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Question 43 - Has the doctrine of inspiration been betrayed at the hands of its friends?

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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

43. Has the doctrine of inspiration been betrayed at the hands of its friends?

Here the word betrayal is used rather than the phrase “attacked” thus indicating the source of the action. Stated another way, one can be *attacked* by his enemies, but only *betrayed* by his friends.

Richard Belcher of Concordia Theological Seminary writes:

“It is commonly assumed in scholarly circles, even among many evangelicals, that the doctrine of verbal inspiration of Scripture is dead. However, the corpse awaits burial, because many of the laity and untrained pastors still hold tenaciously to it and refuse to admit what the scholars claim. The doctors of theology have examined the body, read the pulse, assessed the life signs, and concluded (not always sadly) that verbal inspiration choked on the claim of inerrancy and the too rigid concept of mechanical dictation. The laity must now be re-educated so that it will know and agree with what the scholars already know to be a certainty. Care must be taken to work slowly and inconspicuously at that task lest the uneducated and uninformed be sent into shock over the truth of their beloved’s passing. The news, however, must be filtered to them through the schools and publishing houses and from more enlightened pulpits. In time the majority will agree with the decree of the scholars that the concept of verbal inspiration is dead and has given way to a more excellent concept.

“For several years now the process of re-education has been descending upon us. Many persons have been convinced by the scholars; others feel it really makes no difference; another large group is puzzled by it all. A few understand the problem and its implications.” (*The Inerrancy Debate*, pp. 9-10)

Charles Ryrie adds the following words:

“Attacks on the inerrancy of the Bible are not new and seem to be somewhat cyclical. However, the contemporary debate seems to be an intramural one; that is, it is among evangelicals, rather than between liberals and conservatives. Perhaps this makes it even more significant, for the debate has drawn lines among evangelicals that needed to be drawn. It has also served to sharpen distinctions that surround the concept of inerrancy.” (*Basic Theology*, p. 77).

In a lead article in the Spring 1974 issue of *Review & Expositor*, well-known evangelical author Bernard Ramm concluded in essence that the Scripture is indeed the Word of God, but not in any infallible or inerrant sense regarding its wording. He went on to say that while Scripture is the canonical Word of God, the canon is not necessarily fixed but is still open. This means God could and may add additional books to the original 66. Richard Belcher responds to Ramm’s article as follows:

“Ramm’s position is a supreme example of the evangelical double-talk that is going on concerning the nature of Scripture. High sounding statements, using traditional evangelical language, are made about Scripture. But then the meaning of that language is undermined by further statements and observations. Scripture is the Word of God – but not fully. Scripture is the revelation of God – but not infallible and inerrant. Scripture is the canonical Word of God – but the canon is potentially still open. Scripture is the authoritative Word of God – but it only reflects the mind of God in some measure or to some degree. Scripture is the doctrinal Word of God – but only potentially. Such use of evangelical language enables modern evangelicals who do not hold to inerrancy still to answer ‘yes’ to probing questions concerning the nature of Scripture.” (*The Inerrancy Debate*, p. 54)

Norman Geisler summarizes:

“In summary, for a neo-evangelical the Bible is a religious book, a book of salvation. Its purpose is to save and it is infallible in accomplishing that purpose. But it is not inerrant in all its statements. Only the saving ‘core’ is true, not the cultural ‘husk’ in which it is presented. Inspiration is dynamic and ‘organic.’ It does not guarantee the inerrancy of all historical and scientific statements in Scripture but only the infallibility of the saving purpose of Scripture.

“Neo-evangelicals vary on the issue of the precise *means* of inspiration. Some hold that God inspired the *idea*, and the writers put it into their own erring *words*. Others affirm that God inspired only the *core* redemptive truths, not the *cultural* mode in which it was expressed. Some stress that the *purposes* (intentions) of the Bible are inspired of God, but not all its *propositions* (affirmations). But all neo-evangelicals allow for actual errors (i.e., mistakes) in the biblical record. That is in strong contrast to the historic orthodox and contemporary evangelical view of the Bible as an infallible and inerrant record.”
(*A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 180, 189)

A final observation from Harold Lindsell is appropriate at this point:

“If Jesus taught biblical inerrancy, either He knew inerrancy to be true, or He knew it to be false but catered to the ignorance of His hearers. Or, He was limited and held to something that was not true but He did not know it. Whichever way anyone goes with regard to his Christology, certain conclusions follow inevitably. For example, if Jesus knew that the Scripture is not inerrant and yet taught that it is, He was guilty of deception. Thus He was a sinner rather than a sinless being. If He was a man of His times and in ignorance thought inerrancy to be true, then He was in no sense omniscient, and this leads to a strange Christology. The third alternative is the only one that holds water. Christ taught that Scripture is inerrant because He knew it to be so. This is the only view that fits the New Testament evidences about the person of Jesus.”
(*The Battle for the Bible*, Zondervan Publishing, 1976, p. 45).

Thus, it can be seen that to deny inspiration and inerrancy is in effect to deny (or at best, question) the integrity of both the scriptures and the Savior.

