

Lecture 6 – The Doctrine of Scripture (cont.)

“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:21

Key Terms

The taxonomy of inerrancy positions: absolute inerrancy, full inerrancy, limited inerrancy, inerrancy of purpose, inspired (but not inerrant), non-propositional; *autographa*

Objectives

- *Compare and contrast inerrancy, infallibility, and inspiration.
- *Identify “taxonomy of positions” on inerrancy.
- *Discuss inerrancy in the historical context in which it arose as well as its relationship to critical approaches to Scripture.
- *Explore the implications for various views of inerrancy for Christian life and ministry.

The Doctrine of Scripture (cont.)

III. Inerrancy: The Reliability of Scripture

- A. An issue of intense debate
- B. Definition: “Exempt from error, free from mistake, infallible.” (Oxford Dictionary)
- C. Objections to the term
 1. The term conveys an aura of scientific exactness, precision, and specificity which is alien to ancient canons of science, history, and truth.
 2. The term is a negation, and as such does not posit any positive reality at all.
 3. The term is applied to a hypothetical, non-existent document, and thus is no real use.
 4. The term is of relatively recent vintage and thus does not belong to the classical tradition of the church.
 5. By the very nature of the term, inerrancy is impossible to verify.
 6. Without testing, inerrancy is merely a dogmatic presumption that keeps us from honestly investigating the biblical phenomena.
- D. A taxonomy of positions
 1. Absolute inerrancy
 2. Full inerrancy
 3. Limited inerrancy
 4. Inerrancy of purpose
 5. Inspired
 6. Non-propositional
- E. Responses to objections
 1. Millard Erickson’s definition of inerrancy:

“The Bible, when _____ in light of the level to which _____ and the means of _____ had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was _____, is _____ in all that it affirms.”
 2. Items of note in Erickson’s definition
 - a. He does not cite an *autographa*.
 - b. He stresses the positive (the Bible’s truthfulness) rather than a negation.
 3. Erickson’s qualifications
 - a. Inerrancy pertains only to the affirmations of Scripture.

- b. Inerrancy must respect ancient canons of historiography.
- c. Inerrancy must respect the purpose and intention of the text.
- d. Inerrancy must respect the phenomenal language of the text.

“Everyone should recognize that in accordance with accepted forms of speech and custom a statement can be perfectly authentic and not yet pedantically precise.” John Murray

“There is a vast difference between exactness of statement, which includes an exhaustive rendering of details, an absolute literalness which the Scriptures never profess, and accuracy, on the other hand, which secures a correct statement of facts of principle intended to be affirmed.” B.B. Warfield

- e. Inerrancy suggests a positive attitude toward the text.
 - 1) Inerrancy is a reaction to the Higher Critical Method.
 - 2) Inerrancy is a precommitment to biblical truthfulness as a proper compliment to the Bible’s own affirmation of its divine source and authority.
 - 3) But inerrancy cannot become a license for obscurantism, a refusal to investigate the phenomena of the text on dogmatic grounds.

f. Inerrancy pertains only to the Bible as it is correctly interpreted.
(See following page for quotes)

- 4. What of the Rogers/McKim thesis that inerrancy is a modern invention?
- 5. Who cares?
 - a. Traditional exegetical task: three actions

“We believe that the Word contained in these books has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men. And inasmuch as it is the rule of all truth, containing all that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation, it is not lawful for men, nor even for angels, to add to it, to take away from it, or to change it. Whence it follows that no authority, whether of antiquity, or custom, or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or councils, or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures but on the contrary, all things should be examined, regulated, and reformed according to them.”
The French Confession of Faith, article V (1559)

Quotes

Re: the Bible is inerrant only when rightly interpreted.

Scripture erroneously interpreted is no longer God’s Word.
Sinclair Ferguson (“How the Bible Looks at Itself”)

It is the God-intended meaning of Scripture as expressed in the Spirit-inspired words that is inerrant, and not some other meaning that anybody thinks the words convey.
David Jones (course syllabus)

[Inerrancy] means that what the Bible says, when correctly understood grammatically and in its historical setting, is absolutely true... We contend for the inerrancy of the meaning which the inspired writers intended to convey in their original manuscripts.

J. Oliver Buswell, Jr. (*Systematic Theology*)

In all questions pertinent to the doctrine of Scripture, we must remember that the intent of Scripture is Scripture; it is what Scripture means to say that is Scripture. We cannot deal, therefore, with the inerrancy of Scripture apart from hermeneutics.

John Murray (cited in *Evangelicals and Inerrancy*)