FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

BIBLIOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Word of God

UNIT 3: THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson 7

WITHOUT ERROR IN ALL THAT IT AFFIRMS

The Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy Defined

Key Texts: Psalm 12:6; Proverbs 30:5–6

> *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."*
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> **2 Timothy 3:16–17, NASB 1995**

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Introduction

Unit 2 established the doctrine of inspiration with care and precision. We have seen that Scripture is theopneustos (breathed out by God), that this inspiration extends to the very words of every part of the text, that it works through the full humanity of the biblical authors in the mystery of the concursus, and that Scripture consistently bears witness to its own divine origin. Now we take the next indispensable step.

If the Bible is truly the Word of God, if the God who cannot lie breathed it out through human authors superintended by His Spirit, then a question of enormous consequence follows immediately: Can it contain errors? The doctrine of inerrancy answers with an unequivocal no. Because God is the primary Author of Scripture, and because God is incapable of deception or falsehood, the Scriptures He breathed out must be free from all error in all that they affirm. Inerrancy is not an additional doctrine grafted onto inspiration from the outside; it is the direct and necessary consequence of everything inspiration means. To affirm inspiration and deny inerrancy is to affirm that God can breathe out falsehood, which is to deny the very character of the God who inspired.

Yet the doctrine of inerrancy is also widely misunderstood, both by its critics who caricature it as requiring wooden literalism and by some of its defenders who state it with insufficient precision. This lesson will define inerrancy carefully, establish its theological grounding in the character of God, clarify its proper scope, distinguish it from the false precision that critics often attribute to it, examine how it relates to the observable phenomena of the biblical text, and review the careful definitions provided by the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. The goal is not merely that you know the doctrine but that you understand it well enough to embrace it with full conviction, defend it with full confidence, and apply it with full wisdom.

I. DEFINING INERRANCY: FREE FROM ALL FALSEHOOD, FRAUD, AND DECEIT

The most careful and comprehensive definition of inerrancy in the modern era is provided by the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978), which we will examine in detail in Section VI. For now, we can state the essential definition this way: biblical inerrancy is the doctrine that Scripture, in the original autographs, is without error in all that it affirms and free from all falsehood, fraud, and deceit.

Each element of this definition is important and deserves comment.

In the original autographs specifies the scope of the inerrancy claim. Inerrancy applies to the manuscripts as originally produced by the inspired human authors, not to every subsequent copy, every translation, or every printed edition. Copyists have introduced errors across the manuscript tradition; translators have sometimes struggled to capture the full meaning of the original; no printed Bible in any language is a perfect reproduction of the autographs. But the science of textual criticism has enabled scholars to recover the original text with extraordinary reliability, and the inerrancy of the autographs is the solid foundation on which confidence in our extant texts rests.

Without error in all that it affirms introduces the critical concept of affirmation, which we will develop more fully in Section IV. The Bible reports many things that are not true: Satan's lies, the erroneous theology of Job's friends, the false accusations of Jesus' enemies. Inerrancy does not claim that every statement recorded in the Bible is true; it claims that every statement the biblical authors make in their own voice, every claim they intend to assert as true, is without error. The Bible accurately reports that Satan said what he said; inerrancy does not require that what Satan said is true.

Free from all falsehood, fraud, and deceit reaches beyond mere factual error to the character of the text. Scripture does not attempt to mislead its readers, does not present as fact what the authors knew to be fiction, does not employ deceptive rhetoric to create false impressions. The truthfulness of Scripture is not merely formal (no technically false propositions) but substantial: it is the honest, reliable, trustworthy communication of a God who is Himself the truth.

II. INERRANCY AS THE LOGICAL COROLLARY OF INSPIRATION

The relationship between inspiration and inerrancy is not merely historical or conventional. It is logical and necessary. Inerrancy follows from inspiration as a matter of theological entailment. If the premises of the doctrine of inspiration are true, the conclusion of inerrancy is unavoidable.

The argument can be stated as a straightforward theological syllogism:

Premise 1: God is the primary Author of Scripture. He breathed it out (theopneustos, 2 Timothy 3:16); the human authors wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

Premise 2: God is perfectly truthful. He cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). His word is truth (John 17:17). Everything He says corresponds to reality.

Conclusion: Therefore, Scripture, as the Word of God, is perfectly truthful. It cannot contain falsehood, because its Author cannot produce falsehood.

This syllogism is not merely formal logic; it is a theological argument that takes the character of God with complete seriousness. The force of the argument is as strong as the premises. Those who deny inerrancy while affirming inspiration must therefore either deny that God is the genuine Author of Scripture (in which case inspiration becomes something less than the Bible claims for itself) or deny that God's truthfulness extends to His act of inspiring Scripture (in which case God is truthful about everything except the Bible He produced, a position that is both arbitrary and incoherent).

B. B. Warfield, who did more than any other modern theologian to articulate the logical relationship between inspiration and inerrancy, put it this way: "The Biblical books are to be accepted as inerrant and infallible, because God is their Author." The inerrancy of Scripture is not an independent doctrine that happens to accompany inspiration; it is simply what inspiration means when you take the character of the divine Author seriously.

III. THE THEOLOGICAL SYLLOGISM: GOD IS TRUTHFUL → GOD INSPIRED SCRIPTURE → SCRIPTURE IS TRUTHFUL

Let us develop the theological grounding of inerrancy more fully by examining what the Bible itself says about the truthfulness of God and the truthfulness of His Word.

A. The Truthfulness of God

The God of Scripture is not merely a God who usually tells the truth or who tells the truth about important things. He is a God for whom lying is ontologically impossible because it is incompatible with His very being. The writer to the Hebrews states this with arresting force:

> *"In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us."*
>
> **Hebrews 6:17–18, NASB 1995**

It is impossible for God to lie. This is not a moral prohibition that God has imposed on Himself and could in principle remove; it is a metaphysical impossibility rooted in His nature. The God who is Truth (John 14:6) cannot be the source of untruth. The God whose every word is perfectly reliable cannot breathe out unreliable words. Paul makes the same point in his opening salvo to Titus: his apostolic proclamation rests on "the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago" (Titus 1:2, NASB 1995). The foundation of the entire apostolic proclamation is the God who cannot lie.

B. The Truthfulness of God's Word

The Bible is equally direct about the truthfulness of God's specific utterances. Our key texts for this lesson press this point with poetic force:

> *"The words of the LORD are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times."*
>
> **Psalm 12:6, NASB 1995**

The image of silver refined seven times describes a purity that admits of no remaining impurity, no trace of dross, no admixture of falsehood. God's words are not mostly pure or substantially reliable; they are absolutely, exhaustively, and irreducibly pure. The refining process is complete. There is nothing in them that needs to be separated out as human error or cultural accommodation.

> *"Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar."*
>
> **Proverbs 30:5–6, NASB 1995**

Every word of God is tested: proven, refined, demonstrated to be reliable under examination. And the instruction not to add to His words carries an implicit warning: the words of God are complete and reliable as they stand; any human addition that misrepresents them will be exposed as a lie. This is not a passage about the sufficiency of Scripture in the technical sense we will treat in Unit 5; it is a testimony to the absolute truthfulness of every word that God has spoken. His words need no correction, no qualification, no supplementary error-correction from human wisdom.

C. Jesus' Testimony: "Your Word Is Truth"

In His high-priestly prayer, Jesus addresses the Father with a statement that functions as a theological axiom for the entire doctrine of inerrancy:

> *"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."*
>
> **John 17:17, NASB 1995**

Jesus does not say that God's word is true, as if it were one true thing among others. He says God's word is truth, identifying it with the very category of truth itself. The Word of God does not merely correspond to reality; it defines and upholds it. This statement, made by the one who is Himself "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), is the highest possible testimony to the absolute truthfulness of Scripture. And it is precisely this absolute truthfulness that the doctrine of inerrancy seeks to confess and protect.

IV. THE SCOPE OF INERRANCY: ALL THAT SCRIPTURE ADDRESSES

One of the most important and most contested questions in the doctrine of inerrancy is its scope: Does the Bible's inerrancy extend to every subject it touches, or is it restricted to matters of faith and practice? The historic evangelical answer, affirmed by the Chicago Statement and by the great tradition of Reformed and evangelical theology, is that inerrancy extends to all that Scripture affirms, without restriction to any particular subject matter.

A. The Rejection of Limited Inerrancy

Limited inerrancy is the position that restricts the Bible's truthfulness to matters of salvation, doctrine, and ethics, while allowing for errors in historical narratives, geographical descriptions, or references to natural phenomena. This position has been advocated by various scholars who wish to maintain a meaningful doctrine of biblical authority while accommodating the results of critical historical scholarship.

The problems with limited inerrancy are both exegetical and theological. Exegetically, no text in Scripture draws the distinction that limited inerrancy requires. The Bible's own claims to truthfulness ("every word of God is tested" [Proverbs 30:5], "Your word is truth" [John 17:17], the Scripture cannot be broken [John 10:35]) are stated without qualification or restriction to any particular domain. Theologically, limited inerrancy introduces an incoherence: if the God who cannot lie inspired the theological content of Scripture but permitted historical errors in the surrounding narrative, then God's inability to lie is strangely selective, and we are left with no reliable principle for distinguishing which claims are inerrant and which are not. The history of liberal scholarship demonstrates that when the historical framework of Scripture is opened to critical erosion, the theological content invariably follows.

B. History, Geography, and Natural Descriptions

The scope of inerrancy includes the historical narratives of Scripture. The Exodus happened as described. The conquest of Canaan occurred. David was a historical king. The details of the Gospels accurately represent the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. These are not merely theological propositions dressed in historical garb; they are historical claims, and their inerrancy means they correspond to what actually happened.

This matters enormously for the gospel. The gospel is not a timeless myth or a religious symbol; it is a report of historical events. As Paul insists in 1 Corinthians 15:14, "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain." The resurrection is a historical claim, and the truthfulness of the gospel stands or falls with the historical truthfulness of that claim. A Bible that is theologically reliable but historically unreliable cannot serve as the foundation for a historically grounded faith.

The scope of inerrancy also includes geographical references and descriptions of the natural world, insofar as these constitute genuine affirmations by the biblical authors. When the Bible places events in specific locations, those locations are real. When the Bible describes natural phenomena, those descriptions accurately represent what the authors intended to communicate about reality, even if they employ the observational language and communicative conventions of their own cultural context rather than the technical precision of modern science.

V. INERRANCY AND THE PHENOMENA OF SCRIPTURE: PRECISION VS. ACCURACY

The most common and most serious misunderstanding of inerrancy is the confusion of accuracy with precision. Critics of inerrancy frequently point to features of the biblical text that would constitute errors if the Bible were required to speak with modern scientific or historical precision but that are entirely consistent with inerrancy once the distinction between accuracy and precision is properly understood.

A. Round Numbers and Approximations

The Bible frequently uses round numbers and approximate figures in contexts where exact precision is neither claimed nor required. When the Gospel of Mark says that Jesus fed "about five thousand men" (Mark 6:44), the qualifier "about" signals that a precise count is not being offered. The approximate figure accurately represents a genuinely large crowd. There is no error here, only the ordinary communicative practice of approximation that is common to all human speech across all cultures and all eras.

Similarly, the parallel accounts of various historical events in Kings and Chronicles sometimes differ in their numerical figures. Some of these differences reflect the use of round numbers; others reflect different counting conventions (such as whether a co-regency is counted in the reign of the father or the son); still others await resolution through further historical and textual study. The existence of such differences does not constitute proof of error; it constitutes evidence that careful, patient exegesis and historical study are required before conclusions about error can be reached. The history of biblical scholarship demonstrates that many apparent numerical discrepancies that once seemed intractable have been resolved by subsequent research.

B. Observational Language

The Bible frequently describes natural phenomena in the language of human observation rather than in the technical language of modern science. References to the sun rising (Ecclesiastes 1:5), to the four winds of heaven (Daniel 7:2; Revelation 7:1), or to the circle of the earth (Isaiah 40:22) reflect the ordinary observational perspective of human beings standing on the earth. Weather forecasters employ the same perspective when they announce sunrise and sunset times, and no one accuses them of flat-earth cosmology.

Inerrancy does not require that the Bible employ the technical vocabulary and conceptual framework of twenty-first-century physics, biology, or cosmology. God accommodated His communication to the language and perspective of the human authors and their audiences. This accommodation does not introduce error; it reflects the wisdom of a God who communicates with creatures in a manner they can receive and understand. What the biblical authors affirm about the natural world in their own observational terms is accurate; they are not making the false affirmations that a modern scientist would be making if he employed the same language.

C. Quotations, Paraphrase, and Selective Reporting

The biblical authors, particularly the Gospel writers, frequently cite Old Testament passages in ways that adapt, paraphrase, or apply the original text rather than reproducing it verbatim. Matthew's quotation of prophetic texts, for example, sometimes follows the Septuagint (the Greek translation) rather than the Hebrew, and sometimes

combines or applies texts in ways that do not correspond to a word-for-word citation of the original. These practices reflect the normal conventions of ancient citation, which did not require verbatim reproduction and were well understood by the authors and their original audiences.

Similarly, the four Gospels present the same events and sayings of Jesus in different words, different orders, and with different emphases. These variations do not represent contradictions; they represent the selective, purposive reporting of four evangelists who were writing for different audiences and with different theological emphases, each under the superintendence of the Spirit who intended each Gospel to serve its particular purpose. The differences between the Gospels are fully consistent with inerrancy once we understand that inerrancy governs what the author intended to affirm, not whether his account reproduces every detail in identical form to every other account.

D. The Critical Distinction: What Does the Author Intend to Affirm?

The governing principle for applying inerrancy to the phenomena of Scripture is always the question of authorial intention: What does this author, in this literary form, in this historical context, intend to assert as true? A psalm of lament is not a doctrinal treatise; its claims are expressed in the genre of poetry and must be interpreted accordingly. A historical narrative makes different kinds of truth-claims than an apocalyptic vision. A letter written to address specific problems in a specific church makes claims that are both contextually embedded and trans-contextually authoritative in different ways.

Inerrancy is not a wooden hermeneutical grid that requires every biblical statement to be interpreted as a literal, precise, scientific affirmation. It is a principled commitment to the truthfulness of what each biblical author, in his own genre and context, actually intends to communicate. Applied with proper hermeneutical sensitivity, inerrancy is not only compatible with the full range of biblical literature; it is the only doctrine of Scripture that takes the full humanity of the text seriously enough to read each text in its own literary and historical terms.

VI. THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY: A DETAILED REVIEW

In October 1978, more than 300 evangelical scholars, pastors, and church leaders gathered in Chicago and produced what has become the definitive modern statement of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI) was drafted in response to the growing erosion of inerrancy within evangelical institutions and the widespread confusion about what the doctrine actually claims. Its nineteen Articles of Affirmation and Denial represent the most careful, comprehensive, and nuanced statement of inerrancy available.

A. What the Chicago Statement Affirms

The Statement affirms that Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation and the events of world history and the origin of Scripture in God Himself than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives (Article XII, paraphrased). This is the scope of inerrancy as the Statement defines it: extending to all that Scripture teaches, across all subjects, without restriction to any particular domain.

Key affirmations include:

- **Article VI:**The whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.
- **Article IX:**Inspiration does not guarantee the kind of technical precision associated with modern scientific, historical, or geographical investigation; inerrancy is entirely consistent with the literary and cultural conventions of the biblical world.
- **Article XI:**Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible; it is not possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions.
- **Article XII:**Scripture is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, and deceit. Inerrancy is not negated by the absence of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, variant selections of material, or the use of free citations.

B. What the Chicago Statement Denies

The Statement's denials are equally important, as they clarify the boundaries of the doctrine against common misrepresentations:

- **Article XII (Denial):**Inerrancy is not negated by the biblical phenomena listed above (round numbers, observational language, etc.). The critics' standard of "modern technical precision" is not the standard Scripture claims for itself.
- **Article XIII (Denial):**It is improper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. To judge the Bible by standards its authors never claimed and that are foreign to the literary conventions of the ancient world is to apply a criterion of error that Scripture has never submitted to.
- **Article XVIII (Denial):**The assumption that inerrancy has no connection to other biblical and theological concerns (that it is an isolated, peripheral doctrine) is denied. Inerrancy is interwoven with the full fabric of evangelical theology; to deny it is to compromise the whole.

C. The Significance of the Chicago Statement

The Chicago Statement is not Scripture, and it does not carry the authority of Scripture. But it represents the considered wisdom of the evangelical church in a moment of crisis, when the doctrine of inerrancy was under sustained attack from within as well as without and careful definition was essential for the health of the church. Its value is precisely its precision: it defines inerrancy in a way that is neither too narrow (demanding modern scientific precision that Scripture never claimed) nor too broad (emptying the doctrine of meaningful content). It remains the standard reference point for evangelical discussions of inerrancy more than four decades after its drafting.

Key Texts (NASB 1995)

> *"The words of the LORD are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times."*
>
> **Psalm 12:6**

> *"Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar."*
>
> **Proverbs 30:5–6**

> *"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."*
>
> **John 17:17**

> *"… in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago."*
>
> **Titus 1:2**

Theological Terms and Definitions

Inerrancy	The doctrine that Scripture, in the original autographs, is without error in all that it affirms and free from all falsehood, fraud, and deceit. Inerrancy is not merely the claim that the Bible does not err in spiritual matters; it extends to every subject the Bible addresses, including history, geography, and descriptions of the natural world, insofar as those descriptions reflect the author's intended affirmations.
Infallibility	The property of Scripture by which it is incapable of deceiving or leading its readers astray. Infallibility is closely related to inerrancy but emphasizes the Bible's reliability as a guide: it will not mislead those who receive it rightly. In historic usage the two terms were largely synonymous; modern usage sometimes distinguishes them, with some theologians affirming infallibility in matters of faith and practice while denying inerrancy in historical or scientific details. This limited infallibility position is rejected by the conservative evangelical tradition.
Original Autographs	The initial manuscripts of the biblical books as produced by the inspired human authors under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit. Inerrancy applies to the autographs specifically, not to every subsequent copy or translation. The autographs no longer exist in physical form, but the science of textual criticism has recovered their content with extraordinary reliability.
Phenomena of Scripture	The observable features of the biblical text that reflect its genuinely human character: the use of round numbers, approximations, observational language (e.g., describing the sun as rising), quotations cited from memory, variations in the order of events across parallel accounts, and other features of ordinary human communication. The doctrine of inerrancy is fully compatible with all these phenomena; they do not constitute errors because they reflect the communicative conventions and purposes of their authors rather than false affirmations.
Affirmation (vs. Accommodation)	A critical distinction in the definition of inerrancy. Inerrancy applies to what Scripture affirms, that is, what the author intends to assert as true. Scripture may report things that are false (e.g., Satan's lies, the mistaken opinions of Job's friends) without itself affirming them as true. Inerrancy does not mean that every statement in the Bible is true, but that every affirmation the biblical authors make in their own voice is true.
Precision vs. Accuracy	A distinction central to the doctrine of inerrancy. Precision refers to the degree of exactness with which a claim is stated; accuracy refers to the correspondence of a claim to reality. A statement can be accurate without being precise (e.g., "there were about 5,000 men" accurately describes a crowd even if the exact count was 4,973). Inerrancy requires that Scripture's affirmations be accurate, not that they be stated with modern scientific or historical precision.
The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy	A landmark theological document produced in 1978 by over 300 evangelical scholars and church leaders, providing the most comprehensive and carefully nuanced definition of biblical inerrancy in the modern era. Its Articles of Affirmation and Denial define what inerrancy does and does not mean, addressing common misunderstandings and defending the full truthfulness of Scripture across all subjects it addresses.
Limited Inerrancy	The erroneous view that the Bible's inerrancy is restricted to matters of faith and practice (soteriology, ethics, doctrine) while allowing for errors in historical, geographical, or scientific details. This position is rejected by the Chicago Statement and by the historic evangelical tradition on the grounds that it introduces an artificial and biblically unwarranted division within the text, and that it undermines confidence in the Bible's theological affirmations since they are inseparable from their historical grounding.

Truthfulness of God	The divine attribute that grounds the doctrine of inerrancy. God is the God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), whose every word is truth (John 17:17), and whose promises are completely reliable (2 Corinthians 1:20). Because God is the primary Author of Scripture and because God is incapable of deception, the Scriptures He breathed out must be free from all error and falsehood.
Verbal Plenary Inerrancy	The full evangelical position, combining verbal inspiration (inspiration extends to the words), plenary inspiration (inspiration extends to all parts), and inerrancy (the inspired text is without error in all that it affirms). This combined doctrine affirms that every word of every part of the original autographs is both divinely inspired and completely truthful.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the Bible is without error in all that it affirms, because the God who cannot lie breathed out a Word that is as pure as refined silver and as trustworthy as His own character. This conviction is not an optional add-on to Christian faith; it is the logical entailment of everything the Bible claims about God and about itself. To affirm that God inspired Scripture while allowing that Scripture may err is to hold two positions that cannot coexist without one of them destroying the other. The church that confesses "God is truth" but hedges on "God's Word is truth" has not yet thought clearly about what it means for God to speak.

We must also embrace the nuanced understanding of inerrancy that the Chicago Statement provides. Inerrancy does not demand that every passage be read with woodenly literal, scientifically precise expectations. It demands that we read each passage in terms of what its author, in his literary form and historical context, intended to affirm, and it insists that every such affirmation is true. This is a doctrine capacious enough to accommodate the full richness of biblical literature while firm enough to hold the line against every form of error.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

The doctrine of inerrancy should produce in us a profound and settled rest, the rest of a soul that knows it is standing on ground that cannot give way. When you read a historical narrative and it tells you what happened, it happened. When you read a promise and it tells you what God will do, He will do it. When you read a command and it tells you what God requires, He requires it. There is no need to second-guess, no need to filter out the human error, no need to hold the text at arm's length pending further scholarly confirmation. The God who cannot lie has spoken, and His Word is pure.

Cultivate a love for inerrancy that goes beyond intellectual conviction to personal delight. The psalmist who wrote that God's words are "sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:10) was not merely confessing an abstract doctrine; he was expressing the joy of a man who had tested God's Word and found it perfectly reliable in the furnace of his own experience. That joy is available to every believer who trusts and reads and obeys the inerrant Word.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

1. Read the Bible with full confidence. Because the Bible is inerrant in all that it affirms, you can come to it without the constant qualification of wondering whether this passage is reliable. Read the historical narratives as history. Read the promises as promises. Read the commands as commands. The Word you are reading is pure, refined seven times.

2. Learn the distinction between precision and accuracy. When critics raise apparent discrepancies (different numbers in parallel accounts, variations between Gospel narratives, ancient descriptions of nature), you do not need to be defensive or evasive. Understand the distinction between what the author intended to affirm and the modern standard of precision the critic is applying. Most apparent errors dissolve when this distinction is properly applied.

3. Hold the line on scope. Resist the pressure to restrict inerrancy to matters of faith and practice while conceding errors in history or science. The concession is never as safe as it seems; once the historical framework of Scripture

is opened to critical revision, the theological content that depends on it is inevitably compromised. A historically unreliable Bible cannot sustain a historically grounded faith.

4. Engage difficult texts with patience and humility. There will be passages that resist easy harmonization: texts where the apparent tension between accounts or between Scripture and extra-biblical evidence is not immediately resolved. In such cases, the doctrine of inerrancy calls us not to forced harmonization but to patient, humble, ongoing study, confident that the God who cannot lie has not breathed out contradictions and that the apparent tensions will yield to faithful investigation. The history of biblical scholarship has repeatedly vindicated this patience.

5. Commend inerrancy to the next generation. The church's grip on inerrancy is only as secure as its willingness to teach it clearly and hold it firmly. Parents, teachers, and pastors bear a particular responsibility to instill in the rising generation not merely the conclusion ("the Bible is without error") but the reasoning ("because the God who cannot lie breathed it out") and the nuance (what inerrancy does and does not claim). Informed conviction is far more durable than inherited assumption.

D. *For Every Season of Life*

For the student or young believer encountering critical scholarship for the first time: You will hear confident assertions that the Bible contains historical errors, scientific mistakes, and irreconcilable contradictions. Do not be shaken before you have investigated. The history of evangelical scholarship demonstrates that patient, careful study has resolved the vast majority of alleged errors, and that the ones remaining resist resolution because of the limits of our current knowledge, not because God's Word has failed. Stand on Psalm 12:6: the words of the LORD are pure words, refined seven times.

For the believer in a season of trial or grief: The inerrancy of Scripture means that the promises God has given you are not approximate approximations of good intentions. They are the precise, reliable, unbreakable commitments of the God who cannot lie. "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5, NASB 1995). Every word of that promise has been tested and proven. Rest your full weight on it.

For the pastor and teacher: You stand before your people each week handling the inerrant Word. Preach it with the confidence that befits the text you are holding. You are not managing human religious insights of varying reliability; you are declaring the pure, refined, tested words of the God who cannot lie. Let that conviction shape the authority with which you handle and proclaim the Scripture.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Have you ever had your confidence in the Bible shaken by a specific passage, apparent contradiction, or critical argument? What was it, and how did you work through it? What resources (theological, exegetical, or personal) proved most helpful?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read Psalm 12:6. What image does the psalmist use to describe the purity of God's words? What does this metaphor communicate about the nature and degree of that purity?
3. Read Proverbs 30:5–6. What two claims does Agur make about the words of God? What warning does he add, and what does that warning imply about the completeness and reliability of God's Word?
4. Read Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:17–18. What specific attribute of God is highlighted in both passages? How does this divine attribute provide the ultimate foundation for the doctrine of inerrancy?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

5. The lesson presents the doctrine of inerrancy as a logical corollary of inspiration, a theological syllogism with three parts. State the syllogism in your own words. At which premise do critics of inerrancy most often push back, and how would you respond?
6. Explain the distinction between precision and accuracy and why it is so important for the doctrine of inerrancy. Give a concrete example of a feature of the biblical text (round numbers, observational language, etc.) that would appear to be an error under a precision standard but is not an error under an accuracy standard.
7. What is limited inerrancy, and why does the lesson argue that it is both exegetically and theologically untenable? What happens to the theological content of Scripture when the historical framework is opened to critical revision?
8. The Chicago Statement says that inerrancy is "not negated by" a list of biblical phenomena (round numbers, observational language, variant Gospel accounts, etc.). Why is it important that the doctrine of inerrancy be defined in a way that accommodates these phenomena rather than treating them as errors?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

9. The lesson argues that a historically unreliable Bible cannot sustain a historically grounded faith, citing 1 Corinthians 15:14. Think through the implications of this argument for the resurrection specifically. What is at stake theologically if the historical reliability of the resurrection narrative is denied?
10. Read John 17:17. Jesus does not merely say God's word is true but that it is truth. What is the difference, and why does it matter for how we think about the authority of Scripture in relation to other truth-claims (scientific, philosophical, experiential)?
11. The lesson argues that inerrancy calls us to patient, humble engagement with difficult texts rather than forced harmonization or easy concession. Is there a passage or apparent discrepancy in Scripture that you have found genuinely difficult? How might the principle of patient, ongoing study apply to it?

12. How would you explain the doctrine of inerrancy, including both what it does and what it does not claim, to a skeptical friend or family member who believes the Bible is full of errors? What are the one or two most important points you would want to make?

Prayer Focus

Spend time in prayer as a group, thanking God that He is the God who cannot lie and that His character is the foundation upon which the inerrancy of Scripture rests. Thank Him for giving us a Word that is pure as refined silver, tested and proven reliable in every generation. Ask the Lord to deepen your confidence in the inerrant Word, to give you wisdom when you encounter difficult passages, and to grant you the patience and humility to trust Him in the texts that remain unresolved. Pray that the church would hold fast to the doctrine of inerrancy not as an abstract theological position but as a living, joyful confidence in the God who has spoken truly.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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