and the sequence of events within it, human beings from Adam on have received verbal messages from Him, either directly, as stated in Scripture, or indirectly in the form of part or all of Scripture itself. When Adam fell, the Creator did not abandon mankind to final judgment but promised salvation and began to reveal Himself as Redeemer in a sequence of historical events centering on Abraham's family and culminating in the life, death, resurrection, present heavenly ministry, and promised return of Jesus Christ. Within this frame God has from time to time spoken specific words of judgment and mercy, promise and command, to sinful human beings so drawing them into a covenant relation of mutual commitment between Him and them in which He blesses them with gifts of grace and they bless Him in responsive adoration. Moses, whom God used as mediator to carry His words to His people at the time of the Exodus, stands at the head of a long line of prophets in whose mouths and writings God put His words for delivery to Israel. God's purpose in this succession of messages was to maintain His covenant by causing His people to know His Name-that is, His nature-and His will both of precept and purpose in the present and for the future. This line of prophetic spokesmen from God came to completion in Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Word, who was Himself a prophet-more than a prophet, but not less-and in the apostles and prophets of the first Christian generation. When God's final and climactic message, His word to the world concerning Jesus Christ, had been spoken and elucidated by those in the apostolic circle, the sequence of revealed messages ceased. Henceforth the Church was to live and know God by what He had already said, and said for all time. At Sinai God wrote the terms of His covenant on tables of stone, as His enduring witness and for lasting accessibility, and throughout the period of prophetic and apostolic revelation He prompted men to write the messages given to and through them, along with celebratory records of His dealings with His people, plus moral reflections on covenant life and forms of praise and prayer for covenant mercy. The theological reality of inspiration in the producing of Biblical documents corresponds to that of spoken prophecies: although the human writers' personalities were expressed in what they wrote, the words were divinely constituted. Thus, what Scripture says, God says; its authority is His authority, for He is its ultimate Author, having given it through the minds and words of chosen and prepared men who in freedom and faithfulness "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:21). Holy Scripture must be acknowledged as the Word of God by virtue of its divine origin.

Authority: Christ and the Bible

Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is the Word made flesh, our Prophet, Priest, and King, is the ultimate Mediator of God's communication to man, as He is of all God's gifts of grace. The revelation He gave was more than verbal; He revealed the Father by His presence and His deeds as well. Yet His words were crucially important; for He was God, He spoke from the Father, and His words will judge all men at the last day. As the prophesied Messiah, Jesus Christ is the central theme of Scripture. The Old Testament looked ahead to Him; the New Testament looks back to His first coming and on to His second. Canonical Scripture is the divinely inspired and therefore normative witness to Christ. No hermeneutic, therefore, of which the historical Christ is not the focal point is acceptable. Holy Scripture must be treated as what it essentially is-the witness of the Father to the Incarnate Son. It appears that the Old Testament canon had been fixed by the time of Jesus. The New Testament canon is likewise now closed inasmuch as no new apostolic witness to the historical Christ can now be borne. No new revelation (as distinct from Spirit-given understanding of existing revelation) will be given until Christ comes again. The canon was

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created in principle by divine inspiration. The Church's part was to discern the canon which God had created, not to devise one of its own. The word canon, signifying a rule or standard, is a pointer to authority, which means the right to rule and control. Authority in Christianity belongs to God in His revelation, which means, on the one hand, Jesus Christ, the living Word, and, on the other hand, Holy Scripture, the written Word. But the authority of Christ and that of Scripture are one. As our Prophet, Christ testified that Scripture cannot be broken. As our Priest and King, He devoted His earthly life to fulfilling the law and the prophets, even dying in obedience to the words of Messianic prophecy. Thus, as He saw Scripture attesting Him and His authority, so by His own submission to Scripture He attested its authority. As He bowed to His Father's instruction given in His Bible (our Old Testament), so He requires His disciples to do-not, however, in isolation but in conjunction with the apostolic witness to Himself which He undertook to inspire by His gift of the Holy Spirit. So Christians show themselves faithful servants of their Lord by bowing to the divine instruction given in the prophetic and apostolic writings which together make up our Bible. By authenticating each other's authority, Christ and Scripture coalesce into a single fount of authority. The Biblically-interpreted Christ and the Christ-centered, Christ-proclaiming Bible are from this standpoint one. As from the fact of inspiration we infer that what Scripture says, God says, so from the revealed relation between Jesus Christ and Scripture we may equally declare that what Scripture says, Christ says.

Infallibility, Inerrancy, Interpretation

Holy Scripture, as the inspired Word of God witnessing authoritatively to Jesus Christ, may properly be called infallible and inerrant. These negative terms have a special value, for they explicitly safeguard crucial positive truths. 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. Similarly, 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. We affirm that canonical Scripture should always be interpreted on the basis that it is infallible and inerrant. However, in determining what the God-taught writer is asserting in each passage, we must pay the most careful attention to its claims and character as a human production. In inspiration, God utilized the culture and conventions of His penman's milieu, a milieu that God controls in His sovereign providence; it is misinterpretation to imagine otherwise. So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: since, for instance, non-chronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers. When total precision of a particular kind was not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it. Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed. The truthfulness of Scripture is not negated by the appearance in it of irregularities of grammar or spelling, phenomenal descriptions of nature, reports of false statements (e.g., the lies of Satan), or seeming discrepancies between one passage and another. It is not right to set the so-called "phenomena" of Scripture against the teaching of Scripture about itself. Apparent inconsistencies should not be ignored. Solution of them, where this can be convincingly achieved, will encourage our

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faith, and where for the present no convincing solution is at hand we shall significantly honor God by trusting His assurance that His Word is true, despite these appearances, and by maintaining our confidence that one day they will be seen to have been illusions. Inasmuch as all Scripture is the product of a single divine mind, interpretation must stay within the bounds of the analogy of Scripture and eschew hypotheses that would correct one Biblical passage by another, whether in the name of progressive revelation or of the imperfect enlightenment of the inspired writer's mind. Although Holy Scripture is nowhere culture-bound in the sense that its teaching lacks universal validity, it is sometimes culturally conditioned by the customs and conventional views of a particular period, so that the application of its principles today calls for a different sort of action.

Skepticism and Criticism

Since the Renaissance, and more particularly since the Enlightenment, world-views have been developed which involve skepticism about basic Christian tenets. Such are the agnosticism which denies that God is knowable, the rationalism which denies that He is incomprehensible, the idealism which denies that He is transcendent, and the existentialism which denies rationality in His relationships with us. When these un- and anti-biblical principles seep into men's theologies at a presuppositional level, as today they frequently do, faithful interpretation of Holy Scripture becomes impossible. Transmission and Translation Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission. The verdict of this science, however, is that the Hebrew and Greek text appear to be amazingly well preserved, so that we are amply justified in affirming, with the Westminster Confession, a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of Scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free. Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the autographa. Yet the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served in these days with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true Word of God is within their reach. Indeed, in view of the frequent repetition in Scripture of the main matters with which it deals and also of the Holy Spirit's constant witness to and through the Word, no serious translation of Holy Scripture will so destroy its meaning as to render it unable to make its reader "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Inerrancy and Authority

In our affirmation of the authority of Scripture as involving its total truth, we are consciously standing with Christ and His apostles, indeed with the whole Bible and with the main stream of Church history from the first days until very recently. We are concerned at the casual, inadvertent, and seemingly thoughtless way in which a belief of such far-reaching importance has been given up by so many in our day. We are conscious too that great and grave confusion results from ceasing to maintain the total truth of the Bible whose authority one professes to acknowledge. The result of taking this step is that the Bible which God gave loses its authority, and what has authority instead is a Bible reduced in content according to the demands of one's critical reasonings and in principle reducible still further once one has

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started. This means that at bottom independent reason now has authority, as opposed to Scriptural teaching. If this is not seen and if for the time being basic evangelical doctrines are still held, persons denying the full truth of Scripture may claim an evangelical identity while methodologically they have moved away from the evangelical principle of knowledge to an unstable subjectivism, and will find it hard not to move further. We affirm that what Scripture says, God says. May He be glorified. Amen and Amen.