INERRANCY AND THE LOCAL CHURCH:
WHAT DOES THE DEBATE MEAN
TO THE PEOPLE IN THE PEWS?

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Biblical inerrancy is not just a scholarly debate amongst academics. It is a debate that reaches down to every church in every pew each week. Absent the doctrine, why preach the Bible at all? Biblical inerrancy is a singular and vital doctrine, and the imperative for expository preaching.

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When discussing the definition of inerrancy, one is reminded of the dialogue between Alice and Humpty Dumpty,

> "When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what *I* choose it to mean—neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things." "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."[1]

In the theological literature, Erickson presents the issue succinctly, "the term 'inerrancy' means different things to different people, who contend over which position properly deserves to be called by that name."[2]

While some theological arguments or fads come and go, the debate on inerrancy returns with almost cosmic regularity. To some, defending inerrancy is the classic example of a *fool's errand*. University of North Carolina professor and regular contributor to *Christianity Today* Molly Worthen, in a recent book on evangelicalism states, "The inerrant Bible was a symbol burdened with the centuries-old tangle of

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[1] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Champaign, IL: Project Gutenberg e-book, 2001), 83.

[2] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 191.

faith and reason and was beginning to crack under the weight."[3] For Worthen and those of her view, the divisions within evangelicalism would be solved if the whole notion of inerrancy, regardless of how it is defined, was discarded. Defining inerrancy has vexed evangelicalism for nearly 140 years.[4] The Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), which in purpose has existed to discuss, study, and defend inerrancy for most of its existence, has only one point to its doctrinal statement, "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs."[5] As to the intent and meaning of inerrancy, members of ETS are referred to "the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978).[6] ETS further states,

> The case for biblical inerrancy rests on the absolute trustworthiness of God and Scripture's testimony to itself. A proper understanding of inerrancy takes into account the language, genres, and intent of Scripture. We reject approaches to Scripture that deny that biblical truth claims are grounded in reality.[7]

In the most recent edition of the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, the authors on the entry for "Evangelicalism," state,

> Reformists are dissatisfied with the traditional doctrine of inerrancy and would substitute "infallibility" (Scripture infallibly leads us to Christ), "final authority in what it teaches" (but nowhere else), or "final authority in faith and doctrine" (but not necessarily in matters of science or history).[8]

Beale makes the point most forcefully,

> There is an erosion of the traditional evangelical notion of what it means for the Bible to be true, as formulated, for example, in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. This slow process of weakening the traditional, biblical view of the Bible's truth is nothing less than the very identity of evangelicalism.[9]

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[3] Molly Worthen. *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 54. Worthen's antipathy to inerrancy (of any form) is evident throughout this book. She calls the doctrine of inerrancy, "a comforting gauze that concealed a great deal of ugliness. It disguised the compromise and confusion that are unavoidable when moderns try to live by an ancient and often obscure text" (198).

[4] For a thorough discussion see Peter Maaten van Bemmerlen, *Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sanday and Warfield*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 13. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987).

[5] ETS, "Doctrinal Basis," http://www.etsjets.org/about (accessed 3 January 2015). A brief statement affirming Trinitarianism was subsequently added in 1990.

[6] ETS, "Membership Requirements," http://www.etsjets.org/about/membership_requirements (accessed 3 January 2015).

[7] Ibid.

[8] Richard V. Pierard and Walter A. Elwell, "Evangelicalism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 409.

[9] G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 221.

Since 1950, there have been over 500 English titles published wherein "inerrancy" has either been in the main title or a chapter heading. There are as many listings in the *ATLA Serials* database for titles containing "inerrancy" in the title. And, if you search the "source of all knowledge," *Google Books*, entering "inerrancy" will yield 121,000 results. The debate over the meaning and scope of inerrancy has continued unabated and is the theme of this year's annual meeting of ETS.

What actually constitutes inerrancy? How is it to be defined: broadly or narrowly? Olson, perhaps overstating his point, notes,

> By the 1990's a rough consensus was emerging among evangelical theologians that Scripture must be considered inerrant in some meaningful sense, but that its inerrancy must not be defined using modern scientific standards of accuracy.[10]

In many circles "inerrancy" became something of a "litmus test" as Packer states,

> Shibboleths—test words indicating identity and allegiance (cf. Judg. 12:5–6)—are always suspect as obstacles to real thought, which indeed they can become. "Infallible" and "inerrant" as descriptions of the Bible function as shibboleths in some circles and so come under this suspicion in others. Individual definitions of both terms—minimizing, maximizing, and depreciating—are not lacking; it would be idle and irresponsible to speak as if there were always clarity and unanimity here.[11]

Those "tests" invariably make their way from the academic and scholarly debate into the local congregation. While the academic debates on inerrancy wax and wane, the categories we detail in the following chart have remained relatively static.

View of Scripture	Description
Inerrantist	Views Scripture as inspired by God and thus is entirely without error.
Maximalist	Views Scripture as entirely reliable on matters of faith and practice, and largely reliable on ancillary subjects such as history.
Minimalist	Views Scripture as generally reliable in matters of faith and practice; although even in these matters it can be culturally dated or biased. Scripture cannot be considered as a primary source in history or ancillary subjects.

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[10] Roger E. Olson, "Bible/Scripture," in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 155. The idea that there was even a "rough consensus" (whatever that might mean) among evangelical theologians on this issue seems rather far-fetched.

[11] J. I. Packer, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," in *Scripture and Truth*. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 351.

Mythologist	Views Scripture as simply another ancient religious text. It has no more or less uniqueness or authority than other mythological texts. Some would view Scripture as propagandist or manipulative literature.

The main categories for evangelicals: Inerrantists and Maximalists, are occasionally hard to distinguish as the line between the two undulates and definitions occasionally become muddled. However, even within the *Inerrantist* position there is another spectrum or set of categories. We can illustrate Categories of inerrantists with the following chart:

Type of Inerrantist	Description
Classic	Based on the arguments of A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, these are the classic statements of a "verbal plenary inspiration" position generally articulated in the Princeton tradition.
Evidentialist	Views inerrancy as defensible on the basis of "proof." Opponents to inerrancy would collapse under the weight of evidence supporting biblical statements on history and science.
Chicagoan	Beginning with the formation of ETS and culminating in the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*; sought to define and affirm inerrancy in a manner that crossed theological and hermeneutical boundaries.
Hermeneutical	Views inerrancy as bound together with the Grammatical-Historical (or some close variation) method of hermeneutics. The overlay of any other method onto Scripture is a *de facto* denial of inerrancy. *Ipsissima Verba*, particularly in gospel studies, is usually affirmed.
Critical	Views inerrancy as independent of hermeneutical method. Literary critical methodologies are legitimate to assist in interpretation, but are illegitimate when employed to determine authenticity. *Ipsissima Vox*, particularly in gospel studies, is usually affirmed.

The current debate within evangelical inerrantists is largely between those holding a "classic" position and those holding something closer to the "critical" position.

The modern debate about inerrancy really begins in the nineteenth century as the inroads of rationalism and new scientific theories related to the age of the earth and the origins of man—diametrically opposed to the biblical accounts—were being formed and articulated. These theories increasingly made holding to traditional biblical inspiration and inerrancy untenable for the increasingly liberal wing of theological thought.

The debates in a more formal setting were between the Princeton theologians A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield against mainly Charles Briggs. In the newly created journal *The Presbyterian Review* (a journal with joint editorial responsibility between

Princeton and Union Theological Seminary's and their opposing views on inerrancy), Hodge and Warfield, made the following declaration,

> During the entire history of the Christian theology the word Inspiration has been used to express either some or all of the activities of God, cooperating with its human authors in the genesis of Holy Scripture. We prefer to use it in the single sense of God's continued work of superintendence, by which, His providential, gracious, and supernatural contributions having been presupposed, He presided over the sacred writers in their entire work of writing, with the design and effect of rendering that writing an errorless record of the matters He designed them to communicate, and hence constituting the entire volume in all its parts the Word of God to us.[12]

Hodge and Warfield then proceed throughout their article to define and defend the concept that would be known as "verbal plenary inspiration." They concluded by stating,

> The legitimate proofs of the doctrine, resting primarily on the claims of the sacred writers, having not been rebutted by valid objections, that doctrine stands doubly proved. *Gnosis* gives place to *epignosis*—faith to rational conviction—and we rest in the joyful and unshaken certainty that we possess a Bible written by the hands of man indeed, but also graven with the finger of God.[13]

Within evangelicalism this classic position remains dominant, but increasingly is being challenged.[14] In *Five View on Biblical Inerrancy*, R. Albert Mohler presented what he called the "Classic Position," largely an updated presentation of the Hodge-Warfield construct and the *Chicago Statement*. He stated, particularly as inerrancy applies to the church,

> The affirmation of biblical inerrancy is necessary for the health of the church and for our obedience to the Scriptures. Though necessary, it is not sufficient, taken by itself, to constitute an evangelical doctrine of Scripture. Evangelicals must embrace a comprehensive affirmation of the Bible as the Word of God written. In the end, inspiration requires inerrancy, and inerrancy affirms the Bible's plenary authority. The Bible is not inerrant, and thus the Word of God; it is the Word of God, and thus inerrant.[15]

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[12] A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, "Inspiration." *The Presbyterian Review*, 2, no. 6 (April 1881):232.

[13] Hodge and Warfield, "Inspiration," 260.

[14] See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Response to R. Albert Mohler," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, gen. eds. Counterpoints in Bible and Theology, Stanley N. Gundry, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2013), 71–76.

[15] R. Albert Mohler, "When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classic Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, gen. eds. Counterpoints in Bible and Theology, Stanley N. Gundry, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2013), 58.

In responding to Mohler, Kevin J. Vanhoozer states,

> The questions I've raised about Mohler's "classic" doctrine of inerrancy are not questions about the truthfulness of Scripture. They are rather about the adequacy of the category "classic doctrine of inerrancy" and the overconfident conflation of affirming inerrancy with certain types of interpretation . . . I think we must do more than call people to hold onto inerrancy: we must first define it, and then distance ourselves from its interpretive abuses.[16]

Vanhoozer, an ETS member who affirms inerrancy, is one of a growing number of evangelical inerrantists who are dissatisfied with the declamation of the doctrine in the classic manner.

In the debate with A. A. Hodge and Warfield, when it was Briggs's turn at the pen, he stated,

> *Verbal* inspiration is doubtless a more precise and emphatic definition, than *plenary* inspiration; but this very emphasis and precision imperil the doctrine of Inspiration itself by bringing it into conflict with a vast array of objections along the whole line of Scripture and History, which must be met and overcome in incessant warfare, where both sides may count on doubtful victories, but where the weak, ignorant, and hesitating stumble and fall into divers temptations and may make shipwreck of their faith.[17]

In this, Briggs was more correct than even he probably realized as the debate continued well past his life. But what does the debate mean in the local church? What is at stake, and why is this discussion important?

Inerrancy and the Local Church

In recent years an entire denomination was essentially split apart and a new group was formed over the issue of inerrancy.

The "resurgence" within the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980's, where conservatives[18] and inerrantists coordinated their efforts to gain control of the denominational machinery, was enormously disruptive in the lives of many local churches. An entire new group, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, was formed. Extolling what they perceived to be their "moderate" and "historic" Baptist position, they stated as one of their key doctrinal tenants:

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[16] Vanhoozer, "Response" 75–76.

[17] C. A. Briggs, "Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures in Relation to Their Inspiration." *The Presbyterian Review*, 2, no. 7 (July 1881): 551–52 [emphasis in original].

[18] Often these were "political" and "social" conservatives who were perhaps more concerned with agenda items in those arenas rather than the theological concerns. In many respects this was also the era when the "Moral Majority" conservative, Republican-leaning politics became increasingly identified with evangelicalism.

We want to be biblical—especially in our view of the Bible. That means we dare not claim less for the Bible than the Bible claims for itself. The Bible neither claims nor reveals inerrancy as a Christian teaching. Bible claims must be based on the Bible, not on human interpretations of the Bible.[19]

It is interesting to compare this statement (and the longer doctrinal statement of the CBF) with Charles H. Spurgeon's lamentation of the state of the Baptist church in England as he was fighting the same battle about a century earlier. He summarized his position on the theological trends in his day as he stated:

Look at the church of the present day; the advanced school, I mean. In its midst we see preachers who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. They talk of the Lord Jesus, but deny his Godhead, which is his power; they speak of the Holy Spirit, but deny his personality, wherein lies his very existence. They take away the substance and power from all the doctrines of revelation, though they pretend still to believe them. They talk of redemption, but they deny substitution, which is the essence of it; they extol the Scriptures, but deny their infallibility, wherein lies its value; they use the phrases of orthodoxy, and believe nothing in common with the orthodox.[20]

It seems indisputable that evangelicalism is moving into a new phase of the inerrancy debate. The discussion is moving away from various "objections along the whole line of Scripture and History."[21] The emphasis is moving away from individual problem or proof passages to issues of genre and hermeneutics.[22] As these discussions, definitions, and defenses continue at an increasing pace, D. A. Carson's observation from the last major phase is worth remembering:

A high view of Scripture is of little value to us if we do not enthusiastically embrace the Scripture's authority. But today we multiply the means for circumventing or dissipating that authority. I am not here speaking of those who formally deny the Scripture's authority: it is only to be expected that they should avoid the hard sayings and uncomfortable truths. But those of us who uphold the thorough truthfulness of God's Word have no excuse.[23]

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[19] Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. "Frequently Asked Questions." http://www.thefellowship.info/identity/faq/ (accessed 1 Nov 2014).

[20] Charles H. Spurgeon. "The Form of Godliness without the Power," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit; Sermons Preached and Revised by C. H. Spurgeon in the Year 1889*. (reprint, Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1975), 308.

[21] Ibid.

[22] See Kevin J. Vanhoozer's contribution "Augustinian Inerrancy: Literary Meaning, Literal Truth, and Literate Interpretation in the Economy of Biblical Discourse," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, gen eds., Counterpoints in Bible and Theology Series, Stanley N. Gundry, ed (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2013), 199–235.

[23] D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*. Compiled by Andrew David Naselli (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 106. This article first as "Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture,"

Do These Differences Make Inerrancy "Impossible"?

Christian Smith in his *The Bible Made Impossible*[24] laments a Biblicism and the promulgation of "how to" books based on the Bible. Some of Smith's criticisms are certainly valid. Supercilious works purporting to teach a "biblical" truth can instead undermine a layperson's trust in the Scripture, especially when those "how to" type of books fail. For example, does anyone really believe that Dan 1:8–13 is properly extrapolated into a comprehensive weight loss and healthy eating paradigm as Rick Warren does?[25] Smith's larger criticism of "Biblicism," by which he means an affirmation of inerrancy, is more pointed, he states,

> Christians, perhaps especially biblicist Christians, are "all over the map" on what the Bible teaches about most issues, topics, and questions. In this way, the *actual functional outcome* of the biblicist view of scripture belies biblicism's theoretical claims about the Bible. Something is wrong in the biblicist picture that cannot be ignored.[26]

What Smith postulates is that inerrancy, what he calls biblicism, cannot be true because there are so many diverse interpretations of the Bible, even among inerrantists, that this method of understanding the nature of Scripture is self-defeating. In this regard Smith asks a question that virtually every Christian asks at some point in his early exposure to biblical instruction, "Why do good men disagree?" He calls it the problem of "pervasive interpretive pluralism." He states,

> So the question is this: if the Bible is given by a truthful and omnipotent God as an internally consistent and perspicuous text precisely for the purpose of revealing to humans correct beliefs, practices, and morals, then *why is it that the presumably sincere Christians to whom it has been given cannot read it and come to common agreement about what it teaches?* I know of no good, honest answer to that question. If the Bible is all that biblicism claims it to be, then Christians—especially who share biblicist beliefs—ought to be able to come to solid consensus about what it teaches, or at least on most matters of importance. But they do not and apparently cannot.[27]

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in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, edited by Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

[24] Christian Smith. *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012).

[25] Rick Warren, Daniel Amen, and Mark Hyman. *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

[26] Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible*, 26 (italics in original).

[27] Ibid., (italics in original). This is often an argument that Catholicism uses against Protestantism. That is, absent the church as a controlling factor in the interpretation and application of Scripture, or the *Magisterium*, then Protestantism splits and splinters and a person is left with no sure guide as to what to believe. Smith apparently accepted this apologetic and subsequent to the first edition of *The Bible Made Impossible*, converted to Catholicism.

Smith calls pervasive interpretive pluralism the factor that discredits biblicism, or better, inerrancy.[28] "The undeniable fact that entrenched, ubiquitous disagreements about what scripture teaches on most issues, large and small, represents a fatal blow to biblicism."[29]

However, disagreements over "issues" have continued through church history and are hardly unique to the Reformation and post-reformation era. For instance, regarding the mode of baptism even John Calvin stated,

> But, whether the person being baptized should be wholly immersed, and whether thrice or once, whether he should only be sprinkled with poured water—these details are of no importance, but ought to be optional to churches according to the diversity of countries. Yet, the word "baptize" means to immerse, and it is clear that the rite of immersion was observed in the ancient church.[30]

The problem of interpreting the Bible and then actually applying it to the modern situation is always challenging. As McDermott states, "Because evangelicals believe that God's message for the church is applicable to every age, there has been a tendency to apply apparently time-bound passages by isolating the universally valid principle behind the text in order to find its equivalent present-day cultural clothing."[31] As Krieder states,

> Evangelicalism is not monolithic. It never has and never could be. It has always been diverse. There are a variety of ways people who respect the Bible read the Bible. Pervasive interpretative pluralism is evidence of the fallibility of biblical interpreters. The Bible is not self-interpreting; it must be read. It does not speak for itself; it must be read. It does not accomplish the purpose for which it was given unless it is read. And when it is read, it is read by human eyes within human bodies situated in a particular culture in time and space.[32]

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[28] While Smith states his position "does not question the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Bible" (viii), his definition of biblicism, by which he means, "a theory about the Bible that emphasizes together its exclusive authority, infallibility, perspicuity, self-sufficiency, internal consistency, self-evident meaning, and universal applicability" (ibid), makes it clear that the traditional doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy is exactly the target of his attack. His work, and Worthen's *Apostles of Reason*, are currently bookends of the literature of the *Maximalist* position.

[29] Ibid., 67.

[30] John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Library of Christian Classics 21. Edited by John T. McNeil, Translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 4.15.19; 2:1320.

[31] Gerald R. McDermott (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 38.

[32] Glenn R. Kreider, "The Bible Made Impossible?: A Response to Christian Smith. A Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Baltimore, MD. (Nov 2013), 13.

If a text speaks to a situation or circumstance which no longer exists, how is that passage made "profitable" to the modern Christian? For instance, in Paul's epistles he has several discussions of how slaves who are also Christians are to live. Since slavery has been essentially abolished, how are those passages to be applied today? After a rather impassioned discussion on the subject of slavery (and rather missing the point in the differences between the institution of slavery in the Roman empire *vis a vis* the race-based slavery of the American South, Daniel Akin then applies Titus 2:9–10 to the realm of the employer-employee relationships.[33] While the "employer-employee" application may be a useful model, or "good and necessary inference," it still is not the exact situation that the text is addressing.

When these issues are not precisely addressed, especially in preaching, the person in the pew can be confused by a lack of consistency in both interpretation and application of the Scripture.

This debate even touches the most basic issue facing the average Christian in the pew; that is, "What Bible version should I use?" In discussing Bible translation, Leland Ryken states, "The evangelical Protestant theology of inspiration has traditionally been espoused verbal or plenary ("complete, full") inspiration of the Bible. This view holds that God inspired not only the thoughts of biblical writers but their words."[34] After quoting several notable adherents of the classic position, he then goes on to state,

> The application of the doctrine of verbal inspiration to Bible translation should be obvious: If the words rather than just the thoughts of the Bible are inspired by God, it is the words that a translation should reproduce.[35]

And finally,

> It is my belief that an essentially literal translation is congruent with the doctrine of verbal or plenary inspiration. Contrariwise, the preoccupation with dynamic equivalent Bibles is with the thoughts of Scripture, with no priority assigned to the words. I come to the unwelcome conclusions that many evangelicals who theoretically espouse the doctrine of verbal or plenary inspiration—who reject the position of theological liberalism that the Bible contains primarily the thoughts of God—are betrayed by their very choice of a dynamic equivalent translation into the position that they claim to reject.[36]

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[33] Daniel Akin, "Titus" in *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition, eds David Platt, Daniel L. Akin and Tony Merida (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), 267–75.

[34] Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 131.

[35] Ibid., 133.

[36] Ibid., 134–35.

Conclusion

2014 is the one-hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, perhaps the worst war in terms of carnage and destruction in human history, while at the same time probably being the most preventable and unnecessary war in history. Most thought the war would be over within a few months, by Christmas 1914 at the latest. On Christmas 1914, unofficial "ceasefires" occurred and there was widespread fraternizing along the front lines.[37] Soldiers of both sides got together to celebrate the season, play soccer (for the non-American, football), and generally enjoy camaraderie.

The commanding officers on both sides issued orders against this sort of activity in the future as it was viewed as "diminishing the fighting spirit" of the troops.

The inerrancy debate has seen significant "fighting spirit" and as an inerrantist I can appreciate both the need and necessity to "fight" for this vital doctrine; however, I also agree with Carson, who wrote:

> While I fear that evangelicalism is heading for another severe conflict on the doctrine of Scripture, and while it is necessary to face these impending debates with humility and courage, what is far more alarming is the diminishing authority of the Scriptures in the churches. This is taking place not only among those who depreciate the consistent truthfulness of Scripture but also (if for different reasons) among those who most vociferously defend it. To some extent we are all part of the problem; and perhaps we can do most to salvage something of value from the growing fragmentation by pledging ourselves in repentance and faith to learning and obeying God's most holy Word. Then we shall also be reminded that the challenge to preserve and articulate a fully self-consistent and orthodox doctrine of Scripture cannot be met by intellectual power alone, but only on our knees and by the power of God.[38]

Biblical inerrancy is not just a scholarly debate amongst academics; it is that, but it is a debate that reaches down to every church and every pew each week; whether the preacher affirms, denies, or even ridicules the concept of inerrancy. Absent the doctrine of inerrancy, why preach the Bible at all?[39] Biblical inerrancy is a singular and vital doctrine; it is, as MacArthur states, the imperative for expository preaching. In the first article of the first issue of *The Master's Seminary Journal*, he stated,

> Inerrancy demands an exegetical process and an expository proclamation. Only the exegetical process preserves God's Word entirely, guarding the treasure of

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[37] See "Christmas Truce" at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_truce (accessed 1 November 2014).

[38] Carson, "Recent Developments," 108–109.

[39] A recent op-ed piece in a local newspaper by a pastor who calls himself "Preacher Johnson" states this simply and most clearly, "An errorless scripture is essential to Christianity. If we can point to one verse and claim an error, then how can we point to any verse with a certainty of truth?" Middlesboro Daily News Online, http://www.newsweek.com/2015/01/02/thats-not-what-bible-says-294018.html (accessed 11 January 2015).

revelation and declaring the meaning exactly as He intended it to be proclaimed. Expository preaching is the result of the exegetical process. Thus, it is the essential link between inerrancy and proclamation. It is mandated to preserve the purity of God's originally given inerrant Word and to proclaim the whole counsel of God's redemptive truth.[40]

As Holland states, "This doctrine is not merely for scholastic conversation; rather it provides authority and integrity to our proclamation of the gospel."[41] Christian Smith and others who reject inerrancy often advocate a rather nebulous "viewing Scripture through the lens of Christ"[42] or to use a phrase from the 1970's, "salvational reliability."[43] However, if as a recent *Newsweek* article proclaimed the Gospel accounts only contain about 15 verses that reasonably reflect Christ's words,[44] what value is the "Christocentric lens" and how can the salvation plan detailed in the Scripture possibility be validated?

The inerrancy of Scripture: its declaration, defense, and demonstration is more than a scholarly debate; it is the central to the Christian life and the debate reverberates in the pew. As the concluding section of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Iinerrancy* affirms:

> 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. . . . If this is not seen and if for the time being basic evangelical doctrine 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.[45]

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[40] John MacArthur, "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching." *MSJ* 1, no 1 (Spring 1990): 15,

[41] Rick Holland, "Expository Preaching: The Logical Response to a Robust Bibliology." *MSJ* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 37.

[42] Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible*, 98.

[43] See George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 277–90.

[44] Kurt Eichenwald, "The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin," *Newsweek* Culture Section, December 23, 2014. (accessed 5 January 2015). http://www.newsweek.com/2015/01/02/thats-not-what-bible-says-294018.html

[45] International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy." http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf (accessed on 5 January 2015).