

What does the Scripture say about itself and its inerrancy?¹

Essay by Stefan Sjöqvist, kyrkoherde St. Paulus evangelisk-lutherska församling, Uppsala at the Europe CELC meeting, in Plzeň, Czech Republic 2018.

Scope

The scope of this essay is not: is the Bible the Word of God or is the Bible inspired by God, but what does the Scripture say about itself and its inerrancy? Many people believe that the Bible is the Word of God and inspired by God without affirming that it is inerrant. Some people even say that the Bible is infallible without accepting the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures.

So how do we defend the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Scriptures? Does the Bible itself even affirm its inerrancy?

Definition of inerrancy

Before we answer these questions we must define what we call biblical inerrancy. That the Bible is inerrant means that the Scriptures in their original manuscripts are wholly true and accurate in every respect, and without error, about all they affirm, whether relating to doctrine, ethics, morality, history or science.

What inerrancy is not

That the Scriptures are the inerrant Word of God does not mean that they contain everything we want to know; it does not mean that every word was dictated by God in a mechanical sense. God inspired every word in the Bible, not mechanically, but rather by using the language and personality of the writers. *"The Holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."* (2 Tim 3: 15-17)

Inerrancy and infallibility

The Holy Scriptures are also infallible. Infallibility can be distinguished from inerrancy in that infallibility regards effect or content. The Chicago Statement of the Evangelicals proposes this distinction: *'Infallibility signifies the quality of neither misleading nor being misled and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe, and reliable rule and guide in all matters. Similarly, inerrant signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.'*²

Some simplify the distinction by saying that inerrancy means that the Scriptures are "exempt from error" and by defining infallibility as a near synonym meaning "incapable of error". So the difference should be in matter of content versus attributes or effects; the difference between what it is and what it does.

¹ Bible citations are from the NIV, exceptions are mentioned within parentheses. Thanks to prof John Vogt who proofread the text.

²

Norman L. Geisler, ed. Inerrancy, Appendix. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980, 500.

Even though linguistically the words infallibility and inerrancy are almost synonymous, some less heterodox theologians try to smuggle admittance of actual errors into the text by affirming the infallibility of the Scriptures. They say that, while the biblical record has errors, nevertheless, it is "*perfect with respect to purpose which is never failing in its transforming power.*" This is however, a smokescreen. If what you trust in is not true in fact, but only in intention, or effect, it is meaningless. Salvation is based on the historical events described in the Bible. If these facts do not correspond to reality, neither does your salvation. Salvation is not like in the gnostic system based on a description of ideas, but rather salvation is based on persons and events in real life.

So, the only sustainable position is to confess both the infallibility and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures. Even though infallibility in its original sense presupposes inerrancy, we should still hold to the term inerrancy, since some liberals try to hide denial of the inerrancy behind an ambiguous use of the term infallibility.

Inerrancy and inspiration

To affirm that the Bible is inerrant you have to confess the verbal inspiration of the Bible and vice versa. The "partial inspiration theory" tells us the Bible is infallible in matters of faith and practice/morals, yet it could have errors in history or science. The "dynamic inspiration theory" tells us that the thoughts contained in the Bible are inspired, but the words used were left to the individual writers. But St. Paul in his second letter to Timothy tells us that, not only the message, not only the main message, but the actual text, "*all Scriptures*" *πᾶσα γραφή* is inspired or God-breathed *θεόπνευστος*.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." (2 Tim. 3: 16)

Likewise St. Peter says:

"For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1: 21)

Inerrancy in the Old Testament

One might think that the issue of inerrancy is first addressed in the Bible when it is challenged by the Serpent in the Garden of Eden, saying:

"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Gen 3: 1)

But the issue is actually solved in the first words of Genesis:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen 1: 1)

This God who created the universe is by definition without error. He is perfect, holy and without flaws. A limited god would not be God. The Scriptures declares that "*it is impossible for God to lie*" (Heb. 6:18). Paul speaks of the "*God who does not lie*" (Titus 1:2). He is a God who, even if we are faithless, "*He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself*" (2 Tim. 2:13, NKJV). God is truth (John 14:6).

If God is inerrant, and the Bible is the Word of God, the Bible is inerrant. It is true that the creation is a victim of decay and corruption as Paul says in Romans 8:

"For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." (Romans 8: 20, 21)

But the Word of God is nowhere described as part of the fallen creation. It is eternal in nature and not subject to the corruption of sin.

Scripture says:

"Your word, Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens." (Psalms 119: 89)

Isaiah contrasts the perfect Word of God with the corrupted creation by saying:

"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever." (Isaiah 40:8)

And by definition this Word is not only the message, but every single letter that expresses this message, as Jesus explains in Matthew 5:

"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. For truly I tell you, 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. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 5: 17-19)

When NIV translates: *"the smallest letter"* the Greek text says: "one ἰῶτα", which is just a dot in the Greek alphabet, which corresponds to the Hebrew iota, also a dot, which looks like an apostrophe (') We should not be surprised. If God is perfect, so is also his Word, even to the smallest syllable.

So if we summarize: inerrancy of the Word of God, can be drawn from the characteristics of God who in himself is inerrant. A fallible or errant Word from God, would prove an errant God, and by definition a limited god is not God.

Inerrancy in the Pentateuch

We understand why belief in the inerrancy of the Word of God is important, when we face how Satan challenges it in Genesis 3:1, *"Did God really say ... ?"*

Later on St. Peter will question the inerrancy of the words of Christ: *"Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"* (Mt 16:22)

But the questioning of the inerrancy of the words of Jesus is comparable to the temptations of the serpent in Eden, so he answers Peter with the strongest rebuke:

"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." (Mt 16: 22)

The key to understand the Pentateuch as the Word of God and therefore inerrant lies in the office of the prophet. God is in himself truthful.

"God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" (Num 23: 19)

The Hebrew נָבִיא, nabi, comes from a root meaning "to bubble forth, as from a fountain." Since the nabi was "to utter," he was called to be the spokesman or speaker on behalf of another. Nabi is the first and the most generally term used for a prophet.

In the time of Samuel another word, רוֹאֵה, ro'eh, meaning a "seer," began to be used (1 Samuel 9:9). It occurs seven times in reference to Samuel. Afterwards another word, הֹזֵה, hozeh, "a seer" (2 Samuel 24:11) was employed. In 1 Chron. 29:29 all three of these words are used: "Samuel the seer (ro'eh), Nathan the prophet (nabi'), Gad the seer" (hozeh).

God did not generally speak to the people directly, but he called and chose the prophet as his mouth. To be a prophet was to act on behalf of God as his representative, his ambassador, yes, his mouth. He was obligated to tell the people what his taskmaster told him, and nothing else, not adding anything of his own. The typical introduction to the prophet's message was: *"This is what the Lord says."* This exact phrase is found 169 times in the OT. In addition, there are variations like: *"This is what God says"* (2 Chron 24:20)

The prophetic office as the mouth of the taskmaster is to be taken quite literally. As Moses was to be the mouth of God, his brother Aaron was to act as Moses' mouth when Moses hesitated to act in behalf of God to the people of Israel. Yes, Aaron is even called Moses' prophet.

"Now when the Lord spoke to Moses in Egypt, he said to him, "I am the Lord. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you." But Moses said to the Lord, "Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?" Then the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country." (Ex. 6: 28-7: 2)

Note here that, when the prophet speaks, his person is lost, Moses is acting as the agent of God, *"like God,"* to Pharaoh. It is no longer Moses who speaks to Pharaoh, but God himself. Moses is only God's instrument, his tool or mouth. That is why the words of Moses, as the words of God, could be nothing less than inerrant.

We understand the general use of the term prophet when we study the specific use of the term, applied to the one Prophet promised in Deut 18:18ff:

"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death." You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed." (Deut 18:18-22)

Could the inerrancy of the words of the prophet be stated more emphatically?

Note that God says that He would raise a prophet and put His words in his mouth. The words that the prophet speaks carry the full weight and authority as if God had spoken them Himself. This description regarding the office of the prophet reveals that the prophet was to be the depository of divine revelation. In other words, if the prophet sent by God spoke or wrote as a prophet, these authoritative words would be binding upon the consciences of their hearers or readers.

"Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you." (Deut 4:2)

What God said to Moses he was told to write down.

"The Lord said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it." (Ex 17:14)

In Deuteronomy 31:9, the last book in the Pentateuch we read:

"Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the Levitical priests, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel."

The word law, תּוֹרָה Torah, is the technical term for the five books of Moses.

Jesus not only uses the Jewish terminology of the OT canon and called the Pentateuch "the Law of Moses" (Luke 24: 44), he specifically said that Moses actually had written what was in these books. To the Pharisees he said:

"But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. 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?" (John 5: 45-47)

Paul also connects the Pentateuch with what Moses actually wrote:

"Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: 'The person who does these things will live by them.'" (Romans 10:5)

The reasoning for the inerrancy in the Pentateuch could be summarized:

- 1) God is inerrant
- 2) What God says is therefore inerrant
- 3) The prophet is functioning as the mouth of God
- 4) What the prophet said as a prophet is therefore inerrant
- 5) God called Moses the prophet to write down the words of God.
- 6) What Moses wrote as a prophet is the Pentateuch
- 7) Therefore the Pentateuch is the inerrant Word of God

The apostle Paul said "Scripture says," when the words quoted came directly from God. Romans 9:17, states: "*For the Scripture says to Pharaoh,*" and Galatians 3:8, in which Paul wrote, "*the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith,*

preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand.”

The inerrancy in the historical books of the OT

To the historical books of the Old Testament we usually count Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. In these books we do not always have a prophet named as an author, We do not actually know who wrote, for example, Kings or Chronicles.

But the claim of inerrancy of the text could be verified by its own propositions and the acknowledgment of the rest of the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. When the historical writings of, for example, the book of Kings are quoted in the New Testament, they are quoted as Scripture. In Romans 11: 2 the apostle Paul says: "*Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah,*" and then he quotes from 1 Kings 19: 10,14, and the apostle Paul says:

"All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim 3: 16)

The reasoning for the inerrancy of the historical books of the Old Testament would be:

1. The historical books of the Old Testament are regarded as Holy Scriptures in the Bible.
2. The Holy Scriptures are according to the Bible given by God through divine inspiration.
3. God never fails, he is truthful
4. Therefore the historical books of the Old Testament are inerrant.

Inerrancy and the poetical books of the Old Testament

To the poetical books of the Old Testament we usually count: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.

That a book is inerrant does not mean that everything in its content needs to be taken literally. What is history is true in its historical content and what is poetry is true in its symbolical meaning. Not everything in the poetical books should, however, be taken as symbols or figures. Ezekiel regards Job, for example, as a historical person, besides Noah and Daniel (Ezekiel 14: 14,20). Figures and pictures are used to convey spiritual truths.

When Jesus quotes a psalm, he not only accepts the Davidic authorship of many psalms, but he also says that King David spoke through the Holy Spirit. In Mark 12: 36 he says: "*David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared,*" and then he quotes from Psalm 110.

The psalms underscore the fact that what are the words of God should be seen as inerrant. We read:

"All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal." (Psalm 119: 160)

The psalmist is here stressing that it is not just some specific Word or message, but all the words from God which are true³. It is impossible to defend an errant word from God and

3

³ *שׁוֹמֵר* "in Psalm 119:160 signifies the head-number of sum. If he reckons up the word of God in its separate parts and as a whole, truth is the denominator of the whole, truth is the sum-total." (Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament)

quote this passage.

In the same way the psalmist states:

"The words of the Lord are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times." (Ps 12: 6)

Flawless is synonymous to inerrant. All the words of the Lord are without error. They are without the least mixture of falsehood, and therefore shall be infallibly fulfilled. Men often speak rashly promising what they cannot perform, and deceitfully promising what they never intend to perform. But God's words are different; they are pure from all manner of fraud or uncertainty. To underscore his point the psalmist states the same idea positively. The words of God are *like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times*. Seven is the number for what is complete or perfect. On the seventh day the creation was complete, perfect.

What God states is meant to be stated. That is why the psalmist also could say:

"Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens." (Psalm 119: 89)

In all changes God's Word remains firm. Like the heavens, it continually attests God's unfailing power and unchanging care. It stands as firmly as the heaven from which it comes. Psalm 19 states:

"The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple." (Psalm 19: 7)

The law of the Lord is perfect; by which he means not merely the law of Moses but the doctrine of God, the whole totality of sacred Scriptures. David declares the doctrine revealed by God to be perfect, and yet David had but a very small part of the Scriptures, and still they are perfect. Since every word from God is true, the Bible is perfect not only in its totality but also in every detail and part.

The book of Proverbs speaks in similar manner:

"Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him." (Prov 30:5)

Jesus quoted Psalms as sacred Scriptures and the inspired Word of God saying:

"These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).

In their preaching and writing, the apostles often quoted from the Psalms as biblical proof of the fact that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Peter quoted Psalm 16:8-11 as proof that Jesus must be raised from the dead (Acts 2:24-36). In Hebrews one many of the passages quoted were actually addressed to God by the psalmist, yet the writer to the Hebrews refers to them as the words of God.

Peter and John saw the words of David in Psalm 2, not merely as the opinion of a king of Israel, but as the voice of God. They introduced a quotation from that psalm in a prayer to God by saying, *"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?”* (Acts 4:25)

So, Jesus and the apostles saw the words of the Psalms as given by the Holy Spirit through the psalmist. But not only in the general content, even in the details does the New Testament state the divine flawlessness in the text of the Psalms. The Lord is not installing David himself on the throne since David calls the one installed “my Lord” that is the Messiah-God. (Compare Psalm 110 with Matt. 22:43-44). So the actual choice of genitive in David’s account proves his point.

To summarize:

1. Jesus and the apostles regarded the Psalms as the Word of God and Holy Scriptures.
2. The Psalms themselves says that Word of God both in totality and in parts is flawless, that is inerrant.

Inerrancy and the prophetic books of the Old Testament

The last division of the Old Testament is the prophetic books. The major and the minor prophets. The Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The Minor Prophets are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The Minor Prophets are also sometimes called The Twelve.

The Major Prophets are described as “major” because their books are longer and the content has broad, even global implications. The Minor Prophets are described as “minor” because their books are shorter (although Hosea and Zechariah are almost as long as Daniel) and the content is more narrowly focused.

The divinity of the prophetic books is illustrated in the prophetic office of the prophet, which is the same as that which Moses received. Willingly or unwillingly they received words from God, and were prompted to speak those words to the people of God.

When the prophets speak, they add: *“the Lord has spoken.”* (Jer. 13: 15; Amos 3: 1) or in Isaiah and Jeremiah *“The Lord said to me”* (Is. 8: 11; Jer. 30: 4), *“the mouth of the Lord has spoken”*, *“The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.”* (2 Sam. 23: 2), *“hear the word of the Lord”* (Is. 28: 14; Jer. 9: 20), *“this word of God came to”* (1 Kings 12: 22; 1 Chron. 17: 3), *“the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the Lord was on him”* (Ezek. 1:3), *“The word of the Lord that came to Hosea”* (Hos. 1: 1); *“This is what the Lord says”* (Amos 1: 3), *“This is what the Sovereign Lord says”* (Obad. 1: 1).

That the prophets claimed to convey the words of God is taught overwhelmingly. *“The Lord says”* occurs over 3500 times in the Old Testament. Jeremiah alone declares it almost 100 times. *“The word of the Lord came to me”* is also a common phrase. Some of the prophets, like Jeremiah and Isaiah, were also commanded to write down the Word of the Lord.

We read:

“In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: “Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of

Josiah till now....So Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words the Lord had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll." (Jer. 36: 1, 2, 4)

It wasn't only that the prophet received a message from God; it wasn't only that he was an "inspired person;" it wasn't only a message which inspired people. No, the prophet received the actual words which were the exact message from God, "all the words." And some of the prophets wrote these words on a scroll, sometimes they wrote with the help of a scribe.

Likewise Isaiah was commanded:

"Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness." (Is 30: 8)

The New Testament is very clear that the actual words written in the prophetic books were inspired by the Holy Spirit. When Paul met the Jews in Rome, we read that "he witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus." (Acts 28: 23) In his teaching he says concerning Isaiah:

"The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet...." (Isaiah 28: 25)

By these words he is confirming that the Holy Spirit speaks through the written words of the prophet.

And since God is truthful and never fails or lies, the text confirms the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Holy Scripture. The truth is in God, and that is why the people are admonished to seek the truth from God's written Word. The truth is not to be found in men, in mystery, or in the subjective self, but in the revealed Word of God:

Isaiah wrote:

"When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? Consult God's instruction [torah] and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn." (Is 8: 19,20)

Jeremiah confirms that the truth is in the words of the prophet when he says to the people of God:

"Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing." (Jeremiah 26: 15)

Inerrancy in the Gospels

The truthfulness of the New Testament is embodied in the person of Christ. He is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies:

"He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." (Luke

24: 44)

To Christ the Word of God was the Scriptures which at his time was the 39 books of the Old Testament:

In John 10: 35 he said:

"He called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken" (KJV)

In this text the Word of God is synonymous with the Scriptures.

Not a single part of the inspired word of God could be set aside:

"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. For truly I tell you, 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." (Mt 5: 17, 18)

Jesus said that the entire Old Testament witnesses to his person and work.

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:27).

Jesus never belittled Scripture, set it aside, criticized it, contradicted it or opposed it. He believed Scripture was more powerful than his miracles: Luke 16:29, 31. He quoted it in overthrowing Satan. The OT Scriptures were his source in dispute with enemies: Matthew 4; Luke 16:29, 31. He quoted Scripture as the basis for his own teaching. His ethics were the same as what we find already written in Scripture: Matthew 7:12; 19:18–19; 22:40; Mark 7:9, 13; 10:19; 12:24, 29–31; Luke 18:20.

"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16: 31)

And God's word is completely true as Jesus prays:

"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17: 17)

But in his definition of God's Word he counts not only the Old Testament Scriptures, but also his own words. He says not only:

"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." (Mt 5: 18)

but he also says:

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Mt 24: 35)

Since Christ is true God, his words are the Word of God. And therefore every one of his words is true, that is flawless, without error, inerrant. Yes, he is the embodiment of truth.

He says: *"I am the way and the truth and the life." (Jn 14:6)*

"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (Jn 8: 31, 32)

Jesus is Truth, and his words are true. When Jesus comes as the embodiment of truth, he is the finality of truth.

"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1: 17)

Nothing after Christ or outside Christ is divine revelation or truth. This idea is crucial in determining the New Testament canon, what should be regarded as the New Testament inerrant and infallible Holy Scriptures.

Jesus is the Word, he embodies the truth in the new covenant, as the fulfillment of OT prophecy, as the keystone and the seal of truth. If the true and tested prophet of the Old Testament is the truth test in the Old Testament, Christ himself is the truth test in the New Covenant.

The apostle Paul wrote:

"You heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus." (Eph 4:21)

The writings of the New Testament all bear the marks of truth because they are the Word of Christ. The words of Christ are not only the keystone, but the touchstone of the New Covenant.

"The one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete." (Luke 6:49)

"Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." (Luke 9:26)

"If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day." (John 12:47)

Inerrancy in the epistles, Acts and Revelation

In the term "Word of Christ" are not only the actual sayings of Christ in the Gospels but the whole corpus of the teaching of Christ. He got the words from the Father, and he gave them to the apostles, as he himself prays to the Father in John 17:

"I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them." (Jn 17:8)

Christ says to the apostles:

"The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all

things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (Jn 14: 26)

Two things can be noted here. What he taught, *”all things”* which is meant to be the authoritative truth, shall be vested in the apostolic office. Furthermore, the teaching of Christ, his words, are not dependent upon the memory of the apostles. Christ promises the apostles the Holy Spirit who will remind them of all his words.

But the Word of Christ is not only what he actually said in his lifetime on earth. The apostolic office had the promise that the Holy Spirit will teach them more, yes he will lead them into the whole truth.

Christ says:

”I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.” (John 16: 12-15)

That is the reason why the apostolic ministry has a key role in the New Testament. The apostolic office is the Spirit of Truth leading the apostles into the whole truth. They are ambassadors of Christ, sent by him. This is also the touchstone for the New Testament canon. The early church knew that:

- 1) The truth was the Word of Christ.
- 2) Christ gave his Word to the apostles.
- 3) Through the Holy Spirit the apostles were reminded of the words Christ gave them.
- 4) Through the Holy Spirit Christ also continued to lead the apostles into all truth. The 66 books of the canon are therefore sealed by the Holy Spirit and the apostolic ministry.

The early Church therefore recognized only those books as authoritative that had an apostolic origin. Only those books had the promise to be the Word of Christ.

That not one divine, inspired word of the apostles, which is the *”whole truth”* Christ is talking about, has been lost is promised by Christ himself. He promises that all those who will come to faith until the end of the world will be converted by the words of the apostles. In John 17 Jesus prays with the apostles in mind:

”I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word” (Jn 17: 20, NKJV)

The Word of Christ, the promise of the Holy Spirit and the apostolic office are the firm foundation of the inerrancy of the New Testament canon.

The apostle Paul writes:

”All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim 3: 16)

Since the apostles were the carriers of the inerrant and infallible Holy Spirit and Christ had promised his apostles to lead them into all truth, these *”Scriptures”* also included the apostolic letters as St. Peter writes about St. Paul’s letters:

"He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." (2 Pe 3: 16)

He also writes:

"For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Pe 1: 21)

Paul writes:

"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words." (1 Cor 2: 13)

Paul emphasized several times that he is not lying (Rom 9:1; 2 Cor 11:31; Gal 1:20; 1 Tim 2:7) and does not deceive his hearers and readers (1 Thess 2:3). In order to substantiate the truth of his apostolic message, Paul refers to the divine revelation he has received as an apostle of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:1). Paul claims that *"the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."* (Gal 1:11–12). Since his gospel is not of human but of divine origin, Paul calls it *"the word of God"* and distinguishes it from *"the word of men"* (1 Thess 2:13; cf. 1 Cor 2:13).

"In contrast to his Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, however, Paul does not claim that all his words are true, free from deceit and free from error. Rather, he restricted this claim to his apostolic utterances. Paul saw himself as a fallible man who could not claim that he always told the truth. But he was convinced that what he had to say and write as an apostle of Jesus Christ was true and more authoritative than his merely human words.

The apostolic letters are the apostolic teaching as written down by the apostles themselves and their secretaries. As apostolic writings they claim to have the same qualities and authority as the oral apostolic teaching. Therefore Paul opened many of his apostolic letters with the words: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 1:1; etc.). This claim means that the letters do not contain human words but consist of the inerrant apostolic words of God. The same applies to the letters which were not written by the apostles Paul, John, or Peter but were composed by non-apostolic members of the apostolic church whose names are in at least one case unknown to us. Since they reproduce the teaching of the apostles, they participate in its authority"⁴.

John the apostle confirms the seriousness in the apostolic message when he ends the book of Revelation with the words:

"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll."

4

(Rev 22: 18, 19)

In short the inerrancy of the New Testament has its root in Christ himself.

- 1) God is infallible and inerrant.
- 2) Christ is God incarnated.
- 3) The Father gave Christ His Word.
- 4) Christ gave this Word to the apostles.
- 5) Christ gave the apostolic office the promise of the Holy Spirit to remind them of the Word of Christ and lead them into the whole truth
- 6) The writings of the New Testament Scriptures have apostolic origin.
- 7) Therefore the New Testament Scriptures are inerrant and infallible.

In summary the doctrine of the inerrancy of the prophetic and apostolic word can be found in each major part of the Bible. God is truthful. He has decided to communicate with man through prophets and apostles. That is why we can trust the Bible, The Holy Scriptures.