

## Taking God's Word Seriously

Oliver Wendell Holms Jr.: *"I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity."*

Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

1. Why study theology?
  - a. Eternal life is found in knowing God and the Son He has sent (Jn. 17:3).
  - b. Knowing God transforms our lives (Rom. 12:2; 1 Thess. 4:5).
  - c. Faithfulness to God means obeying the two Great Commandments (Mt. 22:35-40).
  - d. Christians are called to always be prepared to give a defense to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is in them, and this requires study in preparation (1 Pet. 3:15).
2. Revelation: God's act in displaying Himself
  - a. The two most important questions that anyone could ask in life are: is there a God? Does He speak?
    - i. If there is a God and He does not speak to us, then we would never have known there is a God.
    - ii. If God does not speak, we will not be able to know Him.
    - iii. Therefore, it is necessary for God to reveal Himself to us.
    - iv. Revelation is defined as the disclosure of something that was previously unknown. This is what God must do if man is to know Him.
    - v. There are two ways that God reveals Himself to man.
  - b. General/Natural Revelation:
    - i. Definitions:
      1. General Revelation: the divine disclosure to all persons at all times and in all places by which humans come to know that God is and what he is like.<sup>1</sup>
      2. Natural Revelation: the knowledge that God conveys to human beings through nature.<sup>2</sup>
    - ii. There are two main media of general revelation:
      1. Creation: the world's existence declares that there is a Creator. (Ps. 19:1; Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:19-21 cf. Mt. 5:45).

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<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 1019.

<sup>2</sup> John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 537.

2. Conscience: God has written His law on the hearts of man in his conscience (Rom. 2:14-16). This inherent moral compass can be seen in the sense of 'ought' present throughout cultures worldwide.
- iii. General Revelation makes moral demands upon man, and leaves man without excuse as to why he did not obey God (Rom. 1:18-21).
  1. Erickson notes, "the knowledge of God that all humans have, if they do not suppress it, should bring them to the conclusion that they are guilty in relationship to God."<sup>3</sup> According to Romans 1, humans do suppress the truth, which makes the guilt all the worse.
- iv. General revelation is insufficient for salvation. Due to the sin nature inherited through Adam, man will never see nature clearly but need special revelation in order to understand God through creation.
  1. The issue is not in the medium, but in man.
  2. Creation shows us that there is a God, but we will not know His mercy, love, His Trinitarian nature, or the Person and Work of Jesus Christ if this is all we have. Therefore, this alone will not bring about salvation.
- c. Special Revelation
  - i. Definition:
    1. God's communication to humans of divine truth, that is, his manifestation of himself or of his will.<sup>4</sup>
    2. It is special because it is to a specific person or group of people at a particular moment in time and in a particular location.
  - ii. There are three kinds of revelation through verbal media, with no diminishment of authority or power as it progresses.<sup>5</sup> God is speaking in each of the three, though it is the medium that changes. The Author remains constant.
    1. The Divine Voice
      - a. God speaks to humans without any human mediator (Ex. 20; Mt. 3:17, 17:5; Mk. 1:11, 9:7; Lk. 9:35).
      - b. Every word spoken by Jesus is the Divine voice speaking to humans.
    2. The Word through Prophets and Apostles
      - a. Israel was fearful to hear the voice of the Lord directly, so God willingly sent prophets to speak on His behalf.
      - b. God puts His words on the lips of the prophets so that, when they speak, it is as if God Himself is speaking,

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<sup>3</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 138.

<sup>4</sup> Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 1021.

<sup>5</sup> The outline for these are found in John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 543.

carrying with it a truthfulness and authority (Deut. 18:18-20; Jer. 1:4-12). This can be seen in the preface to the prophetic books which says, "The word of the Lord that came to..." (Is. 1:1; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Amos 1:1; Obad. 1; Jnh. 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Nah. 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Hag. 1:3; Zech. 1:7; Mal. 1:1).

- c. The words of the prophets were to be obeyed because they were given by God and carried the authority of God.
- d. The Apostles, like the prophets, were chosen by God for the purpose of bearing witness to Christ in a unique and authoritative way (Mt. 10:19-20; Jn. 14:26,15:26-27, 16:13).

### 3. The Written Word

- a. The oral words of the prophets and apostles were written to bring about a permanence to the Word of God.
  - b. For Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:10-13, the Spirit's revelation not only gives "understanding" of divine mysteries, but also provides the "words" in which the apostles teach these mysteries.<sup>6</sup>
  - c. According to the 2 Peter 1:21, "no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."
  - d. This written Word provided the foundation, with Christ being the cornerstone, upon which the church was to be built (Eph. 2:20-21).
- iii. This act of revelation is progressive. It is not given all at one time, but over the course of a long period of time, as God saw fit, with the climax being the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.
  - iv. The revelation of God is both propositional and personal.
    - 1. Propositional in that He is speaking to us truth that is to be obeyed.
    - 2. Personal, according to Frame, God "means to convey not only information, but tone, emotion, perspective."<sup>7</sup> He is speaking to humans in a way that humans are to understand.
  - v. Jesus Himself, the Word made flesh, is the final and full revelation of God to man (Jn. 1:1-4, 14; Phil. 2: 5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:2-3).

### 3. Inspiration: God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16)

#### a. Definition:

- i. Inspiration is a divine act creating an identity between a divine word and a human word.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 552.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 596.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 595.

- b. Warfield writes, “The Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though written by men and bearing indelibly impressed upon them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will.”<sup>9</sup>
  - i. The words of Scripture were written by men and are human words, but they are also, at the same time, the words that God intended to be written (2 Pet. 1:21).
- c. Verbal-plenary inspiration
  - i. Definitions:
    - 1. Verbal: the words that are written down.
    - 2. Plenary: all-extensively, every single word.
    - 3. Matthew Barrett writes, “Not only does inspiration extend to the very words of Scripture but to *all* the words of Scripture (*tota Scriptura*). And by “all” we mean absolutely everything.”<sup>10</sup>
    - 4. Second Timothy 3:16 says that “all Scripture is breathed out by God”, which includes every word.
  - ii. Barrett notes, “There is a dual authorship to Scripture. In this view the human authors wrote exactly what they intended in their own distinct style, yet at the same time what they wrote was superintended by the Holy Spirit so that what the human author said, God said, down to the exact words and phrases.”<sup>11</sup>
    - 1. We can hear Warfield echoed in this statement as both note the dual nature of Scripture.
    - 2. There is great mystery in how this came about, and humility is required when speaking on it.
  - iii. Each writer has a distinct style so that Isaiah does not write like Moses, Paul does not write like John, and Luke does not write like Peter, though each is writing the Word of God.
  - iv. **The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy** says, “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.”<sup>12</sup>
    - 1. It is the original autographs that are inspired.
      - a. Should this make Christians suspicious when reading the Bible? No.

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<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 173.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: the Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 236.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid. 225.

<sup>12</sup> John MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 380-381.

- b. Because of the abundance of early manuscripts scholars are able to compare one to another and see the consistency throughout the copies, as well as to see where scribal errors may have occurred. This allows for a high degree of certainty that the text Christians have in their Bible matches with the original autographs. Any deviations are effectively insignificant, as they do not change any doctrines for the church.
    - 2. Both the whole and the parts are inspired.
      - a. The statement is adamant, writing in both the affirmation and denial, that a belief in the inspiration of God includes both the whole and the parts. This eliminates the opportunity to pick and choose what one wants to be 'inspired' based on other factors (examples include the destruction of God's enemies in the Old Testament and the sexual ethic present in both the Old and New Testament).
  - d. Gracious accommodation of God in inspiration.
    - i. In His grace to man, God wrote in language that can be understood by adults and children, educated and uneducated. It is not a technical textbook but written in common language for the common person.
    - ii. Calvin compares the way in which God speaks to us as the way a "nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to "lisp" in speaking to us".<sup>13</sup> As parents speak in simple terms to their young children, so God speaks to His finite creatures in a way that they can understand.
    - iii. God speaks in human language, using human tone, emotions, experiences, and illustrations in order to convey His words. He speaks in the common language of the people and not in technical language of the elite.
  - e. The canon of Scripture is closed.
    - i. The 66 books of the Old and New Testament incorporate the totality of the written Word of God given to men.
    - ii. God has spoken long ago in many different times and ways but has now spoken finally in His Son (Heb. 1:1-2). Christ has commissioned the apostles to lay the foundation in writing so that the church might be built, with Christ Himself being the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). Once a foundation is laid, one is not to go back and add more to it, but simply build from it. Therefore, because God has spoken and given His written Word, the church is to guard the deposit, but not add to it (2 Tim. 1:14; cf. Deut. 4:2, 12:32; Rev. 22:18).

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<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 1.13.1.

- iii. Paul insists that if he, or even an angel from heaven, preaches a gospel that is different from the authentic one, he is to be accursed (Gal. 1: 8-9).
    - iv. Therefore, there has been and will be no new revelation from God.
  - f. Jesus Christ Himself is the clearest example of the divine and human coming together with each retaining its nature. Horton notes, “Though the inspiration of Scripture is qualitatively different from the incarnation of the Living Word, the latter proves that God enters into our world fully without losing any of his transcendence or truthfulness.”<sup>14</sup> Christ is truly God and truly man; Scripture is the Word of God truly and the word of man truly.
- 4. Inerrancy: God-spoken words are true.
  - a. Defining terms:
    - i. Inerrancy: without error
    - ii. Infallibility: impossible to err
      - 1. Though the term infallibility has been used recently as a weaker term for inerrancy, it carries a greater weight in its definition.
  - b. Simply put Christians believe the Word of God to be completely true (Jn. 17:17). It is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true (Ps. 19). These are terms that convey a picture of truth that does not include the possibility of error.
  - c. According to the **Baptist Faith and Message 2000** the Scripture, “has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.”<sup>15</sup>
    - i. There is no mixture of error with truth. It is totally true and trustworthy. This is the confession of faith for all Southern Baptists.
  - d. **CSBI**: “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.”<sup>16</sup>
    - i. When the Bible speaks on history, it is true.
    - ii. Hermeneutics is important to remember.
      - 1. Literary genre is important when reading the Bible so that we do not interpret poetry in the same way as historical narrative.
      - 2. Hyperbole and metaphors should be interpreted according to its kind and not literally (the I AM statements of Jesus in the book of John, for instance).
  - e. Why do we believe the Bible to be inerrant? Because God is the God of truth, not falsehood.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Scott Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 55.

<sup>15</sup> “Baptist Faith & Message 2000,” The Baptist Faith and Message (Southern Baptist Convention), accessed February 22, 2021, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#i-the-scriptures>.

<sup>16</sup> John MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 379.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: the Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 272.

- i. The character of God cannot be separated from His Word. Barrett notes, “The purity of his Word naturally mirrors the purity of his character, so much so that his Word and his name can be used interchangeably.”<sup>18</sup>
    - 1. God’s Word is praised in Psalm 56:4, 10; 119:161-162; Is. 66:4. God will not share His glory with another, which displays the close connection between God Himself and His Word (Is. 42:8).
    - 2. Scripture takes the place of God as foreseeing and speaking in Galatians 3:8 (cf. Gen. 12:3).
  - ii. Scripture is clear that God cannot lie. Since God cannot lie, His Word must be true.
    - 1. Num. 23:19; Tit. 1:1-3; Heb. 6:18
- f. Can the Bible contain errors due to human error?
- i. Humans err. Is it not reasonable to think that the Scripture, since it was written by men, can also err? No, because, according to 2 Peter 1:21, men spoke through God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, either the Holy Spirit was ineffective and impotent in carrying out His work or God is a liar for saying that men were carried along. The options then are: God is a failure, God is a liar, or Scripture is without error.
- g. Scripture is inerrant in all that it affirms.<sup>19</sup>
- i. We cannot make the Bible say what we want it to say by twisting the verses out of their context.
  - ii. We cannot force our modern standards on Scripture.
    - 1. When Jesus speaks of the mustard seed being the smallest of all seeds, it is clear that He is not speaking as a botanist (Mt. 13:32). Jesus was using a familiar image in order to convey a spiritual truth.
    - 2. The use of round numbers when speaking of war or the taking of spoil does not imply error because it is not precise.
      - a. Being imprecise does not necessarily mean error. 2+2=4 needs precision in order to be correct. Speaking of the time of day, or one’s age, or even the pages of a book do not.<sup>20</sup>
      - b. We must remember that God wrote a book for the common person and not a technical book for the elite.
    - 3. Citations of prophets need not be exact.
- h. Jesus’s view:
- i. He consistently quotes from the Old Testament as if it is correct.
  - ii. He makes comments about individuals as if they were real individuals.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 274.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Scott Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 58.

<sup>20</sup> John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 599.

1. Adam and Ever as the first historical persons (Mt. 19:4-6)
  2. Cain and Abel (Mt. 23:35; Lk. 11:51)
  3. Noah and the flood (Mt. 24:37-38)
  4. Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom (Mt. 11:21-24; Lk. 17:29)
  5. Death of Lot's wife (Lk. 17:31-32)
  6. Abraham (Jn. 8:56)
  7. Isaac and Jacob (Mt. 8:11)
  8. Moses as the author of the Law (Lk. 24:44; Jn. 7:19)
  9. God's appearance to Moses in the burning bush (Mk. 12:26-27)
  10. God's miracle of providing manna to Israel in the wilderness (Jn. 6:32, 49, 58)
  11. Moses and the bronze serpent (Jn. 3:14)
  12. David and Solomon (Mt. 12:3, 42)
  13. Queen of Sheba (Mt. 12:42)
  14. Elijah and Elisha (Lk. 4:25-27)
  15. Isaiah as the author of the book of Isaiah (Jn. 12:38-41)
  16. Zechariah's martyrdom (Mt. 23:35)
  17. Jonah being swallowed by the great fish (Mt. 12:40-41)
  18. Historical events, figures, and narrative from Abel to Zechariah son of Berekiah (Mt. 23:25; Lk. 11:50-51)<sup>21</sup>
- iii. In John 10:35, Jesus says that the Scripture cannot be broken.
  - iv. Jesus believes that heaven and earth will pass away before an iota or a dot will pass from the Law unfulfilled (Mt. 5:18).
  - v. Jesus viewed His own words as inerrant (Mt. 24:35; Mk. 13:31; Lk. 21:33)
- i. The apostles themselves believed that their writings were inerrant.
    - i. John says his testimony is true (Jn. 19:35; 21:24).
    - ii. Luke is writing his account so that Theophilus might have certainty about what he has been taught (Lk. 1:1-4).
    - iii. Peter calls the writings of Paul Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15-16).
    - iv. Paul quotes Luke alongside Deuteronomy as Scripture (1 Tim. 5:18; cf. Lk 10:7).
  - j. If Christians forfeit inerrancy, we lose all assurance the Bible can be trusted.
    - i. The standard for faith and godliness is lost if the Bible contains errors.
      1. God has given Christians all things that pertain to life and godliness through the Word of God (2 Pet. 1:3-4). If these cannot be trusted, life and godliness are in jeopardy.
      2. Turretin warns, "Unless unimpaired integrity characterizes the Scriptures, they could not be regarded as the sole rule of faith and practice."<sup>22</sup> If this is the case, another source must be sought.

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<sup>21</sup> This list is found in Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: the Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 275-276.

<sup>22</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 71.



- ii. Man becomes the arbiter of truth if the Bible contains errors.
    - 1. What parts can be trusted, and which passages cannot? Humans now gets to decide what stays and what goes. This makes man sovereign over God.
  - iii. The Christian's confidence in the finished work of Christ is lost (1 Cor. 15:12-19).
5. Authority: since the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, it possesses divine authority.
- a. What does it mean for the Bible to have authority?
    - i. Frame writes, "To say that God's Word has authority... is to say that it creates obligations in its hearers: obligations to believe what it says, to do what it commands, to write on our hearts, and so on."<sup>23</sup>
      - 1. Man is not an indifferent party, but rather a subject in God's universe. Obedience is owed to the King. When God speaks, it carries with it the authority of a king that is to bring about obedience. This is universal (Rom. 3:19).
      - 2. Christians are to live in submission to the Word of God.
        - a. In making disciples, believers are to teach others to "observe" all that Christ has commanded (Mt. 28:20). Observe is to obey and not simply to know.
        - b. Christians show their love for Christ by keeping His commandments (Jn. 14:15).
    - ii. The Bible is the final standard for faith and practice (this will be discussed further under the heading of Sufficiency).
  - b. From where does the Bible receive its authority?
    - i. **Westminster Confession of Faith:** The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.<sup>24</sup>
      - 1. The Bible has authority because of what it is. Horton summarizes the WSC in saying, "we receive it as the word of God because of what it is, not because of what we make of it."<sup>25</sup>
      - 2. The church does not grant authority to the Bible. It either is the Word of God or it is not. Our personal opinion will change neither.
      - 3. The early church was not responsible for the creation of the canon of Scripture, but recognized, through the Holy Spirit, what books were the Word of God. Qualifications for canonicity included:

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<sup>23</sup> John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 610.

<sup>24</sup> "The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) by Westminster Divines," Ligonier Ministries, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith/>.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Scott Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 53.

- a. Universal usage (not restricted to one certain area of Christianity).
  - b. Apostolic authorship, or those directly connected to the apostles.
  - c. Harmony with the other recognized books.
- 4. Bavinck succinctly notes, “The church can only recognize that which is; it cannot create something that is not.”<sup>26</sup> The books found in the Bible are the Word of God in totality because God is the Author of them through the inspiration of the human authors.
- c. As the Creator of all, God has authority over all of His creation (Gen. 1-2).
  - i. He sets the standards that are to be obeyed.
    - 1. Those standards are not random but are according to His own holiness and righteousness (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 19:7-11; 97:2, 6; 111:3 119:137, 142; 145:17; Is. 45:21; Jer. 12:1).
  - ii. Man does not have the right to decide for himself what is right and wrong (Gen. 3).
  - iii. God’s rules are for our greatest good and joy.
    - 1. God makes known the path of life (Ps. 16:11).
    - 2. To forsake God is to forsake the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13).
    - 3. God set before Israel His law and commanded them to obey in order to have life, while making it clear that disobedience leads to death (Deut. 30:15-20).
    - 4. The true is the good (*veritas bonum*).
- d. Where the Scripture speaks, God speaks authoritatively.
- e. God’s authority does not change based upon an individual’s view of it.
  - i. God does not lose authority to dictate right and wrong because an individual is an atheist, agnostic, secular, Muslim, or Jew (Rom. 3:10-11, 19).
  - ii. The Scripture cannot be broken—no matter who disagrees (Jn. 10:35).
- f. Jesus’s view:
  - i. Jesus submitted to the Old Testament and saw consciously His life as a fulfillment of it (Mt. 3:15; 5:17; Lk. 4:21; 22:37; 24:44).
  - ii. Jesus quotes Scripture to Satan, recognizing it as authoritative (Mt. 4:4, 7, 10; Lk. 4:4, 8, 12).
  - iii. Jesus’s response to the religious leaders displays His submission to the Word of God<sup>27</sup>:
    - 1. Haven’t you read what David did? (Mt. 12:3)
    - 2. Or haven’t you read in the Law? (Mt. 12:5; cf. 19:4-6)

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<sup>26</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 458.

<sup>27</sup> This list is found in Matthew Barrett, *God’s Word Alone: the Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 246.

3. Have you never read in the Scriptures? (Mt. 21:42)
  4. Have you not read what God said to you? (Mt. 22:31)
  5. What did Moses command you? (Mk. 10:3)
  6. What is written in the Law? (Lk. 10:26)
  7. Then what is the meaning of that which is written? (Lk. 20:17)
  8. In your own Law it is written. (Jn. 8:17)
  9. Is it not written in your Law? (Jn. 10:34).
- iv. Jesus understood His own words to be authoritative (Mt. 5:3-12, 20, 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; 6:25; Jn. 13:34; 17:12-17). His words will judge those who reject Him on the last day (Jn. 12:48).
6. Sufficiency: The Bible is exactly what we need for salvation and the Christian life
    - a. Matthew Barrett defines sufficiency saying, "The sufficiency of Scripture means that all things necessary for salvation and for living the Christian life in obedience to God and for his glory are given to us in the Scriptures."<sup>28</sup>
    - b. The Bible is not exhaustive for all truth.
      - i. The Bible is not an encyclopedia of all truth. The Bible will not teach us how to change a tire, for instance.
    - c. The Bible contains all Christians need for salvation and a life of holiness.
      - i. Barrett writes, "Anything God would call us to do in obedience to his will as his children can be found in Scripture."<sup>29</sup>
      - ii. The Word of God is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Christians have what they need in order to be complete, equipped for every good work.
      - iii. All things have been granted to believers that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). Nothing will be lacking.
      - iv. Psalm 19 describes the sufficiency of the Word of God as perfect reviving the soul; sure, making wise the simple; right, rejoicing the heart; pure, enlightening the eyes; clean, enduring forever; true, and righteous altogether; more desirable than gold and sweeter than honey, rewarding those who keep it (Ps. 19:7-11).
    - d. Since the Bible is all sufficient, every part is necessary.
      - i. Because the Bible has been inspired by God and is inerrant and authoritative, every word is necessary.
      - ii. Though the Christian is not under the Old Covenant, but under Christ, the Old Testament is still indispensable for Christians (Rom. 15:4). It was written, ultimately, for the benefit of the church. We cannot unhitch ourselves from it.

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: the Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 334.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 342.

- iii. God's Word will not return void but will accomplish all that He desires (Is. 55:11).
  - e. The Bible is sufficient at all times and in all places.
    - i. Truth is still truth in any context (Is. 40:8; 1 Pet. 1:25).
    - ii. Humans are all sinners in need of a Savior (Rom. 3:10, 23). Christ is crucified and risen in any culture (1 Cor. 15:1-9). Salvation is still by grace through faith, and not by works (Eph. 2:8-9). These are not culturally dependent.
  - f. Every other authority must be subject to Scripture.
    - i. God has the final word in all matters.
    - ii. Experience, reason, culture, science, and emotions are not final sources of authority in the life of the believer. Rather, Christians are to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ through the Word of God (2 Cor. 10:5).
    - iii. Since all truth is God's truth science, when it is completely understood, will not be in contradiction to Scripture. God speaks truthfully in nature and His Word, and the two will be in harmony when both are understood. However, until they are understood, Scripture must be the final authority.
    - iv. A biblical example of taking every teaching and searching the Scripture in order to find its truthfulness is found in Acts 17, with Paul preaching to the Bereans.
  - g. What then, do we do with creeds and confessions? There is a difference between *sola scriptura* and *nuda scriptura*.
    - i. *Sola Scriptura* views the Bible as the final authority for all questions of faith and practice, but views tradition as helpful in understanding the Bible.
    - ii. *Nuda Scriptura* views the Bible as the only authority for Christians, which means all other documents can be discarded. "The Bible is my creed" is the slogan.
    - iii. Historic creeds and confessions are to be viewed in a ministerial role, they are present to help and support but do not possess final authority. Scripture, on the other hand, occupies the magisterial role.
  - h. Jesus's view
    - i. When faced with temptations in the wilderness, Jesus quoted Scripture, displaying its sufficiency (Mt. 4:4, 7, 10; Lk. 4:4, 8, 12).
    - ii. Jesus believes the Bible to be sufficient in his disputes with the religious leaders.
  - i. Paul viewed the Old Testament and his teaching as sufficient to lead to salvation (2 Tim. 3:14-15).
- 7. Perspicuity: the Bible is clear
  - a. The Bible is clear because God is clear.
  - b. **The Westminster Confession of Faith** defines clarity in this way: "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those

things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.”<sup>30</sup>

- i. Not everything is equally plain in Scripture. There are difficult passages in Scripture that are not easy to understand. However, those necessary for salvation and living in godliness are clear (Eph. 3:4; 2 Pet. 3:16).
  1. Barrett writes, “If Scripture is not clear in the way we need it to be clear for our salvation, then essentially God’s intention, as genuine as they are, will fail.”<sup>31</sup>
- ii. Christians are to diligently study the Bible in order to understand.
  1. This takes effort.
  2. Paul commands Timothy to “think over” what he has written trusting that the Lord will give understanding in everything (2 Tim. 2:7).
  3. John Piper quips, “When my sons complain that a good book is hard to read, I say, “Raking is easy, but all you get is leaves; digging is hard, but you might find diamonds.”<sup>32</sup>
- c. The Bible was spoken in ordinary language to be read and understood by ordinary people. It is called a lamp and light (Ps. 119:105, 130).
  - i. The expectation is understanding for those who hear.
  - ii. The Word of God was not reserved for the educated but was to be topic of everyday conversations in the home and workplace (Deut. 6:7-9).
  - iii. Clarity was assumed in the giving of the Law because Israel was commanded to teach it to their children (Deut. 6:7; 11:19).
  - iv. John wrote so that his readers might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing have life in His name (Jn. 20:30-31)
  - v. Clarity was assumed because it was used by Paul in preaching to Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 22:21).
- d. What does clarity *not* mean?
  - i. The clarity of Scripture does not mean that everyone will understand the Bible.<sup>33</sup>
    1. The Holy Spirit must open the eyes of man so that he can understand the spiritual meaning of the passage. This is known as illumination (Ps 119:18; 1 Cor. 2:12-13; Eph. 1:17-18).

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<sup>30</sup> “The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) by Westminster Divines,” Ligonier Ministries, accessed February 24, 2021, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith/>.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: the Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 304

<sup>32</sup> John Piper, *Future Grace: the Purifying Power of the Promises of God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2012), 10.

<sup>33</sup> Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: the Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 317.

- a. Inspiration is the Spirit's work of breathing out God's revelatory word in writing form.
  - b. Illumination is the Spirit's work of taking that written Word and making its spiritual meaning clear to the individual reader.<sup>34</sup>
  - c. This distinction is crucial because inspiration leads to an inerrant Bible, while an individual's interpretation can be mistaken.<sup>35</sup>
2. The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing (1 Cor. 1:18).
3. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14; cf. Jn. 3:19; 2 Cor. 4:3).
- ii. The clarity of Scripture does not mean that everyone will agree on how to interpret the Bible.<sup>36</sup>
  1. Faithful readers of Scripture will agree that the Bible has an intended, objective meaning based upon authorial intent. However, they might disagree about what this meaning is.
    - a. The author ultimately decides the meaning. The reader is to seek to understand that meaning.
  2. The need for Theological Triage:<sup>37</sup>
    - a. First order issues are those include those that are most central to the Christian faith, such that disagreement on these doctrines makes one outside of the Christian faith (Trinity, full-deity and humanity of Christ, justification by faith alone, and the authority of Scripture).
    - b. Second order issues are those in which faithful Christians can disagree and recognize each other as believers but will create boundaries between them. This leads to different denominations and local churches (baptism).
    - c. Third order issues are those in which Christians can disagree and remain in close fellowship with one another (eschatology).

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<sup>34</sup> These definitions are found in Ibid. 321

<sup>35</sup> Michael Scott Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 54.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: the Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 322.

<sup>37</sup> R. Albert Mohler, "A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity," Albert Mohler, July 12, 2005, <https://albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity>.

- iii. The clarity of Scripture does not mean each text is to be isolated on a hermeneutical island.<sup>38</sup>
  - 1. Scripture is a unitary whole and will not contradict itself.
  - 2. Barrett notes, “Since God is the divine author of the *entire* biblical text, all of Scripture must be taken into account whenever we read one portion of it.”<sup>39</sup> This is known as the analogy of Scripture (*analogia Scripturae*).
  - 3. Scripture is its own best interpreter. The clear passages will help to interpret the less clear.
  - 4. Most heresies in Christianity begin when one passage is isolated, while the rest of Scripture is set aside.
    - a. An example is Arianism, which believes that Jesus, as the Son of God, was created by God. They support this view with Scripture saying that God is one (Deut. 6:4; Is. 43:10-11). They set aside the clear teaching of the deity of the Son in support of their view. This is why the entire canon of Scripture must be taken into consideration when interpreting the Bible.
- e. Christians must not reach the conclusion that Scripture is unclear, but rather their understanding is not complete.
  - i. Paul reminds his readers they will only know in part in this life. They see in a mirror dimly but will one day see clearly (1 Cor. 13:9-12).
  - ii. Humility is necessary for the believer reading Scripture.
- f. Jesus’s view:
  - i. Jesus believed the Bible to be clear and understandable for those who read it.
    - 1. Haven’t you read what David did...? Or haven’t you read in the Law...? (Mt. 12:3, 5)
    - 2. Haven’t you read...? (Mt. 19:4)
    - 3. Have you never read in the Scriptures ...? (Mt. 21:42)
    - 4. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ (Mt. 9:13; cf. Hos. 6:6)
    - 5. You are Israel’s teacher and do you not understand these things?” (Jn. 3:10)
    - 6. You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.” (Mt. 22:29)
    - 7. “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” (Lk. 24:25)

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<sup>38</sup> Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: the Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 323.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

- ii. Jesus believed all of Scripture to be pointing to His coming, a point He argued was clear and should have been recognized by the religious leaders (Jn. 5:39-40).
8. Tolle Lege, Tolle Lege (Take and Read)
  - a. Having confidence in the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, authoritative, sufficient, and clear Word of God should lead to a growing desire to read the Bible.
  - b. Commit to reading the Bible daily that you might know God. Remember: it is God speaking. He has spoken and must be heard and obeyed. It is for your greatest benefit and joy to know the Scripture so that you might know God and the Son whom He has sent.
  - c. Commit to reading the Bible through in a year (it takes around fifteen minutes every day to complete in a year's time). Christians are not too busy for the Bible and cannot afford to remain ignorant of it.
  - d. As followers of Christ, living like Christ is of top priority, and this includes living in submission to the Word of God.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why is studying theology necessary for the Christian?
2. What are the three verbal mediums through which God speaks?
3. What does verbal-plenary inspiration mean?
4. How is God's character linked to His Word?
5. Why is Jesus's view so important to understand?
6. Would your faith be shaken if the Bible contained errors?
7. Does the authority of Scripture only encompass believers?
8. How should we utilize reason, emotions, culture, and science when they contradict Scripture?
9. Does the clarity of Scripture mean that everything is clear?
10. How is your Bible reading strengthened because of this doctrine?
11. How can we praise God for the gift of His Word given to us?
12. What will you do in response to this lesson?

### **Further Reading**

Below are a few books that would be recommended reading for those who wish to learn more about this topic:

- *Taking God at His Word* by Kevin DeYoung
- *God's Word Alone* by Matthew Barrett
- *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (See attached below)
- *A Peculiar Glory and Reading the Bible Supernaturally* by John Piper
- *Final Word* by John MacArthur
- *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* by B. B. Warfield
- *He is There and He is Not Silent* by Francis A. Schaeffer



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## 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 misunderstanding 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 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 Exposition is not printed here but can be obtained by contacting: ICBI / P.O. Box 13261 / Oakland, CA 94661 / (415)-339-1064.

## **A SHORT STATEMENT**

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
4. 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.
5. 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.

## **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 in 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.

**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.

**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**

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