

Associated Gospel Churches - Articles of Faith and Doctrine

The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

Part 1

October 23, 2005

The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

Previous AGC Article:

I. The Divine Authority and Plenary Inspiration of the whole Canonical Scriptures

We believe that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. By which we understand that the whole of the book called the Bible is inspired in the sense that the Holy Ghost gave the identical words of the sacred writings of the Holy men of old, chosen by Him to be the channel of His revelation to man.

2 Tim. 3:16-17; Mark 12:26-36; Acts 1:16,2:4; 2 Pet 1:21; 1 Cor 2:13

The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

Current AGC Article:

I. The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

We believe the Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, as originally given by God are divinely inspired, without error, entirely trustworthy, and constitute the only supreme authority in all matters of faith, teaching and behaviour.

2 Peter 1:21

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Hebrews 4:12

Mark 12:26-36

Acts 1:16

The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

- Concepts included in this Article:
 - *Canon* of Scripture - “the Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments”
 - *Inspiration* of Scripture - “as originally given by God are divinely inspired”
 - *Inerrancy* of Scripture - “without error”

The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

- Concepts included in this Article:
 - *Infallibility* of Scripture - “entirely trustworthy”
 - *Authority* of Scripture - “and constitute the only supreme authority”
 - *Sufficiency* of Scripture - “in all matters of faith, teaching, and behaviour.”

The Canon of Scripture

- **Definition**

The list of all the books that belong in the Bible

- ‘**canon**’ = ‘**standard**’ or ‘**measuring rod**’
- **39 books in OT, 27 books in NT**
- **Apocryphal books not considered canonical, as they are for Roman Catholics**

The Canon of Scripture

- **Definition**

The list of all the books that belong in the Bible

– AGC Article XVIII (Gifts of the Holy Spirit) states that the Canon is now closed:

- *“...We believe that special divine revelation for authoritative Scripture ceased with the Apostolic Age.”*

– For more detailed discussion, please refer to “*The Canon of Scripture*” in the Resources section (Topical Studies area) at www.cgygfellowship.com

The Inspiration of Scripture

- **Definition**

The doctrine that all the words of Scripture are spoken by God and are His words

- **2 Timothy 3:16**

“All Scripture is God-breathed...”

*[Gr. *theopneustos*: “breathed out by God”]*

- **Mark 12:26**

“Have you not read in the book of Moses... how God said...”

- **applies primarily to original texts (“as originally given”)**

The Inspiration of Scripture

- **Mode of Inspiration**

- the words of Scripture are God’s words, written down by human authors under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit

“**David himself**, speaking by the Holy Spirit...” (Mark 12:36)

“...which the Holy Spirit spoke **long ago through the mouth of David...**” (Acts 1:16)

But,

- ***mode of inspiration*** (the *process* through which God used human authors to write His words) is largely a mystery

The Inspiration of Scripture

- Mode of Inspiration

- 2 Peter 1:20-21

- Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 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***

- *men spoke* [i.e. men's words], yet they *spoke from God* [yet God's words]

The Inspiration of Scripture

- **Mode of Inspiration**
 - a wide variety of possible processes,
 - **not just “mechanical dictation” [i.e. God dictated and the writer transcribed], although in some cases, direct dictation was the mode (e.g. Jesus to John in Revelation 2-3)**
 - **God directed the thoughts, research, etc. of the authors in a way that preserved and used their backgrounds, personalities and literary styles; yet, the words they wrote were the words God intended and were the very words of God**

The Inerrancy of Scripture

- **Definition**

Inerrancy means that Scripture in its original manuscripts is without error in all that it addresses

i.e. Scripture is free of all falsehood, fraud or deceit, and does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact

- **applies not only to spiritual/religious themes, but also to science, history, etc., where Scripture addresses these issues**

The Inerrancy of Scripture

- **Important clarification:**
 - the issue is the complete truthfulness of Scripture

Does Scripture always speak the truth in all that it addresses?

The Inerrancy of Scripture

- **thus, inerrancy is not negated by**
 - lack of modern technical precision
 - irregularities of grammar or spelling
 - observational descriptions of nature (e.g. “the sun rises”)
 - the reporting of falsehoods (e.g. account of Abram’s lie to Pharaoh)
 - use of hyperbole (e.g. “all Jerusalem went out to him”)
 - use of round numbers
 - topical arrangement of material (instead of chronological)
 - variant selection of material in parallel accounts (e.g. variations in accounts between the Gospels)
 - use of free (“loose”) citations/quotations

adapted from the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978)

The Infallibility of Scripture

- **Definition**

Infallibility means that Scripture is entirely reliable and trustworthy in all that it addresses

i.e. Scripture will never lead us astray

- **closely related to inerrancy**

The Inerrancy of Scripture

- doctrines of *inerrancy* and *infallibility* are grounded firmly on the *inspiration* of Scripture
 - Scripture is “God-breathed” (i.e. God’s words) (2 Timothy 3:16-17 & others)
 - God does not (*cannot*) lie (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18)
 - thus, all His words are flawless and true (Proverbs 30:5, Psalm 12:6)
 - thus, all His words are trustworthy (2 Samuel 7:28, Psalm 119:137-138)

Some Objections

- “We don’t have any original manuscripts, so it’s pointless and misleading to talk about an inerrant Bible.”

A brief response:

- for >99% of the text, we know what the originals said (i.e. no variations in the many manuscripts we have)
- where textual variants occur,
 - **the error is man’s, not God’s (e.g. copying error)**
 - **in many (most?) cases, it’s possible to trace back and know where the variant was introduced**
 - **variants do not change any essential doctrine of the faith**

Some Objections

- “The Scriptures were written by men who were errant and fallible so the end-product could not be inerrant and infallible.”

A brief response:

- ignores the supervision of the Holy Spirit
- it is possible for errant and fallible men to write things that are completely true and reliable, so the fact that they wrote it does not negate inerrancy/infallibility
 - “My name is David.”
 - “I drove to church today.”

Some Objections

- “The authors of the Bible were products of the culture of their day and sometimes ‘accommodated’ their messages to false ideas present in the culture.”

A brief response:

- focuses too much on the human element of Scripture while ignoring the divine element
 - **ignores supervision of the Holy Spirit**
- implies that God acted contrary to His character as the God who does not (and cannot) lie (Titus 1:2, Heb. 6:18)
 - **God does not compromise truth (i.e. will not compromise His character) in order to please men**

Some Objections

- “There are errors and contradictions in the Bible, so that means that it cannot be inerrant and infallible.”

A brief response:

- what errors/contradictions? (please specify)
- most alleged discrepancies or errors have satisfactory solutions for those willing to dig a little
- the ‘problem texts’ that do remain testify to our lack of understanding, but do not nullify inerrancy

“Jesus replied, ‘Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?’” (Mark 12:24)

Some Objections

- **“The Bible may be inerrant and infallible regarding matters of religion and faith, but not in matters of science and history.”**

A brief response:

- **the Bible itself claims to be inerrant & infallible in all its speaks to (e.g. Psalm 12:6; Prov. 30:5)**
- **if the Bible affirms falsehood and can mislead us in some areas (e.g. science & history), how can we know that it doesn't affirm falsehood and will not mislead us on other things (e.g. salvation)?**

Problems with denying inspiration/inerrancy/infallibility

- **if we deny that the Bible is entirely God's Word (i.e. if we claim it's just written by men without inspiration by God), then why should we believe and follow it, especially when so much of it seems out of touch with modern sensitivities?**
- **if we affirm inspiration but deny inerrancy, this implies that God is not who He says He is (e.g. pure light, in whom there is no darkness)**

Problems with denying inspiration/inerrancy/infallibility

- if we deny inerrancy, how can we know that *anything* the Bible says is true?
 - if God is capable of speaking falsely on some things, why not on all things?
 - tends to result in disobedience of parts of Scripture that we find distasteful - ‘it must be a mistake’
 - **erosion of authority of Scripture**
- if we deny inerrancy, we make our own minds a higher standard of truth than God’s Word
 - saying that we know truth more certainly and accurately than God’s Word (which must have made a mistake)

Modern challenges

- **Modernism/liberalism**
 - a movement that gained ascendancy in continental Europe in 18th-19th century & was imported into North America churches in the 19th-20th century

Tended to:

- **deny that Scripture is God's inspired Word**
- **deny the inerrancy & infallibility of Scripture**
- **dismiss supernatural events (e.g. Virgin birth, Resurrection, miracles) as legends or fables**
- **emphasize experience over doctrine**

Modern challenges

- **Modernism/liberalism**

- **movement that gutted Protestant churches on continental Europe and to a large extent in Britain**

- **modernist-fundamentalist controversy raged in North America in late 1800s into early-mid 1900s**

- **swept ‘mainline’ Protestant denominations in the USA & Canada (e.g. Anglicans/Episcopalians, many Baptists, many Presbyterians, Methodists, United Church, etc.)**

- **recent struggle in Southern Baptist Convention (largest Protestant denomination in USA) in 1970s-80s, as conservatives moved to retake control of the denomination from liberals**

Challenges within Evangelicalism

- **Southern Baptists, 1970s-90s**
 - historically an ‘evangelical’ denomination
 - as in other large Protestant denominations, people holding to liberal doctrines had taken over leadership of many denominational seminaries and agencies (e.g. publishing house, Sunday School Board, Missions Boards, etc.)
 - **promoted liberal doctrines not reflective of the beliefs of most Southern Baptists at the time**
 - the “Conservative Resurgence” started in 1960s-70s, largely over the issue of inerrancy of Scripture

Challenges within Evangelicalism

- Southern Baptists, 1970s-90s

For example,

“[Gospel] sources, however objective they claim to be, have biases. They reflect the slanted viewpoints of their authors. At the same time, most possess, in varying degrees, some element of fact.”

**-Hinson, E.G. *Jesus Christ* (McGroth Publishing, 1977),
p.56-57 as cited in J. Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation***

“These experiences [referring to Jesus’ temptation] may have been the creation of the evangelists... In the interest of presenting Jesus as Messiah Servant, they or their sources could have created the account.”

-Ibid., p.64

Challenges within Evangelicalism

- **Southern Baptists, 1970s-90s**
 - **Conservative Resurgence began ‘officially’ at the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston, 1979**
 - **elected a Convention president who held to Biblical inerrancy, who began to appoint people to agency and seminary Boards who also held to inerrancy**
 - **continued until mid-late 1990s, by which time conservatives were firmly in control of denominational agencies and seminaries**

Challenges within Evangelicalism

- **Evangelical feminism**
 - a movement beginning among evangelicals around 1960s to 1970s as a result of the rise of feminism in the broader society
 - called into question ‘traditional’ gender roles in the Church and in the home
 - re-examined Scriptures to challenge traditional understandings
 - desired to base movement firmly on Scripture
 - called for full ‘equality’ of men & women in church & home
 - has become dominant position within much of evangelicalism since 1980s-90s

Challenges within Evangelicalism

- **Evangelical feminism**

- **salutary effects**

- **caused churches to re-examine traditional understandings of Scripture and to rectify errors**
 - **resulted in opening of many avenues of service for women that were not prohibited by Scripture but were previously closed to women**

- **concerns**

- **while claiming to hold to a high view of Scripture, their writings and teachings in practice tend to undermine concepts of Divine inspiration, inerrancy & infallibility Scripture**

Challenges within Evangelicalism

- **Evangelical feminism**

For example,

- some authors question the accuracy of Biblical accounts

“Second, Eden’s quiet echoes of patriarchy may be a way of *describing the past through present categories. The Creation story may be using the social categories that Moses’ audience would have been familiar with. God sometimes permits such accomodation in order not to confuse the main point he wants to communicate...*”
(italics added)

-Webb, W.J. *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals* (InterVarsity Press, 2001), p.143, as cited in Grudem, JBMW 9(1):38.

i.e. Genesis 2 does not actually describe things the way things *really* happened in the Garden of Eden, but God let Moses ‘tweak’ the facts a little so as not to distract his audience from the main point

Challenges within Evangelicalism

- Evangelical feminism

- some (many?) argue that the Bible's teachings on appropriate gender roles were tainted by the cultural background of the day and are therefore either no longer valid in our culture or are just plain wrong

“The apostle Paul was the heir of this contrast between the old and the new... He was both a Jew and a Christian... and his thinking about women... reflects both his Jewish and his Christian experience... Paul... is assuming the traditional rabbinic understanding [of Gen. 2:18-23]... Is this rabbinic understanding of Genesis 2:18f correct? *We do not think that it is...*To resolve this difficulty, one must recognize the human as well as the divine quality of Scripture.”

**-Jewett, P.K. *Man as Male and Female* (Eerdman's, 1975),
as cited in Grudem, *JBMW* 9(1):41.**

Challenges within Evangelicalism

- **Evangelical feminism**
 - attacks on accuracy and reliability of Scripture (i.e. inerrancy & infallibility) used to justify disregarding passages that are distasteful
 - thus, tends to undermine authority of Scripture (next week)
 - same arguments (e.g. cultural conditioning of Biblical authors) now being used (mostly in non-evangelical circles) to justify gay marriage and ordination of practising homosexuals

Challenges within Evangelicalism

- **Post-modernists/”Emerging Church” movement**
 - a growing movement among evangelicals that introduces post-modernist thought into Christianity
 - “Our congregations reflect a broad variety of culture and traditions. Some are postmodern in thinking and methodology, others are very traditional.” - Baptist General Conference of Canada website (www.bgc.ca), July 2005
 - popular writings accepted and promoted within evangelical mainstream by authors such as Brian McLaren (*A New Kind of Christian, A Generous Orthodoxy*) and Mike Yaconelli (*Stories of Emergence*)

Challenges within Evangelicalism

- **Post-modernists/'Emerging Church' movement**

- **tend to deny that objective, inerrant truth may be known**

“When we ‘do theology,’ we are clay pots pondering the potter, kids pondering their father, ants discussing the elephant. At some level of profundity and accuracy, we are bound to be inadequate or incomplete all the time, in anything we say or think, considering our human limitations, including language, and God’s infinite greatness.”

-McLaren, B. *The Church on the Other Side* (Zondervan, 2003) p.65.

- **true to an extent, but ignores fact that ‘elephant’ has become an ‘ant,’ communicated to the ants in their own language, and may therefore be known truly**

Challenges within Evangelicalism

- **Post-modernists/’Emerging Church’ movement**
 - some writers portray the Bible as just one limited perspective of many possible perspectives on truth
 - “Mahatma Gandhi... freely admitted his indebtedness to Christ and the New Testament, and to Buddhism and the Gita as well... was Mahatma Gandhi’s life a “Christian” life - perhaps more “Christian” than our own?... Can we then pronounce Gandhi as being non-Christian?... We acknowledge truths in many places, including unexpected places - in our “non-Christian” friends, in the Koran, in the Gita. And we are confident and enthusiastic in acknowledging these truths, because we know that they all point to Him who is the Truth... There is then no divide. No angry denunciation. No bigoted stereotyping. Only wonder, at Grace amazing.”
 - F. Christian, “Across the Divide”, *FOCUS* magazine (published by Christian Medical & Dental Society of Canada), Oct. 2004, p.17.

The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

Our Response:

- reaffirm what Scripture teaches about itself
 - inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, sufficient

We believe the Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, as originally given by God are divinely inspired, without error, entirely trustworthy, and constitute the only supreme authority in all matters of faith, teaching and behaviour.

2 Peter 1:21

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Hebrews 4:12

Mark 12:26-36

Acts 1:16

The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

- doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility remain of critical importance in our day
 - your stance on these doctrines will impact on how you apply Scripture to other issues
- erosion of these doctrines erodes our confidence that God has spoken and that He has in His Word provided all we need for life and godliness

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

References

- **Grudem, Wayne.** *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, chps. 2-8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).
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- **Grudem, Wayne.** Is Evangelical Feminism the New Path to Liberalism? Some Disturbing Warning Signs. *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 2004. 9(1):35-84.
- **Carson, Donald.** *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).