

What Does the Word Say?
Session 37: The infallibility of the Bible: Part IV
WhatDoesTheWordSay.org

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible. In our previous sessions we have shown that the Bible is infallible because God is its author, and that this is a critically important doctrine, which was central to the reformation. We also showed that Jesus himself used the Bible as his ultimate authority. Dr. Spencer, what else do we want say about this doctrine?

Dr. Spencer: I first want to point out that, as with every other doctrine, we should turn to God's Word itself to see what it says. And, when we turn to the Bible, we find that it clearly claims to be the authoritative Word of God as we documented extensively in Sessions 4 and 27. I don't want to repeat all of that here. But, let me quickly summarize what we said. The Old Testament clearly claims to be the very words of God in many places. In fact, phrases like "God said", and "The Lord says" are used over 3,800 times. There is also an implicit claim to being the Word of God when the Old Testament tells us things about creation, or things said in heaven that cannot possibly be known by any human being except by divine revelation. In addition, as we saw with a couple of examples in our previous session, Jesus Christ treated the Old Testament as the authoritative Word of God, as did all of the apostles. We have quoted the famous statement in 2 Timothy 3:16 that "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV) several times.

Then, with regard to the New Testament, we previously cited 2 Peter 3:16 where he calls the apostle Paul's writings "Scripture". We have also noted that in John 14:25-26 Jesus promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would guide them and remind them of everything he said. Paul then explicitly mentions this guidance in 1 Corinthians 2:13, and he claims to speak the very words of God in 1 Thessalonians 2:13. I will let interested listeners go back and listen to Sessions 4 and 27 for more details.

Marc Roby: And in that connection we should remind our listeners that all of the old sessions are available in the archive on our website, whatdoesthewordsay.org. So, we have made the case that the Bible itself clearly claims to be the Word of God. What else is there to say about infallibility then?

Dr. Spencer: There are even more references in Scripture that we have not previously adduced, and I think it would be worthwhile to go through some of them because this doctrine is so frequently denied in the modern church. For example, when the Sadducees tried to trick Jesus by asking him about marriage in heaven, Jesus rebuked them saying, in Matthew 22:29, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."¹ Which clearly holds up the Scriptures as the ultimate authoritative standard for us.

In addition, Jesus frequently noted that what the Scriptures say will happen, not only will happen, but must happen. For example, in Mark 14:21 he said "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him." And in Mark 14:27 he told his disciples, "You will all fall away, ... for it

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is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’” Then again, in Mark 14:49 he said, “But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” And, in Matthew 26:53-54 he asked the rhetorical question, “how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”, with the clear point being that it *must* happen this way because that is what the authoritative Scriptures have declared.

Marc Roby: It is compelling when you consider all of the references, and these are just ones that we had not mentioned in the previous sessions.

Dr. Spencer: It is very compelling. And it is also clear that it wasn’t just general ideas or principles that came from God, but the very words themselves; Christ said, in Matthew 5:17-18, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” In other words, every single word is infallible.

I don’t believe it is possible for a born-again person to carefully read the entire Bible, or even just the New Testament and come away with any view other than that the Bible is, in its entirety, the very words of our infallible God. And if it is his words, then it is itself infallible.

Marc Roby: And yet, there have been and still are many professing Christians who deny the doctrine.

Dr. Spencer: There have indeed been many, and are still many. And I think they must fall into one of two camps; either they are not truly born again, or they have had bad teaching and have not yet looked into this issue and carefully thought it through for themselves. You can be saved without believing this doctrine, as Article XIX of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy states², but it is an extremely important doctrine, and not believing it will stunt your growth and life as a Christian and, as I said last time, not agreeing with this doctrine is a serious warning sign that you may not be born again at all, you may be believing in a false gospel – so you should take it very seriously indeed. What is extremely sad is the number of ministers who have given up on this doctrine. But, that isn’t really all that surprising when you consider that many modern ministers are trained more as social workers than ministers of the gospel.

Marc Roby: That’s a pretty strong statement.

Dr. Spencer: Yes it is. But it isn’t hard to back up. Just listen to the sermons that are preached, look at the counsel that is given – if, in fact, *any* counsel is given, read modern supposedly Christian books and so on. So much of it is completely dominated by an anthropocentric, or man-centered, outlook, rather than a theocentric, or God-centered, outlook. Much of it is simply social work done in the context of the church. Human psychology, rather than the Bible, dominate.

² Available from <http://defendinginerrancy.com/chicago-statements/> and also from <http://www.alliancenet.org/the-chicago-statement-on-biblical-inerrancy>

In his book *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?*, David Wells tells a story about when he was a seminary professor teaching theology. He says that after giving an introduction to the class on the first day an “obviously agitated student” came up and told him that he “had had a mighty struggle with his conscience about” whether it was right “to spend so much money on a course of study that was so irrelevant to his desire to minister to people in the Church.”³

Marc Roby: It’s amazing to think that someone could consider theology to be irrelevant to being a minister of the gospel!

Dr. Spencer: I agree. This man’s view of a minister was obviously that he is basically a social worker. But, even given that view what he said was wrong. Theology is not irrelevant to anyone. Every person alive is a theologian in one sense; they have all decided whether or not they think God exists, and if they think he exists, they have some idea of what they think he is like and what he requires of them. So, the question isn’t whether or not you will be a theologian, the only question is whether your theology will be biblical or not. This young man probably thought the only theology needed for a minister was to say that Jesus was a good example for us to follow and that God loves us and has a plan to bless us, or something along those lines. But, such a view of theology is not even close to biblical, and it can’t save anyone. In fact, with the anthropocentric view of most churches today, there is really nothing for us to be saved from because we aren’t really all that bad in the first place, and hell doesn’t really exist. So, the whole concept of salvation is missing.

Marc Roby: At that point you might as well join the Elks Lodge.

Dr. Spencer: Or spend your Sundays fishing, or golfing, or watching television and doing yard work, or whatever. And your morning quiet times in private meditation, rather than prayer and reading the Word of God.

Marc Roby: Very true. But we have digressed again, so let’s get back to the infallibility of the Bible. What other biblical evidence do we have that it claims to be the infallible Word of God?

Dr. Spencer: Let me cite some more examples. But, we must realize that when the New Testament speaks of the Scriptures – the Greek word used is γραφή – it is usually speaking of the Old Testament. Therefore, we understandably have more evidence for the Old Testament being the very Word of God than we do for the New. Although, as we saw a few minutes ago, there is compelling evidence for the New Testament as well. In any event, in Romans 1:2, Paul says the Scriptures are holy – he says this because he knows they come from the thrice-holy God. And, in Romans 3:2, Paul calls the Scriptures the “very words of God”.

There also a number of places where the words of Scripture are equated with the words of God, for example, in Romans 9:17 Paul wrote that “the Scripture says to Pharaoh: ‘I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed

³ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993, pg. 4

in all the earth.” But, this quotation is from Exodus 9:16 where the words are attributed to God himself, so we see that to say “Scripture says” is equivalent to saying “God says”.

Marc Roby: Are there other similar examples you want to cite?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, there are other examples as well. In Galatians 3:8 Paul wrote that “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’” So, Paul tells us that Scripture said something, but he was quoting from Genesis 22:18, and when we look there we see that these words are again attributed to God himself.

And this isn’t just the apostle Paul. In Acts 4:25, we read that after Peter and John were released by the Sanhedrin, they returned to the other disciples and prayed to God, saying, in part, “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?’” They were quoting from Psalm 2 when they said in prayer to God that he “spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of” David.

Marc Roby: That is a pretty clear statement that they considered the Old Testament to have been written by God through the agency of the Holy Spirit working in the human authors.

Dr. Spencer: And there are more examples as well. In Acts 28:25-26, the apostle Paul was speaking in Rome and said “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: ‘Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”’”. Notice that Paul says that God the Holy Spirit spoke *through the prophet*, in this case Isaiah, words that are recorded for us in Scripture.

Marc Roby: Yes, another very clear statement that God the Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible.

Dr. Spencer: Yes it is. We’ve already gone over a number of instances in previous sessions of Jesus himself treating the Old Testament as the infallible Word of God. But, we also have a very interesting statement from Jesus about how important it is to receive the Bible as the Word of God. In John 5:46-47, Jesus is rebuking the people for not believing him and he said, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”

Jesus is saying explicitly that if you fail to believe what the Old Testament says, you are not going to believe what he says either. This puts the lie to the idea that I can have some private relationship with Jesus apart from the Bible.

Marc Roby: That reminds me of Jesus talking to the men on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection. We are told in Luke 24:27 that “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is a good passage to mention. Jesus often spoke of the Old Testament prophecies concerning himself and used them as evidence that he was the promised Messiah. He clearly believed the entire Old Testament to be the infallible Word of God and we have given many more biblical references in earlier podcasts to show that.

Marc Roby: Alright, I think we have presented enough evidence today, and in previous sessions, to clearly demonstrate that the Bible is the infallible Word of God.

Dr. Spencer: I agree. The doctrine we have been advocating by the way, is often called the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Bible. The word plenary just means all, and the word verbal refers to the individual words. So, to speak of the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Bible just means that every individual word was breathed out by God himself.

Marc Roby: Having established the biblical doctrine, let me ask you the question that I'm sure many of our listeners have in mind. What do you say about all of the supposed errors in the Bible? We are saying that it is infallible, but can an infallible book have errors in it?

Dr. Spencer: That depends on what you mean by an error. Everything the Bible teaches us is true. But, when we say the Bible is inerrant, we do *not* mean, for example, that the grammar is perfect or that every number is precisely correct. James Boice notes that this is one reason some people don't like the term inerrant.⁴ But it would be silly, I think, to say that the Bible is in error if something in it is ungrammatical, or if when the it says 300 people did something the number was actually 302. The rules of grammar are violated by great writers all the time, the purpose of language is communication and the rules of grammar, while useful, are not absolute laws. And when I say 300 people did something, I think every reasonable person recognizes that I'm giving a round number. They wouldn't say I was wrong if the precise number was 298, or 303.

Also, the Bible uses every kind of normal human expression to communicate truth. So, for example, if I read a newspaper report that says something like "all of the fans in the stands jumped to their feet when the ball was hit", do I accuse the newspaper of being factually incorrect if, in fact, a few people stayed seated, or slowly stood up rather than jumping up? Of course not. We all recognize hyperbole as a normal mode of communication. So, the word "all" does not always mean "all". You have to use the context to judge the true meaning. Also, if I look on the calendar on my cellphone or computer, it tells me the time of the sunrise and the sunset for today. Should I conclude that whoever chose those words actually thinks the earth stands still and the sun rotates around us? Of course not! I understand that is a common expression that refers to what we normally see.

Marc Roby: I sense that we are getting ready to launch into an entirely different discussion at this point, so this is probably a good place to finish for today. I'd like to remind our listeners that we invite them to email their comments and questions to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org.

⁴ James Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, Revised in One Volume, InterVarsity Press, 1986, pg. 71