

説教：真理はあなたがたを自由にする
あるいは 聖書無誤説の誤り
Sermon: The Truth Shall Set You Free OR
Why the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy is False

Paul Tsuchido Shew

John 8:31-32

Psalm 25:1-5

Worship is an exercise in humility. As worshipers, we gather together before the Creator God, with an attitude of humility as we seek to know God and the power of his salvation. Recognizing our own frailty and fallenness, we seek ultimate truth and righteousness in God alone.

The Bible, the Word of God, is our ultimate authority as Christians. We do not rely on the changeable and easily corruptible opinions of people for religious authority. This is a bedrock belief for all Abrahamic faiths. For Christian faith and doctrine, we do not rely on the fickle judgement of humans, but on the unchanging Word of God. On this point, Christians of every stripe and color are united.

But how do we understand the Scriptures? That is a surprisingly difficult question, upon which Christians have a diversity of perspectives. In John 8:31-32, Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." Jesus' teaching

here is celebrated by Christians around the world. You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free! Coming to faith in Jesus Christ is a liberating experience, that Christians can readily testify to. Through coming to know the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we can experience freedom and liberation. Freedom from sin. Freedom from guilt. Freedom from past mistakes. Freedom to be the people that God created us to be. Freedom to make a fresh start, to be born again. Freedom to love. Freedom to forgive. Freedom to hope.

But again, how do we know truth as expressed in the Scriptures? Seeking the truth first requires that we recognize the relationship between God and truth. It is similar to the relationship between God and love. God is truth. All truth comes from God. Psalm 119:160, "The sum of your word is truth; and every one of your righteous ordinances endures forever." In John 8, Jesus promises that if we continue in his word, if we follow him and live according to his teachings as his disciple, then we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free. In response to being loved and forgiven, we follow Jesus, and in so doing we will also come to know the truth. Seeking truth is a lifelong task for Christians that functions hand in hand with faithful living.

Since I became a Christian in high school, I have been blessed with experiences in a wide variety of Christian faith traditions from Methodist to Quaker to Evangelical to Catholic to Pentecostal. I appreciated the good in them all and learned from them all. However, I also learned that not all expressions of Christian faith are equally valid. This is true regarding how we understand the Scriptures. Within the diversity of Christian perspectives, some positions are more valid than others. I do not say this to disparage particular groups, but so that we can think critically about this issue so

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important to Christian faith. In the last few decades, certain branches of Christianity have been strongly asserting that knowing the truth as expressed in scripture requires a literal reading of the Bible as the inerrant Word of God.

This doctrine of inerrancy is straightforward and easy to understand. It elevates the sovereignty and power of God as well as highlighting the fallenness and humility of humans. These are also important themes so there is a natural attraction to this position. The doctrine of Biblical inerrancy asserts that every word of the holy scriptures is verbally inspired by God himself, and that there can be no errors at all in scripture – after all, God cannot make a mistake. According to this doctrine, scripture is the ultimate authority for all knowledge and is completely without error in all matters, whether faith or doctrine or ethical or scientific or historical. Statements of faith for churches and organizations that accept this doctrine often include a statement of faith in “*The inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures as originally given, their plenary inspiration by God, and their supreme authority*”. Plenary means verbal, word-for-word inspiration. In other words, this doctrine teaches that the words of Scripture are the exact words of God himself. This is the same way that most Muslims regard the Quran.

As a young Christian, I participated in organizations and churches that taught that if you do not believe in Biblical inerrancy, then you are not a real Christian, and that Biblical inerrancy was the kingpin of Christian faith. Take away inerrancy and all of scripture, all of Christian doctrine unravels, they said. Sometimes when reading the Bible, that doctrine seemed hard to accept or understand to me. It left me with so many questions. How can we possibly understand many of the stories of the Old Testament that seem to contradict

our understanding of history and science, and even our understanding of God? I read many apologetic works that tried to explain away the seeming contradictions and the difficult problems encountered with a literal reading of the Bible, but I was still left with unanswered questions about how to understand much of the Old Testament.

To some Christians, this may seem like a diversion or an unnecessary aside to this message. But for Christians raised in conservative Churches or influenced by them, this is an extremely important issue that deserves our attention. In recent decades, the proponents of inerrancy have been increasingly vocal within Christianity gaining surprising influence. So Christians with other perspectives must address this issue head-on for the sake of believers in our churches and so that we are not misunderstood by the world.

Perhaps the greatest lie of this doctrine is that it teaches that it is the central point upon which all other Christian doctrine hinges. Proponents of inerrancy assert that if you deny inerrancy, then you deny the foundation of Christian faith. To them, giving up Biblical inerrancy means renouncing Christian faith itself. Ironically, this is causing many young people from conservative churches to abandon Christianity because they cannot accept inerrancy. The doctrine has ironically become a reason for many people to abandon Christian faith.

Let us remember the tremendous diversity within Christianity. Throughout Christian history, there have been many approaches to understanding the Scriptures. Reading the writings of the early church show that an *allegorical* interpretive approach was common. Many Protestant denominations, including the Methodist Church, have historically asserted Biblical *sufficiency*

– the doctrine that the holy Scriptures contain everything necessary for salvation. Some denominations prefer to describe Scripture as being *infallible* – the belief that the holy Scriptures are infallible in teaching all we need for Christian faith and doctrine. In the early twentieth century, the new approach of Modernism gained popularity, teaching that the holy Bible was a very important collection of historic writings that should be consulted in determining Christian faith, ethics and doctrine. Conservatives felt that Christian Modernism went too far in watering down the importance of the scriptures, and this caused them to double-down on taking scripture literally. The current form of inerrancy doctrine formed in the twentieth century as a reaction against Modernism.

So, how should we understand the Scriptures? As seekers of the truth, we have multiple ways to approach the Scriptures, but we should avoid extremes which compromise the core of our faith. The doctrine of inerrancy is such an extreme. Here is a brief list of some of the obvious problems with the doctrine of inerrancy. First, the doctrine maintains that the original texts are the only inerrant versions, but of course those original copies do not exist. Second, the doctrine ignores the editing process of the original texts, and the long process that occurred to produce the versions of the scriptures we have today. It ignores the fact that according to their standards, nothing we have today can be inerrant because we do not possess the original documents. Third, inerrancy requires intense mental gymnastics to try to explain away the many contradictions in the scriptures. Forth, inerrancy supports superficial, literal readings that treat the diverse genre of scriptures as a history or scientific textbook. Fifth, it supports late-bronze age ethics that are considered hideous by today's standards. (If you don't know what I'm referring to here, then carefully read Deuteronomy and Leviticus, imagining

that everything will be applied literally to today.) And sixth, it creates a false contradiction between science and Christian faith.

With the growth of Evangelicalism in the US and around the world, the doctrine of inerrancy has grown and spread in Christianity like a cancer. Its emphasis on the sovereignty of God and human humility can be seductive to pious, dedicated Christians of any background. Unfortunately, there are too many naïve Christians promoting this doctrine today without knowing alternative approaches or the implications of this doctrine. In the end it stifles critical thinking and leaves Christians unable to make sense of much of scripture and unable to integrate their faith in the modern world. The conclusion of this point is that Biblical inerrancy is an unnecessary stumbling block that damages faith in the end.

So, how should we understand the Scriptures? Let us look to Jesus. Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." This same spirit is reflected in Psalm 25:1-5

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust.

I trust in you;

Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.

Guide me in your truth and teach me,

for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

As we seek together as Christians to discern the truth of the Scriptures and to read and understand them appropriately, we should first and foremost keep our eyes on Jesus. Jesus did not preach doctrinal purity about how to interpret scripture. Rather he preached, Love the Lord your God with all your

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heart and soul and mind, and Love your neighbor as yourself. Do to others as you would have them do to you. Love your enemies and do good for those who persecute you.

Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples." Not if you sign a statement of faith. He focused on keeping his word – living it out in our daily lives. Only by living a life of faith and putting into practice the grace and love demonstrated by Jesus will we know the truth.

This is the core of what it means to be a Christian. Our faith is expressed not in a rigid statement but in following Jesus in acts of love and compassion. And it is through the love of God and the love of neighbors that we can experience the transforming power of Christ that will truly set us free.