

How to Deal With Objections to Inerrancy

by PHILLIP KAYSER, Ph.D.



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This presentation of a defense of Biblical Inerrancy is in a novel format: dialogue. The value of a dialogue format over an essay is that it is more real life; rare is the opportunity to give an entire exposition to the doubter. In real life you are often interrupted, have limited time, don't have access to your encyclopedia and can only give the Scriptures that you have memorized. May it be helpful in preparing *you* to open God's Word to doubters.

[For easy reference, key arguments *against* inerrancy are highlighted in **bold**.]

Doubter:

Pastor, I appreciate your sermons, but I wish you wouldn't get hung up on trying to reconcile the Gospel accounts. **You are making the Bible more important than Jesus** when you feel compelled to smooth over contradictions in order to defend inerrancy. What difference does it make if there was only one blind man who was healed by Christ's word (as in Mark 10:46-52) or two men healed by the touch of His hands (as in Matthew 20:29-34)? What difference does it make if there was one angel at Christ's tomb (as in Matthew 28:2) or if there were two (as in John 20:12)? Christ is the central message, and the fact that there are slight differences in the accounts shows that the writers were not collaborating or fabricating a story. They recorded the story as they remembered it.

Pastor:

First of all, to treat the Bible as infallible does not elevate it above Christ. The Bible is called the Word of Christ (Col. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:11-12; Rev. 19:10), and therefore to impugn the Bible is to impugn Christ. Secondly, if there were two angels as John reports, there was certainly one as Matthew reports. That is no contradiction. And thirdly, if these Gospels have clear contradictions, how do I know that any of the Gospel's history is true? Contradictions may demonstrate lack of collaboration, but they also demonstrate fallibility and a book that cannot be trusted.

Doubter:

That is the fallacy of the slippery-slope argument. **Just because parts of Scripture are in error does not make everything in error.** Let me use an example. My parents are obviously not infallible. But just because they have made mistakes in certain areas of their lives does not mean that everything they say must come into question.

Pastor:

The big difference between your parents and God is that they are not God! I don't expect your parents' word to be infallible because they are not omniscient. So if I said the same thing about your parents, you could legitimately accuse me of a faulty slippery slope argument because they don't claim to be infallible. But the same is not true of Scripture. Note the irrefutable logic of the following two syllogisms:

Syllogism #1

1. God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2)
2. God is omniscient (Heb. 4:13)

Therefore, God cannot make mistakes/errors.

Syllogism #2

1. God cannot make mistakes/errors (see syllogism #1)
2. All Scripture is the word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Therefore, Scripture is inerrant.

Doubter:

That may be good logic, but it fails to take into account the fact that John 20:30-31 says that all God intended to convey to us in the Bible were the themes of salvation. In order to effectively communicate, God had to use the language, customs, historical concepts and superstitions of the people of that day. The historical accounts (though containing some errors) are true to the degree that they fulfill and express the Bible's main message. For instance, the Jews would not have understood our modern views on psychology, so Christ had to speak of the schizophrenics that he healed as demon possessed. That does not mean that there are demons. He was just using a convention of that time to express an eternal truth. The important point was that He healed them. So you need

to distinguish between the peripheral scaffolding (which contains some errors) and the primary structure of the Gospel. Your objection to my illustration about my parents is simply not fair. I don't go to my parents for advice on nuclear physics, but I still value their judgment on other things. And it is the same with Scripture. The purpose of Scripture was not to be a textbook on history, or mathematics, or nuclear physics. **It was intended to provide the way of salvation—the Bible is infallible only for salvation and nothing else.**

Pastor:

Let me point out that God's salvation takes place in history. Therefore, to question the Bible's historical statements in one place is to bring into question the historical statements that form the basis for the Apostle's Creed. How do we know that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, except on the authority of Scripture?! It is arbitrary for you to believe in the Virgin Birth, but to deny the accuracy of the genealogies of Christ. It is arbitrary to believe that Christ's death under Pontius Pilate saves you, but to deny other historical details in the Gospels. You can't separate Gospel from history. Though you can dispose of scaffolding without hurting the building, you can't throw away the history of Scripture without also throwing away the Gospel. But, just for the sake of argument, let's say that all God intended to communicate was salvation, and that Scripture is infallible only for what it says about salvation. My question to you is, "Salvation from what?"

Doubter:

From sin and the curse.

Pastor:

And what defines sin and the curse?

Doubter:

Scripture.

Pastor:

Precisely. And Scripture points out that everything in creation, including our thinking processes, the animals and even the physical earth were cursed as a result of sin (Romans 8:20). Furthermore, it tells us that God's salvation program will not be complete until every area of creation is redeemed (Romans 8:21-23). Therefore Scripture addresses false views on economics, historiography, politics, cosmology and many other areas and informs the believer as to how he should think and act in those areas in a way pleasing to Him. But how can the Bible as a historical witness be taken seriously on any of its testimonies when it has been found to be a false witness over and over as you say? Surely a false witness is not going to be trusted in court for any testimony he might give. A politician is going to be skeptical about the Bible's instructions on politics (and remember that this deals with the issues of sin and salvation) if he knows that it has erred in science. There is much more at stake here than you are willing to admit. Scripture is sufficient to thoroughly equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Doubter:

Now wait a minute! It's one thing to agree that Scripture addresses sins in economics, politics, etc., but **it is quite another to say that it is an authoritative textbook on nuclear physics!**

Pastor:

I didn't say it was a textbook on any of those areas. God gave us only enough to show us how we ought to please Him in those disciplines. The Bible was provided to give us guidance, not to finish the work of dominion for us. It is the "key to knowledge" (Luke 11:52), not the encyclopedia of all knowledge. But my point is that the God who made all things, and continues to uphold all things, and who is omniscient will surely not make a mistake when He speaks to those disciplines! He has not given us a "key to knowledge" that does not fit the key hole!

Doubter:

Well, if that were true, why does the Bible speak of the sun rising, instead of the earth rotating around the sun? It is obvious that **there are**

grammatical errors, anachronisms, pre-scientific phenomenistic descriptions, etc. To deny that, is to be intellectually dishonest.

Pastor:

On the contrary, it is the height of arrogance to claim that the Bible has error simply because it does not read like a modern scientific journal. What scientist does not say, "Look at that beautiful sunset!"? Has he momentarily lapsed into error? Of course not! Everyone knows what he means. He would fail to communicate to the layman effectively if he used his scientific jargon. And in the same way, the same Bible that speaks of the "globe" of earth (Is. 40:22) spinning upon its axis like "clay to the seal" (Job 38:14) can also speak (from an earth oriented perspective) of the sun coming up and going down (Eccl. 1:5). That is accurately speaking of the same phenomenon from different perspectives.

As to errors in grammar, that presupposes a static view of language which few linguists hold to today. Language is fluid and changing, not static. Thus in linguistics we were taught that there are subgroups in America for whom our grammar may appear to be incorrect. We cannot impose our scientific, historical and linguistic conventions (and that is all they are) upon the Bible writers. Our conventions may seem strange, or outmoded 1000 years from now, but that does not make them inaccurate. The point is that none of these things changes the truth of what is being communicated. The same cannot be said of alleged errors of other types. For instance, if Jude was mistaken about Enoch's prophecy, he was not communicating truth, but error.

Doubter:

Well, Jude did tell an untruth, though it was unintentional. But his central message still comes across. Maybe you could understand what I am trying to say if I explained it this way: If Christ could communicate truth through historically untrue stories (what we call parables), **I don't see why he couldn't communicate truth through history that is untrue (but parabolic).**

Pastor:

A parable is totally different than history. The speaker of a parable doesn't intend it to be a historical account, nor do the hearers see it as a historical account. It is important to understand both intention and expectation. Everyone knows that the speaker is making up an illustration. But history does claim to be communicating a true fact, and the hearers expect it to be factual. When the author fails in his purpose and the communication fails to meet the hearer's expectations, the author can very properly be called a false witness. There is absolutely no comparison between parables and false history.

Doubter:

But **there are historical errors**. I don't see how you can say differently.

Pastor:

It used to be that liberals would say there were hundreds of historical errors in the Bible, but as J. I Packer and others have shown, archeology has vindicated the Bible over and over so often that there are now some non-Christian archaeologists who use the Bible as a valuable and accurate guide for their archeology. It has been the archaeologists and historians who have changed their "assured findings" over the years, not the Bible. But even if there are a few unresolved difficulties (each of which, by the way, has some possible explanations that have been offered), there has been no proven error, and the syllogism I gave you earlier shows clearly that the Bible cannot be in error. We are to live by every word of Scripture (Matt. 4:4), and we can do so with confidence because every word of Scripture is from God (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Thes. 2:13). As 1 Peter 1 says, "no prophecy of Scripture ever came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Doubter:

I still think you are being too rationalistic when you use that syllogism. **We ought to inductively examine all the evidence of Scripture with a neutral mind** before we come to conclusions like that.

Pastor:

I am merely taking seriously what Scripture says about itself. You need to read Cornelius Van Til on presuppositions. Presuppositionless neutrality is both epistemologically (i.e., in terms of a theory of how we know things) impossible, and morally disobedient. Christ said that if we are not for Him, we are against Him (Matt. 12:30). All of our thoughts (including our thoughts about inerrancy) need to be made captive to Christ's Lordship (2 Cor. 10:5). Let me show you how I would both inductively and deductively approach the subject. The Bible has a large set of indicative (statement of fact) claims. A subset of these are self-referential statements (statements about the Bible as a whole) such as "Thy Word is truth," "The Scriptures cannot be broken," "not one jot or tittle will fail," etc. Now obviously God's evaluation of His Word's infallibility ought to have some weight in how we view the Bible, shouldn't it?

Doubter:

I don't see why certain verses should be imposed on the interpretation of all of Scripture. We should approach each individual passage with a neutral mind. Don't get me wrong. I am committed to Christ. But unbelievers will not take Christians seriously if we don't approach the Bible in a neutral, unbiased manner.

Pastor:

Let me show you why I think the self-referential statements (statements the Bible makes about itself) have priority and why it is impossible to be neutral or to be purely inductive.

1. You keep harping on induction, but let me point out that theoretical statements about induction are not inductive. So the primacy of inductivism is not even theoretically possible.
2. It is impossible to have an exhaustive inductive study because:
 - a. We aren't omniscient and therefore don't have all the facts. That is why we need to trust the judgment of the God who is omniscient.
 - b. Future historians may find "facts" that might overthrow your "facts." They have already done that repeatedly by showing supposed Biblical contradictions and errors to not be errors after all.

3. Some historical assertions are incapable of being tested empirically. (e.g., Christ's Virgin Birth, etc.) Why do you believe this piece of history when you don't trust other pieces of history?

4. Inductive study always rests on presuppositions. The important thing is to find out if the presuppositions are true. For instance:

a. If we assume (as you are doing) the possibility of the supernatural, then we are committed in part to deductive statements from the very Bible we are testing. Hardly neutral!

b. If we assume (as unbelievers do) a natural uniformity in history, we will automatically throw out miracles, etc. and be committed to the validity of the autonomous mind. Again, this is hardly neutral!

c. Our evaluations and conclusions must be governed by God (His Word) or by something outside of God. There are no other alternatives. In the first case (of submission of our minds to God), our belief in inerrancy will put in question our understanding of the difficult issue at stake. But in the second case (of autonomy), the difficult issue at stake will put in question inerrancy. It is the presupposition which makes the difference.

d. Therefore, in order to have true, honest induction we must have true presuppositions. We must take God's interpretation of His Word (what I have referred to as the Bible's self-referential statements) seriously if we want to interpret all the facts of Scripture properly.

Doubter:

You are arguing in a circle. You are taking the Bible's statements about inerrancy to prove that the Bible is inerrant.

Pastor:

There is no circularity in the two syllogisms I gave earlier.

If you accept the premises, the conclusions are logically unavoidable. And if you deny the conclusions, you cannot possibly believe in all three premises. So my position is really the logically sound position.

But if by "arguing in a circle," you are implying that I should not hold to any untested presuppositions, you are failing to realize that man, by virtue of the fact that he is not omniscient, must have untested presuppositions. I very openly acknowledge that my presupposition is

that the Bible is the Word of God. You inconsistently say that it is the Word of God (a faith statement that is every bit as much a presupposition as mine), but fail to carry that presupposition through to its logical end. And the reason for that is that you are holding to two diametrically opposed presuppositions: 1) the Bible is the Word of God, and 2) man's mind is the final arbiter of truth. My "circularity" appeals to the most expert witness either of us can call on: God's witness in the Bible. Your "circularity" always ends up assuming that man's mind must be the final arbiter, witness and judge on the matter. It is simply impossible to deal with ultimate issues without in some sense arguing in a circle (that is, resorting to one's presuppositions). As Dr. Greg Bahnsen has said, the only alternative that limited creatures have to arguing in a circle is arguing in a vicious circle. The difference between the two is that one circle of reasoning begins and ends with the revelation of a God who knows all things and makes no mistakes, and the other circle begins and ends with our puny, finite, fallible minds. The question that needs to be addressed is, "Is God, or is our mind, the ultimate determiner of truth?" It takes faith to say the first; a faith that trusts the evidence in Scripture just as Abraham, against all evidence, believed God's promise to give a son was true. All I am asking is that if you believe the Bible is God's Word, that you take seriously what God says about the nature of that Word.

Doubter:

Well, can you **give me some more evidence that the Bible claims to be infallible and without error?**

Pastor:

Gladly. Scripture affirms that even though men penned the words of Scripture, they were communicating God's very word at every juncture. For instance, 2 Peter 1:19-21 says that no portion of Scripture originated in the will of man, but holy men of God were driven by the Holy Spirit. Thus no portion of Scripture "is of any private origin" (v. 20). Though God controlled these men in a way that would not destroy their personalities, writing styles or unique use of language (i.e. they were not robots), He controlled them so thoroughly that Paul could say to the Thessalonians, "We also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not

as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thes. 2:13). Every word of Scripture is "God breathed" (the literal rendering of 2 Tim. 3:16). Thus the very same words that are said to be David's speech in Hebrews 4:7 are said to be the Holy Spirit's words in Hebrews 3:7. What David said by inspiration, the Spirit said. It was not a mixture of David and the Spirit. No word in the original manuscripts of the Bible came from a different source than God, and therefore the syllogism I gave to you earlier shows clearly that no word can have error.

But there are many other explicit and implicit statements. Some 3,808 times the authors of the Old Testament claimed to be transmitting the very words of God. Over and over the Psalmist cries out, "The law of Jehovah is perfect...I trust Thy word...Thy word is very pure; therefore Thy servant loveth it...All Thy commandments are truth ... The sum of Thy word is truth; and every one of Thy righteous ordinances endureth forever... " Thus, in John 10:34-35 Jesus could refer to a single word that was used in a very unusual way in a very obscure passage, and then tell the Pharisees that they needed to submit to the meaning of that word since "the Scripture cannot be broken." (verse 35). He was affirming that every word of Scripture is inerrant even when it is difficult to understand. Christ confidently said to the Father, "Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). It could not be truth if it contained error. In Galatians 3:16 Paul bases a major doctrine upon determining whether an Old Testament word was plural or singular. Obviously the very letters of words were important to him. And this is why Christ made every jot and tittle of Scripture so important (Matthew 5:17-20). All the Bible was truth.

Doubter:

I hadn't realized that the Scripture even addressed this subject, but I see that there is a lot of material I need to study. Thank you.

Resources Available from the Publisher

- Cummings, Tim. *Ministerial Training: The Bible's Normative Pattern*.
- Davis, Andrew. *Written on Your Heart: An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture*.
- Elliot, Michael (Ed.). *Bible Acrostic: An Aid to Memorizing the Content of Every Chapter of the Bible*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Biblical Romance: What Does the Bible Say About Courtship & Betrothal?*
- Kayser, Phillip. *The Canon of Scripture, Volume 1: Biblical Presuppositions*.
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- Kayser, Phillip. *Universal Suffrage: A History and Analysis of Voting in the Church and Society*.
- Kayser, Phillip, & Bubeck, Mark. *Prayers for Spiritual Warfare*.
- Kayser, Phillip, & Pickering, Wilbur. *Has God Indeed Said?: The Preservation of the Text of the New Testament*.
- Rose, Ben Lacy. *Baptism by Sprinkling*.

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For centuries skeptics and unbelievers have denied the veracity of the Bible. Today there are many denominations and many people who call themselves Christians that take a similar view. They say the Bible contains truth, or it teaches truth, or portions of it are true. But they deny the veracity of miracles, the resurrection, Mosaic authorship, patriarchal lineages, etc. What is the orthodox Christian to do? Toss in the towel? Leave it to the experts? NO! Christians need to talk to the doubters and explain why the Bible is TRUE- every jot and tittle of it. Indeed, the Bible is not only “True”; it is “Truth” (John 17:17).

Founder and President of Biblical Blueprints, **Phillip Kayser** has degrees in education, theology, and philosophy. Ordained in 1987, he currently serves as Senior Pastor of Dominion Covenant Church, a conservative Presbyterian (CPC) church in Omaha, NE. He also serves as Professor of Ethics at Whitefield Theological Seminary and President of the Providential History Festival. He and his wife Kathy have 5 children and 9 grandchildren.



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