

The Problem with Inerrancy

For many Christians, the Bible is inspired by God (or "God-breathed"). They also assume that if the Bible is inspired, it must also be without error (or inerrant). The general view of Biblical inerrancy is that as God-breathed people with his Spirit and enabled them to write down His revelation, everything that was written down (every word, every phrase) is directly from God and adequately represents God's revelation of Himself. This view asserts that in the process of revelation, God ensured no mistakes or errors occurred. The problem with this view is that a careful read through the entire Bible reveals that there are a great many inconsistencies, some of them potential errors and others intentional contradictions.

This should not mean that the Bible must be disregarded or that it has no revelation from God to offer. The author is persuaded that the Bible does contain God's revelation and a person can adequately come to know God, what God's like by reading the pages of Scripture, including the kind of relationship God bears with people, and what His overarching purpose for humanity was and remains. The author also believes that the same Spirit who inspired all the Bible book authors is the same Spirit of God at work in God's world today touching and speaking and reaching people without requiring they sit down, open a Bible, and read its pages.

The author of this short outline, despite his belief and insistence that Scripture is not inerrant, still holds to a convictional belief in the one and only True God, who is Father, Son (Jesus), and Spirit, the original calling on the people of Israel to represent Him and be the light to the nations, the unique way God revealed Himself to a descendant of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth, and in the unique way God revealed Himself to and through the entire life of Jesus... (so much so that the author of Hebrews says that when we look at Jesus we will know what God is like (Hebrews 1:3-2, not to mention what Jesus spoke to Philip on the last night prior to his death, "Have I not been with you all this time. When you see me you see the father", John 13:14). This should give Bible believing Christians reason to pause and reread the entire Gospel narratives Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John much more carefully than is often done. It isn't merely that Jesus is just the God (attached to all other revelations or presuppositions about what God is like) but rather that God is like Jesus, and is in fact Jesus (see Hebrews 1 and John 1). As Greg Boyd has said in his sermons and books, Jesus contradicted but superseded all other revelations of who God is and what God is like.

Far from the Bible being inadequate in revealing who God is and what God's like and what God intends for all creation, including His purpose for humanity, it does exactly this. However, it should be noted that there are inconsistencies throughout the whole of Scripture both in the details shared (that a careful and honest reading will reveal), and that some of the portraits of God are inconsistent (not all portraits and images of God in the Bible are created equal, or to speak). Any errors or inconsistencies are not the fault of God, but rather the fault and immaturity of man. God, apparently in His sovereign plan, was able to, in the process of inspiring man to write down the sacred texts, give degrees of flexibility to make mistakes, of which they apparently did.