

Biblical inerrancy is an important part of Christianity, and any theology. Because the Christian faith has firmly rooted its authority in that of the Holy Scriptures, the inerrancy (or infallibility as some refer to it, though the terms are not totally synonymous) of the Bible plays a central role in the authenticity of Christianity and its message. The issue of infallibility has come to be used as an alternate definition from that stated below, meaning more that the Bible was not always factually accurate but that the purpose, meaning, and overall divine nature was accomplished.

### **A Common Definition of Biblical Inerrancy**

*Inerrancy* is that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or to the social, physical, or life sciences (Elwell, 156).

This definition of course leaves many variables in being able to reach a state of inerrancy. Two obvious variables that some may argue are hardly obtainable from fallible and sinful people, "in its original autographs" and "correctly interpreted". The "original autographs" is a huge topic beyond the scope of this article, but we are sinful people, and can often take an inerrant piece of scripture out of context, or apply it in a manner never intended, thus turning an inerrant word from God into an error filled sentence of man.

For many people, just the term inerrancy holds completely different meanings, and there are several different views of inerrancy. In brief, and in order from scientifically and historically fully true, down to completely false, there is; absolute inerrancy, full inerrancy, limited inerrancy, inerrancy of purpose, a position that takes all four above into account, nonpropositional (holding that the Bible itself is not actually inspired

revelation), and the position that inerrancy is irrelevant and basically regards inerrancy as false.

### **Concluding Definition of Biblical Inerrancy**

There have been countless theses and dissertations written on the subject of the inerrancy of scripture, so this working post can only serve as the most basic introduction into the material of inerrancy. Erickson in *Christian Theology* explains inerrancy as...

The Bible, when correctly interpreted in the light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms.

With this definition a few points have to be made, and are made by Erickson in the text.

1. *Inerrancy pertains to what is affirmed or asserted rather than what is merely reported.* This goes to the argument that every single statement in scripture is true without question. Many places in scripture there are accounts made by ungodly people that are clearly false. Defining the Bible as inerrant does not render these statements as true.
  
2. *We must judge the truthfulness of Scripture in terms of its meaning in the cultural setting which its statements were expressed.* This is a favorite among the unchurched, and today's "culturally relevant post-modern" evangelical. Scripture must be taken in the context of the culture in which it was written. This is very difficult in our culture today. We are so far removed from the times and cultures of scripture today that we must make a conscious effort to keep scripture in context.

3. *The Bible's assertions are fully true when judged in accordance with the purpose for which they were written.* We always have to look at the intended purpose for each work. Approximations are common even in our own language today, and facts in scripture were often stated in approximations then as well, but that does not make an assertion inaccurate.

4. *Reports of historical events and scientific matters are in phenomenal rather than technical language.* The biblical writers were not scientists; they did not have forensics and exacting sciences in the manner we have today. Observations in scripture were often made how they appear to the common eye, not in a lab.

5. *Difficulties in explaining the biblical text should not be prejudged as indications of error.* I think it is pretty safe to say that we do not have all the data. There were items lost to time, books that are extant, and archeological finds that have yet to take place.

### **Why is Biblical Inerrancy Important Today?**

There are many reasons why inerrancy is important, especially today, when we live in a pluralistic society that is intent on defining truth as whatever you make it out to be. From a scholarly viewpoint, there are theological, historical, and epistemological reasons for inerrancy.

From a theological point of view, Paul, the disciples, and Jesus among other people, all called on the authority of scripture. Jesus quoted scripture throughout his ministry and took the view that scripture was the inspired work of God. If God inspires the work, and God is all-powerful, all knowing, and completely Holy, He certainly could influence the

final canon to be completed accurately. If the Bible was not accurate, our own view of inspiration, among many other theologies that come from the Bible, would not be accurate either. In other words, without inerrancy, much of what we believe in scripture could not be held out as truth either.

Historically, the early church long held to the inerrancy, dependability, and authority of Scripture. History has a way of being testing by time, and to disregard the history of the church would itself be in error. The early church had far fewer questions about the inerrancy of scripture. It was known to them to be true, and fully trustworthy. If we depart from inerrancy, we also must depart from many other doctrines formed by the early church.

An epistemological view would state that some assertions in the Bible are at least potentially independently verifiable. Viewed as a type of domino theory, if one falls, they all fall, if we hold certain propositions taught by the Bible to be true that are not, we cannot continue to hold any of the propositions taught by the Bible to be true.

### **Concluding Application**

As stated above, this topic is so far reaching, so broad in scope that any of the information above can only be taken as the most basic and brief overview. In our own personal walk in Christianity the inerrancy of the scriptures has to play an important role in what we believe as Christians. If the Bible is the inspired word of God, given to us by divine revelation, we must conclude it is inerrant. If we don't, all we can do is proceed down a slippery slope of discerning which parts are and which parts are not accurate.

We hold to almost no absolute truths in our culture today. Society no longer allows for absolute truths, they are far too exclusive, far too judgmental. Truths have to be open for debate, flexible, changeable, and able to be managed and manipulated into our own culture and times in a way that benefits our desires and sinful nature.

If the Bible is inspired, and also found to be errant, then we can not conclude that the God of the universe, the God of creation, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of Jesus, is inerrant either. That is a simplistic way to make a conclusion, but if we as Christians do not hold the Scriptures as the ultimate inerrant authority, then how can we hold that Christianity is the only way, the truth, and the light.

*This was an informal and brief essay on inerrancy for open discussion, taken mostly from Erickson's Christian Theology, 1998 and Elwell's Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, 2009.*