

Thirty-six years ago, a battle raged around the world as to whether the Bible was inerrant. This prompted an international summit, in which 300 leading evangelicals met to hammer out what became the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.” Author and professor Norman Geisler attended the 1978 meeting and was a key architect of the final statement. Geisler, also co-founder of Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, N.C., recently talked with *Decision* about how Christians must continue to be committed to the inerrancy of Scripture.

*\*Interview by Richard Greene*

**Q: How would you define biblical inerrancy?**

A: The word *inerrancy* means not errant, or no error. Biblical inerrancy is the doctrine that says the Bible is without error in all that it affirms.

**Q: When the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy was produced, what were some of the key issues that the Council was trying to address?**

A: The conference was held in the wake of Harold Lindsell’s book *The Battle for the Bible*. It was bringing to the consciousness of the Christian public the fact that within the ranks of Christendom, even evangelical Christianity, many were not affirming the historic doctrine of inerrancy. The Council wanted to take a stand on the issue.

**Q: Why is biblical inerrancy so critical?**

A: Every Christian doctrine—whether it’s about God, sin or salvation—is drawn from the Bible. If we can’t trust the Bible, then we’ve lost the very foundation of our faith. To put it in terms of Psalm 11:3, “If the foundations be destroyed, What shall the righteous do?” (KJV).

**Q: Lay out the case for why you believe the Bible is inerrant.**

A: Simply put, God cannot err. The Bible is the Word of God. Therefore, the Bible cannot err.

Now, the first two premises are clearly taught in Scripture. It’s impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18, Titus 1:2). Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (NKJV). Also, John 17:17 says, “Thy Word is truth” (KJV). The psalmist says, “The sum of your word is truth” (Psalm 119:160, ESV). So, it’s very clear that God cannot err.

Second, it’s clear that the Bible is the Word of God. Jesus stated in Matthew 24:35: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away” (NASB). The Old Testament declares that “the grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8, NASB).

**Q: Do some people equate inerrancy with believing that we’re to interpret every word of the Bible as literal, or is it much more than that—or much different from that?**

A: Inerrancy means that whatever the Bible affirms as true is true, and whatever the Bible affirms as false is false. Interpretation of the Bible is a distinct subject—as in how do you interpret the actual words of Scripture?

The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy included a statement on how we should interpret the Bible. We affirmed that “the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.”

Everything in the Bible is literally true, but not everything is true literally. Jesus said, “I am the vine, I am the door.” No one looks for a doorknob or hinges, or leaves coming out of His ear.

The Bible has parables, and it has figures of speech. We adopt the literal method of interpreting the Bible as opposed to the allegorical method, where you spiritualize the meaning of the Bible. For those proponents, the resurrection didn’t happen literally, it was just a spiritual resurrection in the hearts of the disciples. The framers of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy repudiated that view.

**Q: Some people say the Bible contains the words of God but is not necessarily infallible and free of error. How should Christians respond to that argument?**

A: There are three historic views on that. First, the Bible is the Word of God, which is what all orthodox Christians believe.

Then there is the liberal view that says: “The Bible includes the Word of God—that here and there you have God’s Word, but it’s mixed with errors, legends and falsehoods.”

Finally, you have the neo-orthodox view, which holds that the Bible becomes the Word of God as you read it and it grabs you.

Evangelicals have held the Orthodox view that the Bible is the original Word of God. Second Timothy 3:16 says: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (NKJV). All Scripture is God-breathed.

**Q: Is the issue of biblical inerrancy just as important today as it was in 1978?**

A: Orthodoxy can only be defended by eternal vigilance. These issues come up every generation. We’re faced with a whole new set of denials today.

Compromise is not something that is only done by liberals. We have evangelical scholars who are compromising their views. For example, they say: “Yes, I believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, but I don’t take as true the saints resurrecting after Jesus was resurrected in Matthew 27:51-53. That’s legend because we have to interpret the Bible by Graeco-Roman genre categories.”

These scholars aren’t doing what the liberals did when they denied that Jonah literally occurred or that Moses really wrote the first five books of the Old Testament. This group, calling themselves evangelicals, say they believe in inerrancy but then say: “Not all of the stories in the Bible are true. The story of taking a coin out of the fish’s mouth, that probably wasn’t true. The story of Jesus saying, ‘I Am’ and the crowd falling backward, that probably wasn’t true. The story of Jesus and the wise men probably wasn’t true either.” What we affirm with the right hand, they’re giving away with the left hand.

**Q: With the rise of these contrarian views, how can Christians become more certain of biblical inerrancy?**

A: Let’s remember that we had 300 scholars from throughout the United States and from other countries who came and discussed this matter. They made a definitive statement about biblical inerrancy. The Evangelical

Theological Society, the largest group of evangelical scholars in the world, has accepted that statement as a guide to interpreting what they mean by inerrancy. Many denominations turned around on this same issue. We need to harken back to it, we need to reaffirm it, and we need to make people aware of it.

**Q: What might be the consequences of picking and choosing certain passages and believing only those but not following others?**

A: Well, let's take the Matthew 27 passage I alluded to earlier. It says that Jesus rose from the dead and after He arose, the graves were opened and saints came out and walked around the city of Jerusalem. Suppose that isn't true. If this post-resurrection event was directly connected with the resurrection of Christ and happened as a result of it, then if we decide it is not true, how can we trust the first part of the story—that of Christ's resurrection?

One of these scholars says that if you accept this Graeco-Roman genre and interpret the Bible that way and therefore consider this event of the saints coming out of their graves to be legend or poetical, then we're not sure where history ends and legend begins. You won't know what to believe and what not to believe.

**Q: What are the dangers of not believing the Bible is inerrant?**

A: The Sadducees, who didn't believe in the resurrection or in angels, were the liberals of the day. Jesus looked at them in Matthew 22:29 and said, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (KJV).

Once you deny the inerrancy of the Bible, you don't have any basis for your teaching. And you've lost the power of God because if it's not the Word of God—if what the Bible says is not what God is saying—then how can we preach it with authority and life-transforming ability?

History shows the consequences of denying the inerrancy of the Bible, as was the case in Europe. But our American theological predecessors—B.B. Warfield, A.A. Hodge, and J. Gresham Machen—took a strong stand on this doctrine just prior to and around 1900, opposite to their counterparts in Europe. Look at Christianity in Europe compared with Christianity in America, and you can see the difference.

Take a stand on biblical inerrancy. This is the foundation of our faith. Every other fundamental doctrine that we believe comes from the Bible. So in a sense, the Bible is the fundamental of the fundamentals. ©2014 BGEA