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THE ISSUE IS TRUTH

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Controversy is neither novel nor necessarily harmful to Christianity. Rather, controversy has resulted in clarification and reaffirmation of the essentials of the New Testament faith. Historians and a sizeable contingency of laymen know that church history is replete with vigorous discussion and debate. The Reformation era is a classic case in point. Another example from nineteenth century English Baptist ranks is pertinent. Amid the fires of the Downgrade Controversy in England, Charles H. Spurgeon wrote on November 23, 1887,

It is a great grief to me that hitherto many of our most honoured friends in the Baptist Union have, with strong determination, closed their eyes to serious divergencies from truth. I doubt not that their motive has been in a measure laudable, for they desired to preserve peace, and hope that errors, which they

¹In an era of semantic confusion, serious theological drift, frequent misrepresentation of the position of those who believe the Sacred Book, friends and associates requested that a series of tractates be prepared which would clarify the claims of those Christians who are convinced that the Bible is without error and which would answer the allegations that are often placed in array against us.

Although the author preferred a more exhaustive autograph in which the present subject could be elucidated in greater detail, the abbreviated format presented here was felt by all to be essential at the moment. Consequently, a succinct statement of what we believe to be the persuasion of most Baptists and other evangelicals throughout the earth is presented herein. The author is keenly aware that the Bible in one sense needs no defense. Attacks from without are notoriously unsuccessful. However, the subtle dangers of the crippling of missionary and evangelistic endeavors around the globe through the undermining of the very authority from which a bold mission mandate is given necessitates a strengthening of theological landmarks within.

Doctrinal orthodoxy is no substitute for evangelism. However, evangelism seldom, if ever, exists in any community of the faith other than those in which the Bible is the unquestioned authority. Therefore, these papers are humbly presented with the fervent prayer to God that His written word, the Bible, and the living Word, Jesus, may be loved and honored to the ends of the earth.

were forced to see, would be removed as their friends advanced in years and knowledge.

But at last even these will, I trust, discover that the new views are not the old truth in a better dress, but deadly errors with which we can have no fellowship. I regard full-grown “modern thought” as a totally new cult, having no more relation to Christianity than the mist of the evening to the everlasting hills.²

Both in the Reformation and in the Downgrade Controversy the pivotal issue was religious authority with the crucial question being, “How do you know that what you say is true?” Philosophers call the investigation of truth claims “epistemology.” The present contention among various Christian groups has as its focus a series of simple questions which demand some precise answers:

1. Is the Bible true?
2. If the Bible is true, in what sense can it be said to be true?
3. How much truth must the Bible contain in order to be a reliable and authoritative guide for faith and practice?

Ultimately the issue is truth!

The View of Jesus

The strangest enigma of the modern theological scene is the parade of theologians and churchmen who discount the total reliability of Scripture while affirming that Jesus is the only authority for the Christian. The logical dilemma in such a position is apparent. If it be granted that Jesus is the only authority, then how does one know what Jesus said or thought? The answer is that the only source for the teaching and thought of Jesus is the Bible. But if we cannot absolutely trust the Scriptures, then how do we know for certain what Jesus said or thought? Again, Spurgeon delineated the problem with precision:

Let us see to it that we set forth our Lord Jesus Christ as the infallible Teacher, through His inspired Word. I do not understand that loyalty to Christ which is accompanied by indifference to His words. How can we reverence His person, if His own words and those of His apostles are treated with disre-

²Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 152.

spect? Unless we receive His apostles' words, we do not receive Christ; for John saith, "He that knoweth God heareth us, he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."³

Furthermore, if Jesus is actually the ultimate authority to whom appeal is made in matters of faith, then why not listen to Jesus when He speaks about the Scriptures? This consideration makes a summary examination of what the Lord said about the Scriptures paramount in the present controversy. What follows does not begin to exhaust the subject, but it will demonstrate the lucid convictions of Jesus regarding the Bible:

1. Verbal Inspiration

Jesus answered and said unto them, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt 22:29–32; KJV).

The Sadducees, who rejected the possibility of resurrection, had a favorite parable which inevitably silenced the Pharisees, who were proponents of the resurrection. Sensing that Jesus believed in the resurrection, they broached the subject with Him. The well-known parable imagined an unlikely situation in which a woman married seven successive brothers according to the dictates of the law of Levirate marriage (Deut 25:5–6). "When all are resurrected," they inquired, "whose wife will she be?" The Lord's reply clearly affirms God's hand in Scripture. After assuring them that marriage was not a celestial contract, He spoke definitively of the resurrection. "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was *spoken unto you by God*, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" [author's italics]. Jesus is quoting Exodus 3:6, a passage written down by some human author, whom most of us would identify as Moses. Yet Jesus says that it was "spoken by God."

Matthew 19:4f is even more precise.

³Charles H. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 373.

And he answered and said unto them, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?'"

Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24, a passage written by Moses in which Adam uttered these words about his new union with Eve. Jesus says that Adam spoke God's Word.

Here is verbal inspiration. Critics denigrate this evangelical affirmation by assigning to it the meaning of mechanical dictation *in toto*. Such a claim is a misrepresentation. It is a handy straw man which at best displays theological ineptitude and naiveté. Properly understood, "verbal inspiration" means the following:

- a. Through visions, direct utterances, superintending the thought processes of writers, and other ways, God communicated to the prophets and the apostles the precise message which He willed them to record.
- b. Since the Bible consists of words, if there is inspiration of any kind, it certainly must include "verbal inspiration."
- c. The Spirit of God superintended the writing of the message so that what was recorded by the human author who penned the passage was exactly what God intended.
- d. Therefore, in the Bible we do not have merely an account of men's religious experiences, but we do have the very words of God.

J.B. Tidwell, the inimitable Bible scholar of the Department of Religion at Baylor University, said,

It should also be said that inspiration affected the very words. For it would be hardly possible for inspiration to insure the correct transmission of thought without in some way affecting the words. God so controlled the writers in the expression of His thought that they gave us the word of God in the language of men. And, being directed by an infallible guide, they kept out all error in the statement of facts. It is then as truly God's own word as if He had used no instrument at all in writing it. The ideas it expresses are the very ideas which God wanted to convey, so that God is fully responsible for every word of it.

Paul teaches this by saying he spoke in the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth (1 Cor 2:13).⁴

2. Plenary Inspiration

Then he said unto them, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25–27).

Clearly Jesus believed that God had spoken in the Scriptures. But to what extent do the Scriptures contain God’s Word? Most modern theologians are happy to agree that a portion of the Bible is reliably the Word of God. Only those passages offensive to autonomous reason and pseudo-aesthetic sensibilities are excluded. How much of the Bible did Jesus believe?

First, one must note that it is never recorded a single time that Jesus called into question anything written in the Scriptures. Furthermore, the passage before us records the post-resurrection conversation of Jesus with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The Lord rebukes them sternly but compassionately, calling them “fools” and “slow of heart to believe *all* that the prophets have spoken” [author’s italics]. Verse 27 declares that “Beginning at Moses and *all* the prophets, he expounded unto them in *all* the scriptures the things concerning himself” [author’s italics]. Interestingly, Jesus apparently considered Moses to be the author of the Pentateuch. Anyone who claims otherwise does not submit to Jesus’ authority. The Jewish canon was divided in several different ways, but as often as not the Old Testament Scriptures were simply denominated “the Law and the prophets.” Twice Jesus says that the Emmaus duo should have believed *all* the prophets, and once He declares that they should have believed *all* the Scriptures. Would the Lord require less of us?

Evangelicals also affirm the plenary or full inspiration of the Scriptures. This is precisely what Jesus maintained in the passage above. Ecclesiastes, Second Chronicles, and Revelation are just as much inspired as Isaiah, John, or Romans. There are degrees of worth in the Bible but not degrees of inspiration. Obviously John is more crucial than Ecclesiastes just as the laws of the United States Congress are more important than the National Football League Rule Book. But both of these latter com-

⁴J.B. Tidwell, *The Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 28.

pilations represent the law to which respective domains must conform. John tells the story of God's ultimate revelation in Jesus and therefore goes beyond Ecclesiastes. But the same Holy Spirit who inspired Solomon to pen Ecclesiastes later directed John to write the Gospel. The Bible in its entirety and in all its parts is the Word of God.

3. Infallibility

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honor from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words (John 5:39–47).

Infallibility is a term which Christians have used to indicate that the Bible will not lead one astray. It is incapable of teaching deception. Obviously, since Jesus believed that the Scriptures were from God, He also believed that they could not teach deception, or else the flawless and impeccable character of God is self-negated. Furthermore, one must note Jesus' crystal-clear indictment: the Jews failed to believe Moses and his writings. In fact, He argued, "But if you believe not his [Moses'] writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:47). Once again note the following:

- a. Jesus apparently believed that Moses wrote the Pentateuch so that for one not to believe thus constitutes a rejection of Jesus' authority.
- b. In any case, He believed that the key to truth was to believe Moses, i.e., the Pentateuch.
- c. Verse 47 once again places the *words* of Moses on the same level as the words of Jesus. To adhere to the *words* of Moses is to ensure that one will not go astray.

4. Inerrancy

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot nor one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Matt 5:18).

When Christians speak of the “inerrancy of the Bible,” they refer to the conviction that the Bible contains no falsehood or mistake. This claim is made concerning the autographa and is essential to truth, as we shall see later. Dr. Wayne Dehoney stated the case at the 1979 Southern Baptist Convention in Houston, Texas, when he remarked that Southern Baptists had always believed that “in the original autographs God’s revelation was perfect and without error, doctrinally, historically, scientifically, and philosophically.”⁵ But the question is this: Did Jesus believe Scripture to be inerrant?

No modern believer has ever ventured any more sweeping claims for the truthfulness, reliability, accuracy, or inerrancy of the Bible than that propounded by Jesus in Matthew 5:18. Jesus first declared that “one jot nor one tittle shall *in no wise* pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” [author’s italics]. The expression translated “in no wise” is the English rendering of the Greek double negative *ou mē*. Double negatives are not permissible in English, but in Greek they were not only acceptable but also provided a method of expressing negation more saliently than is possible in English. Literally Jesus said, “Under no circumstances ever” shall a jot or tittle pass from the law.

“Jot” is a translation of *iota* and referred in turn to the *yod* [י], the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It appears to be a comma that leaped up above the line. “Tittle” is an unusual rendering of *keraiia* and refers to a small appendage, a diminutive horn or several Hebrew letters which distinguishes them from others. For example, the Hebrew letter י differs perceptibly from י only by the *keraiia*, the little appendage attached to the lower right of the letter. That 1/32nd of an inch mark of the pen is a “tittle.” Jesus says that neither a *yod* nor a *keraiia* shall pass. Neither the smallest letter nor even a pen stroke shall pass until all be fulfilled. The weight of such a dictum necessitates meticulousness in accuracy of expression. Dare anyone say that God left it up to the human writers to express His thoughts in their own language alone? Then, if they, in fact, made errors, God, by His very decree must fulfill even the errors the writers have made.

⁵James C. Hefley, “Southern Baptists Turn Toward Inerrancy,” *Moody Monthly* (September, 1979): 130.

This brief survey establishes that Jesus had a much higher view of Scripture than most contemporary theologians. The attitude of modern theologians, who delight in asserting imagined errors, contradictions, and anachronisms, is far removed from the attitude of Jesus. In fact, the burden of proof is upon the detractors who claim that Jesus did not believe in inerrancy and infallibility of the verbally and plenary-inspired Scripture to demonstrate that Christ's position was otherwise.

Why don't they produce such evidence? Three choices remain for those who do not accept the perfection of Scripture.

- a. They must demonstrate that Jesus had doubts about some passages,
- b. They must affirm the same thing about the Bible that Jesus affirmed (The silence of most theological communities is deafening!), or
- c. They must cease with the pious but nauseous platitudes about bowing only to the authority of Jesus.

The *truth* is that Jesus believed the Bible to be factually and propositionally *true*.

Jesus referred to the Old Testament. Is there evidence that the New Testament should also be considered inerrant? In II Peter, answers are provided, together with a superb explanation as to how such accuracy and truth were accomplished. There remains a mystery in revelation known only to God. But as nearly as the operation can be described, such elucidation is provided in II Peter 1:12–21,

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure

word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Read the passage and note the following.

- a. Peter has not followed “fables,” Greek *muthois*, or “myths,” (v. 16).
- b. He possesses a word “more sure” (v. 19) than that to which he had been an eyewitness (v. 16) or that which he had heard (v. 18) on the mount of transfiguration.
- c. Such certainty is possible because no prophecy of Scripture is of any “private interpretation” (Greek *idias epiluseōs*, literally “no personal loosing upon”). In other words, men did not just decide to loose Scripture upon the world. Scripture was not given through the will of men (v. 21).
- d. Holy men of God spoke as “they were moved” by the Holy Spirit (v. 21). The word “moved” is *pherō* (Greek), meaning “to bear along.” The word depicts the action of one entity upon another. In this case, the Spirit of God acted upon the minds of the authors of Scripture. Certainly the writers cooperated. But such cooperation is not even in view here. The stress is upon the activity of God’s bearing along the prophets so that they spoke only truth.

Second Peter 3:15–16 further indicates that the emerging New Testament was viewed by Peter in the same way. He acknowledges that Paul has written some things hard to understand. Believers are prepared to admit that there is still much truth in the Bible which must be understood and assimilated. But the limitation is in man and not in the Scriptures. Peter continues by asserting that unlearned and unstable men “wrest” these difficult utterances of Paul as they “do also the other scriptures.” Clearly Peter viewed Paul’s writing as being the identical variety of inspired language as was the Old Testament about which he spoke in II Peter 1:21. The New Testament also is truth!

Wresting the Scriptures

“Wrest” is an English translation of the Greek *streblousin*. Peter’s concern in the latter part of II Peter is for those who are guilty of “wrest-

ing” the Scriptures as a matter of habit and commitment. The Greek word is colorful, depicting a twisting and distorting of the Word of God. What Peter avers to be true in his era has subsequently been true of almost every generation. Our own epoch is no exception. “Streblousinizers” (men who stray by distorting the Scriptures) abound, often sincere but deluded, sometimes deliberately capricious and destructive. A committed Christian dare not remain ignorant of the twisting, turning verbal gymnastics emphasized by “streblousinizers” to avoid the issue of truth. Some of these efforts in this present day will be delineated below. But the ingenuity of the “streblousinized” mind will concoct new evasions. All must be subject to the tribunal of truth in the Scripture. Ten present objections made by “streblousinizers” follow:

1. Non-biblical Language

Inerrancy and infallibility are not biblical terms and therefore should be avoided. The answer to this first avowal assumes three logical forms.

- a. Consistency—If we must use only biblical terms in our theology, then we must eliminate such words as “Trinity” which are descriptive of biblical truth but which, as such, are not found in the Bible.
- b. Integrity—Using only the language of Scripture would be delightful for any believer. However, the theologians who “wrest” the Scriptures have demonstrated their determination to eisegete the Scriptures (“read into” the Scriptures any view they wish). By distorting the plain sense of the Bible’s claims for itself, biblical authority is reduced to human judgment. Therefore, because of such efforts to misrepresent the Scriptures, additional defining of terms must be employed.
- c. Logic—Few words have only one precise meaning in any language, and fewer still are ideally adequate vehicles for the translation of thought from one language to another. If this canon demanding the usage of biblical words alone were rigorously applied, one could use only Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic terms.

2. Negative Connotations

“Infallible” and “inerrant” are words which have negative connotations, and Christians should accentuate the positive. Once again there are four answers to such charade.

- a. The language of Scripture itself is often negative. The various prohibitions in the Decalogue provide sufficient example.
- b. Jesus Himself is described by such negative formulations as “without spot” and “without blemish.” In theology, we describe God as infinite and immutable.
- c. The necessity for the employment of such terms as “infallibility” and “inerrancy” developed as a result of the allegations of the theologians that the Bible is “fallible” and “errant.”
- d. The Baptist Faith and Message speaks of the Bible as “a perfect treasure of divine instruction” and as “truth without any mixture of error.” Such phrases are fine if accepted for what they originally and plainly meant. If one affirms those truths, he has affirmed “inerrancy,” whether he uses the term or not. The question then becomes one of integrity.

3. Creedalism

The charge of creedalism is most often voiced when those who desire greater freedom from accountability have exhausted their means of logic and have no sturdier barriers behind which to hide. An attempt is made to persuade the general public that advocates of biblical inerrancy want a creed, while historically in Baptist circles creedalism has been rejected. Charges of creedalism are only as effective as the public is gullible. Therefore, we reply:

- a. Baptists who advocate inerrancy are forever opposed to binding creeds.
- b. However, conservative Christians also recognize that the real reason for rejecting creeds has always been that one could not improve upon a perfect Bible. Baptists reject creeds *because we affirm sola Scriptura*.
- c. Confessions are therefore employed to affirm the major truths most surely held by a church, association, or other cooperating body.
- d. Such confessions are essential if various major theological positions are to be differentiated.
- e. Absolute biblical authority based upon total reliability remains the only way to avoid the imposition of the authority of ecclesiastical bodies or a consensus of theologians.

4. The Authority of Christ

The most inconsistent charge of the “streblousinizers” is the appeal to the authority of Christ over the Bible. Like fundamentalist preachers, theologians may be heard giving impassioned pleas for the authority of Christ. The answers are obvious, but we share them anyway.

- a. All ultimate authority does indeed rest in Christ.
- b. As has been pointed out earlier, there exists no reason for distinguishing between the authority of Christ, who is God, and the authority of the Bible, which is God’s Word.
- c. As a matter of fact, we know nothing about the mind or teachings of Jesus except that which is revealed on the pages of the Bible.
- d. If portions of the Bible are untrue or erroneous, then we cannot know for certain what Jesus thought or taught, and hence appeals to the authority of Christ would be useless anyway.

5. Absence of the Autographa

Advocates of inerrancy attribute inerrancy only to the autographa, i.e., the author’s actual manuscripts. Since we do not possess the autographa, we are assured that the whole debate is superfluous and cannot be proved. We reply with these considerations:

- a. While we cannot produce the inerrant autographa, neither has anyone produced the “errant” autographs laden with mistakes. The burden of proof is upon the doubters to demonstrate original error.
- b. The assumption that the autographa were inerrant is an essential one if we are to know anything for certain. Suppose, for example, that we determine through careful comparison of ancient manuscripts that a certain reading of John 1:14 is the way it was originally written. If the autograph was inerrant and we have established what that autograph said, then we have everything—a clear word from God. But even if we discover exactly what John 1:14 said, if the autograph had errors, we still may not have discovered what God actually said. Worse still, there is no criterion available by which we can find out what God actually said.

6. Infallibility of Intent

Under pressure, liberal theologians, who usually call themselves “moderates,” have found a new loophole. Ten years ago most would have loathed the concept of infallibility. Now, however, with increasing pressure from the bill-paying laity, who provide their financial support, a chorus has arisen affirming “infallibility of purpose,” of “intent,” or sometimes “salvific infallibility.” By this, such theologians mean that the Bible may be trusted when it “intends to be teaching” or when it “speaks concerning salvation themes.” However, it is not always reliable historically or scientifically. We simply inquire thus:

- a. Who will tell us when the Bible “intends to teach” and when it blunders, staggering in the worldview of its limited human authors? Who will define which matters are distinctly salvific (pertaining to salvation)?
- b. The answer is obvious. The theologians want us to depend upon the autonomous reason of man, notably the reasoning of the theologians themselves.
- c. By what logic did those thinkers arrive at the concept of “infallibility of purpose”? This is a faith affirmation outside the realm of empirically demonstrable proof. The only difference between “infallibility of purpose” and total infallibility is that some wish to circumscribe the Scriptures, cutting away those teachings or affirmations which are personally unpalatable.

7. Alleged Errors

Strangest of all is the retreat to the alleged errors in the Scripture, as though this were some startling new discovery of each decade. A long list of apparent contradictions can be marshaled by most theological faculties. Several truths must be noted:

- a. All of the alleged errors of Scripture were known from antiquity.
- b. These apparent contradictions and alleged mistakes are comparatively few in number.
- c. Far fewer exist today since many passages have been demonstrated to be fully accurate through the years with advances in science, archaeology, history, etc.
- d. For the remainder of the problem texts, perfectly conceivable harmonizations abound in the books of saintly, believing biblical scholars.

- e. Allegations of error never arise from reverent exegesis but always from philosophical predilections. As often as not, they owe their origin to a particular theologian's dislike of some teaching of the Bible concerning the pivotal and debated doctrines of God's wrath, the nature of hell, the personhood of Satan, the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus, special creation as opposed to evolution, the virgin conception of Jesus, or role assignments for men and women.

8. Record of Revelation

No phrase is anymore durable in the hand of a "streblousinizer" than the lofty proclamation that the Bible is a "record of revelation." The danger in that appeal is that it is true only insofar as it goes. But caution is in order for the believer.

- a. The tablets of stone given by God to Moses constituted a record of revelation but also were actual revelation! The same is true of the writing on Belshazzar's palace wall done by a portion of a man's hand. The Bible is not just a record of revelation; it *is* revelation!
- b. As often as otherwise, those who speak of the Bible as a "record of revelation" are implicitly, seldom explicitly, implying that the record keeping of revelation was besmirched with human foible, even if the actual revelation in antiquity was correct.

9. Disruption of Denominational Harmony

When those reasons that pass for theology, philosophy, or exegesis fail, as a last resort opponents of biblical inerrancy may appeal to sentimentalism and denominational loyalty and warn of the threat of disrupting the harmony within a denomination if dissension proceeds. Such allegations are absurd, but nonetheless we must respond.

- a. Honest discussion of the issues, privately and publicly, will not disrupt a denomination unless a substantial portion of its constituency has become committed to error. Truth, like cream, rises to the top and never fears encounter with falsehood.
- b. In all controversy at least one side is in error. All errors need to be exposed and truth located and articulated. The fatuous assumption that a denominational umbrella is big

- enough to harbor radically divergent views and still realize a common goal is historically rare and philosophically naïve.
- c. Scripture teaches otherwise. Paul's dispute with Barnabas (Acts 15:36–41) did not hinder the expansion of the gospel. Nor did Paul's terse debate with Peter prove devastating for missions. On the contrary, both ultimately assisted the spread of the faith. Did Paul's vigorous polemic in Galatians or John's apology in First John interfere with evangelism? Never! They only guaranteed the continual dissemination of truth!
 - d. Dean Kelley has demonstrated in his sociological study, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*,⁶ that a strongly authoritative position tends to build a denomination. Furthermore, the shrinking of many formerly influential denominations can be attributed to the dilution of their stand on biblical authority.
 - e. Throughout the history of Baptists, a constant vigil has had to be maintained, not against the devastating divisiveness of orthodoxy but against the license of liberalism.
 - f. Since when were God's people to be more loyal to any denomination or program than they are to Christ?

10. Interference with World Mission Programs

This avowal is the greatest calumny of all. Incredibly, some have averred that insistence upon biblical inerrancy will circumvent efforts to evangelize the world.

- a. No great missionary movement or profound evangelistic thrust in 2,000 years of Christian history has ever originated in a community of Christians in which there were questions raised about the accuracy of the Scriptures. No modern church questioning the veracity of the Bible will be set aflame with fires of evangelistic zeal.
- b. On the other hand, the list of those who ardently believe every word of the Bible and are the progenitors of mass evangelistic outreach is nearly endless. Carey, Judson, Rice, Moody, Spurgeon, Sunday, Graham, Riley, Truett, Carroll, Scarborough, Criswell, and Boyce—to name only a few—advocated the perfection of the Bible.

⁶Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977).

- c. While a high view of the Bible may not always produce evangelism and missionary concern, it is an essential concomitant for the impetus of outreach.

Liberalism of a former era had integrity. Men rejected portions or all of the Bible and said so vociferously. The neo-liberal of our own era is often lacking such basic integrity. He employs the “language of Zion” but affixes new meanings known only to philosophically-oriented initiates. He may speak passionately, using phrases designed to allay the fears of cautious lay people, while privately rejecting much of the Bible. The day has come for Christians to insist that their leaders tell them plainly and specifically what they believe!

The Nature of Truth

Frank Stagg recently provided an article entitled, “What is Truth?” in a *Festschrift* to Eric Rust. He quotes English New Testament scholar C.H. Dodd, saying, “Although he carefully qualifies his generalization, C.H. Dodd offers this judgment as to the most significant Greek and Hebrew words for truth, *alētheia* is fundamentally an intellectual category, *émeth* a moral category.”⁷ Dr. Stagg proceeds, attempting to argue that truth is primarily moral as opposed to propositional. This is done despite Dodd’s proposal regarding the factual nature of *alētheia* in Greek.

Dr. Stagg’s actual conviction is elucidated far more clearly in a recent article by Norm Geisler.⁸ Geisler points out that many theologians of the modern era have a very different view of truth. While most people have a *correspondence* view of truth, neo-orthodox theologians maintain an *intentionalist* view of truth. To most of us, truth is that which corresponds to the actual state of affairs. An error is that which does not correspond with what really is the case. But many theologians are content to use the term “truth” in a far more elastic manner. According to this view, a statement is true if it accomplishes what the author intended it to accomplish. This is an *intentionalist* view of truth.

An illustration of this latter view concerns the hypothetical situation of a man who wishes to go from Dallas, Texas, to Houston, Texas, though he is unfamiliar with the way. A friend who works with the Weather Bureau knows that a hurricane is about to inundate Houston, so he tells his acquaintance to go due west from Dallas. The man follows this instruction

⁷Frank Stagg, “What is Truth?” in *Science, Faith, and Revelation*, ed. Robert E. Patterson (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 240.

⁸Norm Geisler, “Inerrancy: Truth or Consequences?” (Paper, Evangelical Theological Society, 28 December 1979).

and is saved from the ravages of the hurricane. Thus, the friend from the Weather Bureau told the truth because he accomplished what he intended. But, in fact, the truth was not told. The traveler is likely to be irate when he finds himself 200 miles west of Dallas and with Houston now in sight. Especially is that true if his business in Houston was critical.

This strange and alien view of truth is merely another evidence of the inevitable result of human depravity. Man is determined to “wrest” not only the Scriptures but also the obvious sense of language in order to maintain aberrant views, while still concealing his real position under the guise of commonly accepted terminology.

Truth has never changed. Moral truth is right because it is anchored solidly in the nature of God. We know that truth because it has been propositionally revealed to us in the Bible. The necessity for reaffirming this concept is what prompted Francis Schaeffer to begin speaking of “true truth.” J.P. Boyce of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary wrote in his *Abstract of Systematic Theology*:

The author has aimed to make the discussions in this volume especially Scriptural. He believes in the perfect inspiration and absolute authority of the divine revelation, and is convinced that the best proof of any truth is that it is there taught. He questions, indeed whether man can know with absolute certainty any truth which is not thus uttered by God. Into all else must enter the liability to error which arises from human imperfection. So far, therefore, as the Scriptures speak, and so far only does man have certainty of knowledge.⁹

Smokescreens will abound. Some will say that the whole inerrancy debate is just a semantic battle, and they further declare that everyone is actually saying the same thing. It is not so. Others will say that this is only a matter of interpretation and not essential doctrine. They may even suggest that the position of evangelical Christians has never been the inerrancy of Scripture.

In 1925, Kirsopp Lake, distinguished professor at Harvard, wrote a book entitled *The Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow*. Though Lake was a man of spotless integrity, he was no friend to any form of Fundamentalism. He wrote,

It is a mistake often made by educated persons who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology, to suppose

⁹James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887), vii.

that fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind; it is partial and uneducated survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians. How many were there, for instance, in Christian churches in the eighteenth century who doubted the infallible inspiration of all Scripture? A few, perhaps, but very few. No, the fundamentalist may be wrong; I think that he is. But it is we who have departed from the tradition, not he, and I am sorry for the fate of anyone who tries to argue with a fundamentalist on the basis of authority. The Bible and the *corpus theologicum* of the Church is on the fundamentalist side.¹⁰

The issue is not interpretation. Neither can it be construed as a semantic puzzle. The issue is not even whether we use “infallible” and “inerrant” as descriptive terms to depict the Scripture. The issue is truth. Did God tell us in the Bible that which corresponds to reality? If so, did He tell us only the truth? If He did give us truth, then we have a sure guide for faith and practice. If not, we know nothing, and we are cast on the hopeless sea of human subjectivism in a ship of autonomous reason battered by ever increasing waves of divided human speculation with no port available and no lighthouse in sight. The issue is truth! “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

¹⁰Kirsopp Lake, *The Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Boston: Houghton, 1926), 61.