

Real Life University

Hard Conversations to Be Had

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Lesson #10

Brief Review:

Overarching Question: Can we TRUST the Bible?

- Bible's UNIQUENESS
(In the way it was written from all over the Middle East, over the span of several centuries, by an incredible variety of authors who were everything from Kings and Rulers to farmers and fisherman. Yet there is a consistency and unity that is unparalleled. Unique, one of a kind in the number of translations, how it has survived time and attack, unique in its impact on individuals and world culture. It continues to be a "best seller" every year despite the fact it is constantly under attack)
- Bible is HISTORICALLY reliable
(the writings have stood up to the tests of archaeology and other historical materials. Secular sources have commented on biblical events and personalities. As discoveries in archaeology progress, there is more and more confirmation of events and places, cities, people groups that are being confirmed. Still much to find but so far current events point to a historically reliable account recorded in both Old and New Testaments.)
- Bible stands out in its ACCURACY
(The manner in which has been copied over the years is amazing given the numbers of copies and numbers of languages that it has been copied into. The sheer numbers of manuscripts gives us great confidence in its accuracy.)

We sought to address the question: Is the Bible we have in our HANDS TODAY the Bible God intended?

(Overwhelming the answer is yes. Textual criticism far from being an 'enemy' of the Christian faith is actually an ally. The science of cataloging and comparing texts has given us the ability to determine what has been missing or why there is a variant, or where a scribe may have made a mistake in spelling, punctuation or even tried to smooth out a controversial statement.

This is where we have been.)

Today: How are we to VIEW the Bible? What is our DOCTRINE of Scripture?

This is an answer to the question: What do you BELIEVE about the Bible?

(Everybody has a belief about the Bible whether they acknowledge it or not. It may be no belief, it may be I kinda believe it, it may be I believe parts of it, or it may be a very clearly thought through statement of "this is what I believe". The fact of the matter is, it is not enough to say, "I believe the Bible." We must think through, "What I believe about the Bible".

Mormons believe the Bible, Jehovah's Witnesses Believe the Bible, lots of religions refer to the Bible....so to simply say, "I believe the bible" is not enough.

Today I want to teach what we believe at RLM about the Bible. We are not at all 'independent' or 'unique' in this belief about the Bible. In fact RLM believes that it stands with historic Christian faith through the centuries and is in fact in line with what 'Evangelical' Christians across the world believe about the Bible. If you go to the website this is the statement you will find:)

RLM Doctrinal Statement: BIBLE

We believe the Bible is God's Word to us. It was written by human authors, under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because it is inspired by God, the Bible is infallible, inerrant, and absolute truth. It is the ultimate and final authority for Christian beliefs and living.

Supportive Scripture: Psalms 12:6, 119:105, 160; Proverbs 30:5; 2 Timothy 1:13, 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21.

Cambridge Declaration:

We reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.

We deny that any creed, council or individual may bind a Christian's conscience, that the Holy Spirit speaks independently of or contrary to what is set forth in the Bible, or that personal spiritual experience can ever be a vehicle of revelation.

(Cambridge Declaration was made in the 90's by a group of scholars seeking a unity across denominational lines. I use it to simply show that doctrinal statements especially about the Bible seek to unify a group of people and clarify the starting place of beliefs.

For just a couple minutes talk about doctrine. Can someone give me a definition of the word doctrine? Why is it important?)

The English word, "doctrine," comes from the Latin word doctrina. It can be defined as, "teaching or instruction."

Christian doctrine simply means the beliefs of Christians.

(A Christian doctrine is what the entire Bible has to say on one particular subject. This revealed Word defines for us how we should think about God, ourselves, our world, the church, and the future. Therefore, we speak of such things as the "doctrine" of Christ, the "doctrine" of God, and the "doctrine" of the church. This refers to what Christians believe about these subjects based upon the teaching of the Bible.)

Doctrine provides the BOUNDARIES and the FOUNDATIONS of our faith.

Doctrine must be firmly based on the Bible but no doctrine can REPLACE the Bible.

Liken doctrine to rules of a football game. They let us know what game we are playing. We know when we are off track. But football is not about the rules, it is about the game.

“The game is played not to protect the rules, rather the rules are made to protect the game”

Ravi Zacharias

(We have to walk the fine line of seeking to articulate what we believe the Bible is teaching about a certain subject, in this case the Bible, and yet not let that teaching overrule the Bible’s teaching. This is what the Pharisees in Jesus’ day did.)

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You pay tithes of mint, dill, and cumin, but you have disregarded the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

Matt. 23:23

(The reason I bring this up is even now there are those that would defend the inerrancy of Scripture and yet in doing so violate what the Scriptures teach about how to interact with others and the principle of love.)

So we have the doctrine of Scripture and in that doctrinal statement we use the word “inerrant”.

(We will look at this word ‘inerrant’ and what it means and its implications for us as a church and for each of us as individuals. It is a word that gets debated and discussed at the scholarly level. It is often avoided for various reasons. Often it is avoided because it is misunderstood not necessarily in its definition, but in its implications

Inerrant simply means WITHOUT ERROR

Inerrant or Inerrancy is often MISUNDERSTOOD not because of its definition (simple) but because of its IMPLICATIONS.

Question to you all: What have we talked about in class over the last few weeks that some would interpret as 'errors'?

(Textual variants, conflicting accounts of events, supposed contradictions. There are other issues that people have struggled with when it comes to inerrancy of Scripture and I want to deal with some of them. So first let's define what we mean by 'inerrant'.)

When we say we believe the Bible to be inerrant, what do we mean?

"Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences"

Paul Feinberg quoted in 'Can We Still Trust the Bible' pg. 123

Another definition based on the above is very similar:

"When all the facts are known, the Bible (in its original writings) properly interpreted in light of which culture and communication means had developed by the time of its composition will be shown to be completely true (and therefore not false) in all that it affirms, to the degree of precision intended by the author, in all matters relating to God and his creation."

'Can We Still Trust the Bible' pg. 123 footnote 14

What phrases or words stand out to you in these definitions?

What is it about the phrase or word that makes it stand out?

Some phrase/thoughts to note:

-1. "when all the facts are known" -- Humility...we don't know EVERYTHING about everything in the Bible

(There still remain questions of archaeology and even figuring out some of the apparent contradictions in the text. What has happened as we have seen throughout class there are increasing levels of understanding and discoveries being made all the time. Volumes have been written by evangelical scholars have shown that the vast majority of all the supposed contradictions or 'errors in Scripture have been dealt with in 'reasonably' compelling ways. This is not an issue of solving 'theological' or interpretive questions but rather of supposed errors. The more we learn of ancient forms of writing and understanding cultural customs and norms, the more we can come to deal with criticisms brought against God's word)

-2. "the Scriptures in their original autographs" or 'the Bible in its original writings'

(As we have noted in class we do not have any of the original writings. So often this phrase is problematic and to be honest it has been for me too. We don't have the originals so it really is not a very valid argument for inerrancy. The response at times by some inerrantist to this concern that we don't have the manuscripts has been pretty shallow or in the case that I have experienced silly.... "Yeah, I know we don't have them but could God have made them inerrant originally?" OF COURSE! He's God.

Sadly, some inerrantist give shallow or half thought through answers and it turns people away. This is unfortunate. We need to be able to speak to our beliefs in a way that honors God.

In dealing with the question of why state this issue of 'no errors in the original manuscripts' what we must keep in mind is what we learned in our lessons of Textual Criticism. While we don't actually have the autographs' what we do have is so many manuscripts so close to the original writings that there is a VERY HIGH likelihood that we have a very near exact replication of the originals. Daniel Wallace said:)

"While there are places where we are uncertain of what the original text read, the original reading is almost certainly on of the options recorded in the existing manuscripts somewhere"

Daniel B. Wallace quoted in 'Can We Still Trust the Bible', pg. 16

(We can have a very high degree of confidence that what we have is so close to the original text that we can have confidence that there are no 'errors' in our current text. You can trust the fact that what you have is what God intended.)

-3. "properly interpreted" or "properly interpreted in light of which culture and communication means had developed by the time of its composition"

We must make a **DISTINCTION** between the doctrine of Inerrancy and the **PRACTICE** of Biblical Interpretation (Hermeneutics)

Often Inerrancy has been associated with a **SPECIFIC** interpretation of a passage

(Though the Scriptures as given are completely true, no human interpretation of them is infallible. As the Pastor of Biblical Education that is a hard statement to make but it is true! I can't link an interpretation of a passage and say....that is the ultimate truth. It is without error. I can defend it. I can seek to substantiate it. I must study and seek to understand it. Others must do the same. To simply shut down a conversation and say, "Well that's just your opinion lacks integrity, but in the end only God's word is infallible.

There are different passages and doctrines that some would seek to tie directly with inerrancy. I have run into it when it comes to Jesus Second coming and spiritual gifts or divorce and remarriage, the role of the husband and the wife. The Bible definitely talks about all of these issues. I have people tell me if you don't believe in a pre-tribulation rapture of the saints then you don't believe the Bible. I remember being told that "when that which is perfect is come that which is perfect will be done away with" Since the Bible is perfect and it has now come therefore the spiritual gifts have ceased to function and if you speak in tongues you are of the devil.

Those have been a little hard to swallow. I know bible believing folks on both sides of the fence on those and other issues. We cannot make **secondary** doctrines the definition of inerrancy. I do emphasize secondary

Note I say **SECONDARY**

Another passage is about the husband and wife's role in the family. I was told early on in my marriage that if I didn't handle the check book and pay the bills and handle all the money I was not being the 'head' of my house. Some used it to say that women should never work. Those are not inerrancy questions or answers. They are cultural and we do need to understand what does honoring and headship look like.)

The issue is not whether or not a passage is TRUE or not, but what kind of truth it teaches.

-4. "in everything that they affirm"

(a parable does not affirm that its characters ever really lived. It is true not as a factual story but as an symbolic or analogy between human events and God's dealings with us. In other words, we don't expect the 'Good Samaritan' was a literal person walking down the road finding a literal man beaten and bleeding. In the same way when the Bible says the sun rose it is not making a statement about the sun rotating around the earth. While both these are obvious there are other places not as obvious and we have to be wise in our interpretation of the Bible.)

-5. "whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences"

There have been some attempts to LIMIT the truth statements of the Bible to the areas of 'faith and practice'.

This phrase has to do with whether or not a passage INTENDED to make a particular statement about history, science or society AND whether or not it was made for all time

(Now some people people when they use the phrase 'faith and practice' are not seeking to limit the truthfulness of Scripture. But some are. They want it to only speak to doctrine or ethics. They limit the truthfulness of Scripture when it comes to history or society or the life sciences. Inerrancy states that there are not errors in those areas either.

The key is what did the Bible 'intend' to teach. Example: When Isaiah says "in the year King Uzziah died" we have to look deeply at whether or not he is saying the actual day, month and year or if he is saying "when he died...during that time frame". What we come up with is looking closely at the text. The truth is the King Died then Isaiah had a vision. What is Isaiah wanting to say about that 'time'. Is it simply a historical statement dating when the vision took place or is it making a statement about the general state of affairs of the people of God during that time frame politically, socially, and spiritually.

A better example may be Luke 1 & 2 and the birth narrative of Jesus. We have had to wait patiently and expectantly for archaeology to catch up. The complexities of Roman history and the accuracy of which rulers both big and small took office or left office and what titles held.

The area of science gets very intense. Gen. 1 gets hotly debated by young earth folks who believe in a literal 24 hour 7 day Creation and those who believe that the earth went through a process guided by God. The answer is not an issue of inerrancy...the truth that is being taught in the creation stories of Gen. 1 & 2 is that God did it. God initiated creation and was the power behind it. How he did it???? That is for study.)

SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS:

Inerrancy is about the AUTHORITY of Scripture and our ATTITUDE towards it.

- Is it negotiable?
- Is it the final authority for life?
- Is it prescriptive?
- Is it to be embraced in my life and obeyed?

The key question (according to DA Carson) is

"Has God disclosed himself in words?" If God in his mercy talks to us, if he is a talking God, in and through human language, despite the fact that he inhabits eternity, he communicated in known languages and 'familiar' thought patterns of the times that were known and practiced in that time period. Then the question becomes are these words reliable? When he speaks, does he speak the truth?"

Will we follow and obey that truth?