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Question 46 - If the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, how do we account for the alleged contradictions and supposed errors within its pages?

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46. If the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, how do we account for the alleged contradictions and supposed errors within its pages?

Dr. Norman Geisler aptly addresses this question as follows:

"While the Bible is the Word of God and, as such, cannot have any *errors,* nonetheless, this does not mean there are no *difficulties* in it. However, as St. Augustine wisely noted, 'If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, the author of this book is mistaken; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood." The mistakes are not in the revelation of God, but are in the misinterpretations of man.

"The Bible is without mistake, but the critics are not. All their allegations of error in the Bible are based on some error of their own. Their mistakes fall into the following main categories:

A.   Mistake 1: Assuming that the unexplained is not explainable.

B.   Mistake 2: Presuming the Bible guilty until proven innocent.

C.   Mistake 3: Confusing our fallible interpretation with God's infallible revelation.

D.   Mistake 4: Failing to understand the context of the passage.

E.   Mistake 5: Neglecting to interpret difficult passages in light of clear ones.

F.   Mistake 6: Basing a teaching on an obscure passage.

G.   Mistake 7: Forgetting that the Bible is a human book with human characteristics.

H.   Mistake 8: Assuming that a partial report is a false report.

I.   Mistake 9: Demanding that New Testament citations of the Old Testament always be exact quotations.

J.   Mistake 10: Assuming that divergent accounts are false ones.

K.   Mistake 11: Presuming that the Bible approves of all it records.

L.   Mistake 12: Forgetting that the Bible uses non-technical, everyday language.

M.   Mistake 13: Assuming that round numbers are false.

N.   Mistake 14: Neglecting to note that the Bible uses different literary devices.

O.   Mistake 15: Forgetting that only the original text, not every copy of scripture, is without error.

P.   Mistake 16: Confusing general statements with universal ones.

Q. **Mistake 17: Forgetting that latter revelation supercedes previous 47. What objections have been raised against the doctrine of inerrancy?**

Those opposed to inerrancy have criticized the view as follows:

A.   Inerrancy is not needed, for the Bible is only authoritative in matters of "faith and practice."

Wayne Grudem writes:

"One of the most frequent objections is raised by those who say that the purpose of Scripture is to teach us in areas that concern 'faith and practice' only; that is, in areas that directly relate to our religious faith or to our ethical conduct. This position would allow for the possibility of false statements in Scripture, for example, in *other* areas such as in minor historical details or scientific facts – these areas, it is said, do not concern the purpose of the Bible, which is to instruct us in what we should believe and how we are to live. Its advocates often prefer to say that the Bible is *'infallible,'* but they hesitate to use the word *inerrant.*

"The response to this objection can be stated as follows: the Bible repeatedly affirms that all of Scripture is profitable for us (2 Tim. 3:16) and that *all* of it is 'God-breathed.' Thus it is completely pure (Psa. 12:6), perfect (Psa. 119:96), and true (Prov. 30:5). The Bible itself does not make any restriction on the kinds of subjects to which it speaks truthfully.

"The New Testament contains further affirmations of the reliability of all parts of Scripture: in Acts 24:14, Paul says that he worships God, *'believing everything* laid down by the law or written in the prophets.' In Lk. 24:25, Jesus says that the disciples are 'foolish men' because they are 'slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.' In Romans 15:4, Paul says that '*whatever* was written' in the Old Testament was 'written for our instruction.' These texts give no indication that there is any part of Scripture that is not to be trusted or relied on completely. Similarly, in 1 Cor. 10:11, Paul can refer even to minor historical details in the Old Testament (sitting down to eat and drink, rising up to dance) and can say both that they *'happened'* (thus implying historical reliability) and 'were written down for our instruction.'

"If we begin to examine the way in which the New Testament authors trust the smallest historical details of the Old Testament narrative, we see no intention to separate out matters of 'faith and practice,' or to say that this is somehow a recognizable category of affirmations, or to imply that statements not in that category need not be trusted or thought to be inerrant. Rather, it seems that the New Testament authors are willing to cite and affirm as true *every detail* of the Old Testament."
(*Systematic Theology.* Zondervan Publishing House. 1994. p. 93)

B. It is a recent theory, probably originated with the great theologian B. B. Warfield at Princeton in the latter part of the 19th century. In a word, this is *false*. In reality the doctrine of inerrancy was believed and propagated by the earliest church fathers. Note but one example, the testimony of Augustine (354-430 A.D.):

"It seems to me that the most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books: that is to say that the men by whom the Scripture has been given to us and committed to writing, did put down in these anything false. If you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement, there will not be left a single sentence of those books, which, if appearing to anyone difficult in practice or hard to believe, may not by the same fatal rule be explained away as a statement, in which, intentionally, the author declared what was not true."
(*Nicene & Post. Nicene Fathers.* Christian Literature Company. 1886. p. 252)

C. The term *inerrancy* is not even found in the Bible. While this is true, neither are the words *trinity*, *Bible,* or *grandfather* to be located in the scriptures! Thus, inerrancy is perhaps a *non*-scriptural word, but in no sense an *un*-scriptural one!

D. The claim that the original manuscripts were inerrant, even if true, is totally irrelevant, for we do not possess any of them today. Again, to quote from Wayne Grudem:

"Those who make this objection point to the fact that inerrancy has always been claimed for the first or *original copies of the biblical documents.* Yet none of these survive: we have only copies of copies of what Moses or Paul or Peter wrote. What is the use, then, of placing so great importance on a doctrine that applies only to manuscripts that no one has?

"In reply to this objection, it may first be stated that for over 99 percent of the words of the Bible, we *know* what the original manuscript said. Even for many of the verses where there are textual variants (that is, different words in different ancient copies of the same verse), the correct decision is often quite clear, and there are really very few places where the textual variant is both difficult to evaluate and significant in determining the meaning. In the small percentage of cases where there is significant uncertainty about what the original text said, the general sense of the sentence is usually quite clear from the context. (One does not have to be a Hebrew or Greek scholar to know where these variants are, because all modern English translations indicate them in marginal notes with words such as 'some ancient manuscripts read . . .' or 'other ancient authorities add . . .')

"This is not to say that the study of textual variants is unimportant, but it is to say that the study of textual variants has not left us in confusion about what the original manuscripts said. It has rather brought us extremely close to the content of those original manuscripts. For most practical purposes, then, the *current published scholarly texts* of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament

are the same as the original manuscripts. Thus, when we say that the original manuscripts were inerrant, we are also implying that over 99 percent of the words in our present manuscripts are also inerrant, for they are exact copies of the originals. Furthermore, we *know* where the uncertain readings are (for where there are no textual variants we have no reason to expect faulty copying of the original). Thus, our present manuscripts are for most purposes the same as the original manuscripts, and the doctrine of inerrancy therefore directly concerns our present manuscripts as well.

"Furthermore, it is extremely important to affirm the inerrancy of the original documents, for the subsequent copies were made by men with no claim or guarantee by God that these copies would be perfect. But the original manuscripts are those to which the claims to be God's very words apply. Thus, if we have mistakes in the copies (as we do), then these are only the *mistakes of men.* But if we have mistakes in the *original manuscripts,* then we are forced to say not only that men made mistakes, but that *God himself* made a mistake and spoke falsely. This we cannot do." (*Systematic Theology.* Zondervan. pp. 96-97)

 (*When Critics Ask,* Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, Victor Books, 1992. Excerpts from pp. 15-25)

In the late nineteenth century, the Institute of Paris issued 82 errors which it believed could discredit Christianity. Since that time, all 82 difficulties have been cleared away with new discoveries. What most people claim as errors in the Bible are not "errors" but "difficulties." Inconsistencies occur when people do not take time to find out all the facts. In most cases, Bible difficulties can be cleared up with an in-depth study of the problem. Two things should be understood at this point: lack of understanding is not an error nor is an unresolved difficulty an error. Many Bible difficulties have been solved as new historical and archeological discoveries have been made. A difficulty does not constitute an error!