Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Preaching the Book God Wrote, Part 4
Scripture: Proverbs 30:5
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THE LEGACY OF LIBERALISM

A Recent Example

Dr. Robert Bratcher was chief translator of the American Bible Society's *Good News for Modern Man*. A former Southern Baptist missionary, he was invited to speak at the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in March of 1981. He addressed the topic "Biblical Authority for the Church Today." Bratcher said:

Only willful ignorance or intellectual dishonesty can account for the claim that the Bible is inerrant and infallible. No truth-loving, God-respecting, Christ-honoring believer should be guilty of such heresy. To invest the Bible with the qualities of inerrancy and infallibility is to idolatrize [sic] it, to transform it into a false god . . . . No one seriously claims that all the words of the Bible are the very words of God. If someone does so, it is only because that person is not willing thoroughly to explore its implications . . . . Words spoken by Jesus in Aramaic in the thirties of the first century and preserved in writing in Greek 35 to 50 years later do not necessarily wield compelling or authentic authority over us today. The locus of scriptural authority is not the words themselves. It is Jesus Christ as the Word of God who is the authority for us to be and to do. ("Inerrancy: Clearing Away Confusion," *Christianity Today* [May 29, 1981], 12)

Such thinking is typical of the legacy of liberalism that has robbed preachers of true preaching dynamics. Why, after all, should we be careful with Scripture if its truthfulness is uncertain?

False Notions

Bratcher and others who would subscribe to "limited" or "partial" inerrancy are guilty of error along several lines of reasoning.

First, they have not really come to grips with that which Scripture teaches about itself. B. B. Warfield went to the heart of the issue:

The really decisive question among Christian scholars...is thus seen to be, "What does an exact and scientific exegesis determine to be the Biblical doctrine of inspiration?" (B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 175)

The answer is that nowhere do the Scriptures leave open the possibility that the Word of God contains a mixture of truth and error--nor do the writers ever give the slightest hint that they were aware of this alleged phenomenon as they wrote. The human writers of Scripture unanimously concur that it is God's Word; therefore every word of it must be true (Prov. 30:5).

Second, limited or partial inerrancy assumes that there is a higher authority to establish the reliability of Scripture than God's revelation in the Scriptures. They err by *a priori* giving the critic a place of authority over the Scriptures. This assumes the critic himself is inerrant.

Third, if limited inerrancy is true (first class condition), then its promoters err in assuming that any of the Scriptures are a trustworthy communicator of God's truth. An errant Scripture would definitely disqualify the Bible as a reliable source of truth.

Presuppositions are involved either way. Will men place their faith in the Scriptures or the critics? They cannot have their cake (trustworthy Scripture) and eat it too (limited inerrancy). As Clark Pinnock once correctly noted:

The attempt to narrow down the integrity of the Bible to matters of "faith" and its historical reliability is an unwarranted and foolish procedure. (Clark H. Pinnock, "Our Source of Authority: The Bible," *BSac* 124/494 [1967], 154)

If the Bible is unable to produce a sound doctrine of Scripture, then it is thus incapable of producing, with any degree of believability or credibility, a doctrine about any other matter. If the human writers of Scripture have erred in their understanding of Holy Writ's purity, then they have disqualified themselves as writers for any other area of God's revealed truth. If they are so disqualified in all areas, then every preacher is thoroughly robbed of any confidence and conviction concerning the alleged true message he would be relaying for God.

The Bottom Line

G. Campbell Morgan, hailed as one of the twentieth century's finest expositors, was a messenger widely used of God. There was a time in his life, however, when he wrestled with the very issue we discuss. He concluded that if there were errors in the biblical message, it could not be honestly proclaimed in public.

Here is the account of young Campbell Morgan's struggle to know if the Bible was surely God's Word:

For three years this young man, seriously contemplating a future of teaching and ultimately of preaching, felt the troubled waters of the stream of religious controversy carrying him beyond his depth. He read the new books which debated such questions as, "Is God Knowable?" and found that the authors' concerted decision was, "He is not knowable. He became confused and perplexed. No longer was he sure of that which his father proclaimed in public, and had taught him in the home.

Other books appeared, seeking to defend the Bible from the attacks which were being made upon it. The more he read the more unanswerable became the questions which filled his mind. One who had never suffered it cannot appreciate the anguish of spirit young Campbell Morgan endured during this crucial period of his life. Through all the after years it gave him the greatest sympathy with young people passing through similar experiences at college--experiences which he likened to "passing through a trackless desert." At last the crisis came when he admitted to himself his total lack of assurance that the Bible was the authoritative Word of God to man. He immediately cancelled all preaching engagements. Then, taking all his books, both those attacking and those defending the Bible, he put them all in a corner cupboard. Relating this afterwards, as he did many times in preaching, he told of turning the key in the lock of the door. "I can hear the click of that lock now," he used to say. He went out of the house, and down the street to a bookshop. He bought a new Bible and, returning to his room with it, he said to himself: "I am no longer sure that this is what my father claims it to be--the Word of God. But of this I am sure. If it be the Word of God, and if I come to it with an unprejudiced and open mind, it will bring assurance to my soul of itself." "That Bible found me," he said, "I began to read and study it then, in 1883. I have been a student ever since, and I still am (in 1938)."

At the end of two years Campbell Morgan emerged from that eclipse of faith absolutely sure that the Bible was, in very deed and truth, none other than the Word of the living God. Quoting again from his account of the incident: "...This experience is what, at last, took me back into the work of preaching, and into the work of the ministry. I soon found foothold enough to begin to preach, and from that time I went on."

With this crisis behind him and this new certainty thrilling his soul, there came a compelling conviction. This Book, being what it was, merited all that a man could give to its study, not merely for the sake of the personal joy of delving deeply into the heart and mind and will of God, but also in order that those truths discovered by such searching of the Scriptures should be made known to a world of men groping for light, and perishing in the darkness with no clear knowledge of that Will. (Jill Morgan, *A Man of the Word: Life of G. Campbell Morgan*, 94)

May God be pleased to multiply the tribe of preachers who, being convinced of the Bible's inerrant nature, will diligently apply themselves to understand and to proclaim its message as one

commissioned of God to deliver it in His stead.

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