Biblical Inerrancy

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Introduction

This article first examines the history of the debate over biblical inerrancy within modern evangelicalism. Second, it examines traditional arguments both for and against inerrancy. We will demonstrate that inerrancy is an important doctrine to promote and defend, but caution is urged in choosing arguments to support it. Not all arguments for inerrancy are valid.

At the outset it seems appropriate to consider definitions that have been offered for the doctrine of inerrancy. Paul D. Feinberg presents an excellent definition from the perspective of an advocate:

> Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences.[1]

Article XII of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy offers a similar affirmation in support of the doctrine:

> We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

> We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific

> hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.[2]

For the purposes of this article, we shall understand "inerrancy" in light of both of the above definitions.

Alternative understandings of inerrancy have been proposed. Millard Erickson has identified at least three theories. The first is "absolute inerrancy," which is represented by the preceding definitions. The second is "full inerrancy," represented by Roger Nicole and arguing that historical and scientific matters are "correct" but "not necessarily exact," because they are only "popular descriptions." Finally, there is "source inerrancy," represented by Edward J. Carnell and Everett F. Harrison; they argue that inerrancy guarantees "only an accurate reproducing of the sources which the Scripture writer employed, bu...