

Inerrancy

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- [0 : 00] Let me read just from one verse very quickly. As my word, God says through Isaiah, as my word goes out from my mouth, it shall not return to me empty.
- It will accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55-11. Last time we were together we started this series on trusting scripture in a secular age and we looked at the fact that the Bible was inspired and what that means and how that means so much more than just that word might say on the surface and the challenges that we face in believing in an inspired text in 2023.
- And so we took on some of that. Today we want to carry it one step further which is not only to say the Bible is inspired but also that it's true which is a logical step from inspiration to simply say the Bible is also true.
- Now that's where we really get into thorny issues and challenges from the age that we live in and so we'll consider just a couple of those today more later in the series. But the preview what we really want to say today is that truth is more than historical reliability.
- So what it means to say that the Bible is true is much more than saying that the Bible got the facts of history right. Truth is it goes well beyond that.
- [1 : 28] And so that's what we're going to see and talk about tonight. So the big claim three things very quickly the big claim that we like to make when we talk about the truth of the Bible is to say that it is an errant.
- So the way that we express that statement is by saying the Bible is an errant in our tradition. And so what I want to do is ask three questions about what that means. Truth has an errancy that the Bible is true therefore without error.
- What does that mean. Okay. And three things that we've got to say to make that clear. All right first what is an errancy. What is it. Okay. Inerrancy very precisely is the view our view the church's view that the Bible is without any errors in its autographs.
- That means the first forms. So it's not that there aren't discrepancies in the ESV perhaps. It's that there are no errors in the original text that God gave through people through Paul through whoever.
- Now what is that original text. What is the first time Isaiah was ever fully Isaiah. Well it's hard to say because of course Isaiah didn't write Isaiah in a day.
- [2 : 47] He wrote it over a long sequence and how it was transmitted and developed is hard for us to say. So that means that when we say something like the Bible is an errant it's not a position that we come to by empirical data.
- So in other words we don't go through the Bible and study it verse by verse and say I have concluded like a scientist that the Bible is an errant. No. Why. Because what we're talking about are the originals.
- And so in other words an errancy is a doctrine of faith. We say it in faith. We say that if this is God's word and we said that last time that this is the word of God and the words of men then therefore it requires that we say it's true in an era.

So it's a statement we make in faith not a fact finding mission. And so those are very different things. Now oftentimes people challenge an errancy and get that confused.

Like that the only way you can establish an errancy is if you go through the Bible and check for any possible discrepancies word for word verse for verse manuscript for manuscript and that's exactly the opposite of what we're saying.

[3 : 53] We're saying no not at all. Of course we expect human beings that are messing around with it and translating to make mistakes from time to time. We're talking about a doctrine of faith that the originals that God gave us because of who he is are therefore without errors.

Okay now nevertheless that also there's still some tricky bits left that still hasn't given us everything we need to say about this doctrine.

Before I give it to you let me explore a counter claim. So what's the challenge to this? Well there's two popular ones. One I've already dealt with and that's popularly represented by a person like Bart Ehrman a scholar at UNC North Carolina in the United States.

Ehrman claims that there are over 300 mistakes errors in the New Testament. And the problem the simple thing we can say to Bart is that matters of material discrepancy within the New Testament aren't what we're talking about.

So what Ehrman's talking about is manuscript contradictions. This manuscript has the preposition of this one has the preposition at but when you look at almost all of them that Ehrman brings up there's no substantial discrepancy.

[5 : 04] It doesn't change the meaning right. Last time we talked about how the meaning of the Bible is not in every particular word it's in the discourse it's in what God's saying to us across the whole of the sentence.

And so almost everything Ehrman points out can be easily dealt with. For that reason Ehrman's claim that there are 300 mistakes in the New Testament is really not the challenge. The challenge to an errancy instead comes from some people that are a little more thoughtful than Bart Ehrman.

And what they'll say is an errancy is an entirely modern idea that ancient people, pre-modern people ancient Near Eastern people just don't think in that way.

So when we want to say the Bible is an errant it doesn't have any errors in it. We're thinking like a modern person that an ancient person would have never never expected the Bible to not have errors.

So that's the common claim. Why? Because they would say modern people have the camera you know you have an iPhone. And ever since the 19th century when we started recording things by camera and then later by video camera we changed the way we think about the world.

[6 : 10] And now what truth means for us is eyewitness testimony perfect evidence video recordings innocent until proven guilty by some undoubtable testimony right but that's just not how a pre-modern person thought about it.

Modern people were okay to say this is legend and truth at the same time this never really happened but at the same time it's also true in a different sense.

And we don't have time tonight obviously to unpack all the ways we might we might think about that and speak about that but a wonderful book on this is Richard Balkon's book Jesus and the Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony.

It's a wonderful book that explores this claim one of the best scholars in the world and he really really undermines this thesis in that book. So if you're looking for something more I commend it to you you can buy it from William over here I'm sure across the street.

But let me just say this did pre-modern people's really think that? That's the real question and here's Augustine this is Augustine in the third century the late third century late fourth century I should say and Augustine says this it seems to me that the most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing anything false is to be found in the sacred books with regard to history.

[7 : 33] So Augustine all the way back in the late three hundreds says it would be disastrous to say that you can find anything historically false in the sacred books of scripture.

Now he's not a modern person he's a pre-modern person he is in fact someone say an ancient person and so it's just not true and there's there's a lot more evidence for that. Now instead we can say secondly that we've got to think carefully though however about what an errant seed really does mean.

Okay and let me give you a definition of what it what it means we've already said an errant seed is saying that the Bible doesn't have any errors in its originals but but we need to say more than that to hedge around other potential mistakes that might be made.

Alright so here's something a little more precise an errant seed says that the Bible is true when God speaks the meaning God intends to speak.

In other words we read Isaiah 55:11 and it told us what an errant seed means. It says my word goes forth and it accomplishes exactly what I'd tend to accomplish.

[8 : 41] An errant seed is the claim that everything God wants to say is true and that he has said it. He says things without fail so whatever he wants to communicate in the text he has communicated and it has no errors in it.

No errors with respect to his intentions. Now there's a very important reason that we put an errant seed in this frame let me illustrate it we might any Jane Austen readers Jane Austen yeah a few, Siobhan others yeah I like Jane Austen.

Glenis maybe you like Jane Austen. Jane Austen it's very famous Pride and Prejudice it is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife right probably the most famous Austen line.

Now Kevin Van Hoeser uses Austen to illustrate an errant seed. So he says when you read an Austen line an Austen line like that we can say that Jane Austen writes prose divinely.

She writes literature divinely right. We cannot say that Jane Austen writes divine prose. So she writes prose divinely but she doesn't write divine prose right.

[10 : 07] Divine prose is what the Bible gives you and it's where God speaks and says exactly what he wants to say without fail and that's an errant seed.

It's the same thing we really said last week that where is the inspiration located the inspiration where is the Bible the Bible is in the discourse that God intends therefore we can translate it and it's still be God's word even though the Hebrews changed the English the Greeks changed the English.

And in the same way an errant seed is not just the claim that the Bible says true things historically it's much more than that it's the claim that God says exactly what he intended to say and it does what he wants it to do without any failure.

That's the doctrine of an errant seed. Now let me lastly and we'll be done just say a few things that make more sense of that and why that's so important.

So the first is the nature of truth. So when we say that the Bible is an errant that God communicates everything he wants to communicate in the Bible without fail. We say that because when you think about the nature of truth you realize that you've got to say more than just that the Bible contains historical truths.

[11 : 22] An errant seed has to be about more than just getting the facts of history right because if that's all it is you leave out most of the passages of the Bible. Okay let me give you some examples.

In other words it's to say truth is much more multifaceted than how we often think about it. Alright so for example the Psalmist says how long a Lord, how long a Lord will you forget me?

How long a Lord will you look on and not rescue me? What kind of a truth claim is that? Okay well you know what I say well the Bible is true and everything it says but what kind of truth is the truth claim how long how long a Lord will you forget me?

What kind of truth is that? The prayer. Is it a historical truth? No not at all it's not in the category of history. You can't go and say well maybe perhaps you can say well did you really say that?

Well of course it's written. It's a prayer. What kind of a truth claim is the claims of the Psalms, the prayers of the Psalms. What kind of a truth is that?

[12 : 27] And it tells us that an errant seed has got to be about more than just historical facts and historical data. No an errant seed is much deeper. It's that God has said unfailingly what he wants to say in Psalm 77 or whatever it might whatever Psalm you might be reading okay.

Psalms aren't really about facts they're about prayer they're about singing and worshipping God alright. In the same way you can say that art is true.

The art historians will talk about the truth of art or the philosophers and what they mean is that art is true when the good and the beautiful come together in one painting, one sculpture, one image and then it has the category of truth meaning it communicates the type of meaning it should communicate.

It should say. It is what it should be that's what they mean when they talk about true art and so truth is not merely at all the correspondence between event and history and then the way we communicate it.

It's not like courtroom truth. Truth is much deeper. Truth instead is whatever God intends something to be. When it is that thing it is true.

[13 : 38] So whenever something is beautiful as God intended it we can say it's true. It's exactly what God wants it to be. Whenever the Bible communicates a scripture communicates something that God wants and it does it it's true even if it has nothing to do with history alright.

So actually it's incredibly modern to say that truth is relegated to the realm of fact-checking. That's a modern way of thinking. Now that is true but truth has many more layers than that.

It goes much deeper. Let me give you another one. He is risen. Now what kind of a statement is that one? He is risen.

There's no surprises here. What kind of statement is it? It is historical right? It is one. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 15, if he didn't then your faith is futile right?

And so that's a historical truth claim. If it was proven that Jesus did not rise from the dead then we wouldn't have an inherent scripture. But he did. So the historical facts are true but also it goes beyond that.

[14 : 40] So here's one more, the last one. There were 14 generations between Adam, between Adam and Abraham. There were 14 generations between Abraham and David and there were 14 generations between David and Jesus.

Now where do we find that one? What text? Matthew 1 right? Matthew, somebody shouted out Matthew. Matthew 1. There are 14, 14, 14.

Now if you relegate anency to mere historical data you have a real problem when you come to Matthew chapter 1.

Because the point is not to say that there are literally and only 14 generations from Adam to Abraham, Abraham to David, David to Jesus. No, not at all. There's some dude claim that that is the case.

But they missed the point because that's exactly the opposite of the point. The point is there are so many more generations between Adam and Abraham, Abraham, and David and Jesus. Of course there are.

[15 : 37] But why is it being communicated this way? In other words, if you relegate it to history then you have to say the Bible is not anent. But that's not what Matthew 1 is trying to do. Matthew 1 is trying to communicate something different.

Yes, all these people really did live that are listed but so many more generations passed between them. Instead, you've got several things going on, right? You've got 14, 14, 14. 14 is the number of David himself.

So the Jewish people knew very well that in Hebrew the way you count is you take your alphabet and your alphabet are also your numbers. They're your letters and your numbers. A is one, B is two in the Hebrew alphabet.

And so anytime a number appears it also looks like a word, a normal word, right? And so 14 is 464 in Hebrew and 464 is DVD. All right?

464, which is the number 14 in Hebrew, is what? DVD. All right? What does it say? It says Jesus is David, David, David.

[16 : 39] 14, 14, 14. And how does Matthew 1, 1 begin? This is the genealogy of Jesus Christ and the very first thing we're told about him is son of David. And he is the David, David, David, King, King, King, or 14, 14, 14.

You have six sets of seven. But then Jesus is the seventh, seven, the true Sabbath. You've had six sets of seven but you need the seventh. And the seventh is the Sabbath.

And seven times seven is 49. And 49 is the multiple of seven and a very important number. And we can go on and on and on. There's multiple meanings here and it is exactly the point to say this is not the historical fact.

There are many more than 14 plus 14 plus 14 generations from Adam to David. And so if you relegate anency like Bart Ehrman and others do to simply saying, well, you're saying that anency means that every single moment it's pure historical facts, like we had a video camera, then you're going to have to deny it eventually because of Matthew 1 and so many other places like it, but that's not what it means.

All right, I'm finishing in three minutes. Let me leave you with some things to think about to help all of us in our Bible reading.

[17 : 50] That means that whenever we encounter problems as we read the Bible, there's a few things we can do. One of them is we have to assume that the problem is with us. As Christians by faith, we have to assume the Bible is with us.

And so Kevin van Hoeser says, anency is the doctrine that God says exactly when it what he wants to say, but we only see it when right readers are reading rightly. That's how he puts it when right readers are reading rightly.

So of course, a skeptic is not going to buy that, of course, but we're talking to the church and in the church, we say, right readers reading rightly are those who have the spirit.

And so remember last time we said that every act of proper reading is God the Father speaking, God the Son being the very content and God the Spirit interpreting that in our hearts.

That's what happens when we read the Bible or hear preaching. The triune God is there working. And so you have to be a right reader reading rightly or you're not going to see everything that's being offered in the Bible.

[18 : 48] All right. So that's the first thing, just a couple more and we'll be done. Secondly, it's important to remember, however, that scripture is an ancient book. So it's not a modern textbook. It's not a modern book in the way we often expect modern books to be written.

And so that means we don't go to scripture looking for scientific explanations, for example, not at all. Scripture does not say very much about most things, but it does give you the norm for everything.

Scripture doesn't tell us very much about geology, but it can be a real norm for a geologist, meaning that it gives you the boundaries of belief of where your study can go.

If your study is leading you down the path to deny that there was a creator in the beginning, scripture norms you. It stops you. It says not, don't go past that. All right. But it doesn't tell you very much about geology.

It does talk about rocks and gems pretty often, but not in a geological sense. It's not a scientific textbook. So it speaks most often phenomenologically, meaning in Joshua, when Joshua prayed for God to help in the battle of Ai, and it says that God stopped the sun.

[20 : 01] The sun stood still so that there could be a longer day. What might a scientist come and say about that? Grant it's a miracle. Grant that God really did it.

Nevertheless, what might the scientist say about the way the Bible puts it? What's the problem?

What's the problem with saying the sun stood still, even if God extended the day? How would God extend the day? God stands still. The earth stands still. Thanks Thomas.

We know, now we know that it's not, well the sun does move, but it's primarily what that controls daylight and sunlight in a nighttime. It's the movement of the earth, right?

And so the scientist comes along and says, look, you've got an error. It says, sure, maybe God did perform a miracle, but it's not the sun that stood still. That's an improper claim. It's maybe the earth that God stopped on its axis.

[21 : 01] It's not a scientific textbook. We think that most of these claims are, we say it's phenomenological. They're written as they're experienced, right? And every single one of us, we say the sun is rising earlier and earlier every day and going down later and later as we get away from January, right?

And of course, that's the same thing. It's a phenomenological claim. The sun is not rising. Everybody knows that the sun is not rising. What is happening?

The earth is rotating. And yet we will continue to say that till we die, because it's also true. It is true because it's true by way of perception. And that's a certain type of truth.

And so that's what the Bible does over and over and over again. It says there were 13,000 people at the battle. And you say, well, if I had a video camera, I would have seen 13,407.

But did the person tell an untruth? No, not at all. It's phenomenological. It's the same way if you were looking over a cliff at a battle, you would say as a historian, there were 13,000 people there, right?

[22 : 02] You would do your best. You would do your best. And that's exactly what we get in ancient text. So we've got to remember what the Bible is and treat it in that way. Lastly, inerrancy is a confession, remember, always about the autograph of the original text, the autographs.

Which means that we're OK, we're OK, we're not destroyed if we come and realize, hey, the ESV could have done better on this word. That's OK.

If we say, well, the manuscripts might lead us to change this preposition to that. You'll hear that, you'll get that even here because that's what's in the footnotes. The footnotes that say we could have gone this way because of the manuscript.

So even the Bible translators tell you from the outset, that's exactly what to expect. We're not upset by that. We fully expect that. That we have 5,700 plus biblical manuscripts that we now use to cultivate and curate the Bible.

That's the most reliable document ever in human history by far, not even close. And so we know that we have a reliable text and that the inspiration is found in God's intended communication. All right, so believing the Bible, it has real reasons and what we believe about it has a lot, a lot of substance.

[23 : 19] And it also requires in us, each of us, a posture of humble submission. That's really what we're saying is that we come to the text humbly submitting in faith and saying, I'm never going to see the originals.

But because I believe in God, I believe that this is true. That's the logic for the Christian. All right, let's pray. Father, we give thanks that you've given us a trustworthy word.

And we trust in it tonight and we trust that it tells us truths about you. So as we come to prayer, we do it in thanksgiving for your word and we also do it on the ground that your word has shown us Jesus.

And so we pray to you, Christ tonight, that you would hear our hearts in these brief moments of prayer. And I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.