

THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE: DOES IT STILL MATTER?
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I. SOME HISTORY.

- A. Inerrancy was the general belief of Christendom until c. 1860. See Addendum I (p. 5 below).
- B. Around 1860 a sharp division began between Liberalism and Conservatism.
 - 1. Liberalism developed into a denial of the supernatural in all things, including the nature of the Bible. Around 1920 Neo-orthodoxy arose as a reaction against Liberalism; it restored belief in the supernatural elements of Christianity, except for the nature of the Bible.
 - 2. Conservatism in the early 20th century took shape as Fundamentalism, and was modified as Evangelicalism around 1950.
- C. Evangelicalism at first continued to believe in inerrancy, but this changed in the 1960s.
 - 1. In 1963 Dewey Beegle wrote *The Inspiration of Scripture* (later ed.: *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*). He declared he was an Evangelical but denied Biblical inerrancy.
 - 2. Since then the most serious attacks on inerrancy have come from within Evangelicalism.
- D. This same pattern has occurred within the Restoration Movement.

II. THE HISTORY OF CBS/CCU.

- A. This school began in 1924 as a response to the Liberal takeover of Restoration colleges/seminaries.
- B. The CCU Constitution and By-Laws (revised 11/7/08) includes the following statements:

ARTICLE III. CHARACTER AND PURPOSE

Cincinnati Christian University, in its endeavor to equip and train men and women for Christian service, shall make the Bible its chief textbook, arrange all of its courses of study and conduct its work in harmony with the spirit and letter of the Word of God. To this end all trustees and faculty members must be members of the undenominational fellowship of Christian churches and churches of Christ and must **believe, without reservation, in the full and final inspiration of the Bible to the extent that for each of them it is the infallible Word of God and, therefore, the all-sufficient rule of faith and life;* in the deity and supreme authority of Christ; in obedience to the Gospel; in edification of the church; and in the restoration of its unity on the New Testament basis.**

* The term infallible means "incapable of error." It is the school's position that all scripture, as first written by the authors themselves, was produced under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Scripture is, therefore, the Word of God in written form and is infallible (incapable of error) and inerrant (without error) in its entirety when taken in the original meaning of its authors.

[The asterisked footnote defining "infallible" was added to the document in the late 20th century. The 2009-2011 CBS (CCU graduate school) catalog (p. 3) cites the high-lighted portion, but does not include the footnote defining the word "infallible."]

- C. At some point in the late 20th century, by faculty vote the following statement of belief was included in the CBS catalogue: **“The faculty members of Cincinnati Bible Seminary believe that all Scripture, as first written by the authors themselves, was produced under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Scripture is therefore the Word of God in written form, and is infallible and inerrant in its entirety when taken in the original meaning of its authors. Thus it is the sole and sufficient rule for faith and practice.”**

This statement continued to be included in the CBS catalog up through and including the 1996-1999 edition. Beginning with the 2000 edition, it was removed from the catalog without a faculty vote and without explanation.

- D. For the first part of my teaching career, CBS’s policy was to not allow guest speakers (speaking on Biblical and theological topics) who did not accept the full inerrancy and authority of the Bible. In recent years this policy has not been followed.

III. WHAT IS AT STAKE IN THIS MATTER OF INERRANCY?

- A. The issue is not necessarily salvation. One can have saving faith in Jesus without accepting inerrancy.
- B. So what is the issue? What are the consequences of denying the inerrancy of Scripture?

1. Denying inerrancy means that one is affirming that there are errors in the Bible—*somewhere*. It means that some statements in Scripture are true, and some are false.

- a. The task of deciding *which* are true and *which* are false now falls upon us, individually.

b. Donald McGavran, in "That the Gospel Be Made Known," *Theology, News and Notes* (June 1985), 10-11, tells of an experience he had as a missionary in India, as teacher of a men's Sunday school class. The men "were mostly workers in the mission press with an average education of seventh or eighth grade. My predecessor . . . had been a flaming liberal, a graduate of Chicago Divinity School. He had taught this Bible class for the previous seven years.

"A turning point in my theological pilgrimage took place one Sunday morning when I asked the class of some fifteen or twenty men, 'When you read a biblical passage such as we are studying this morning, what is the first question you ask?' One of the most intelligent workers in the mission press replied immediately, 'What is there in this passage that we cannot believe?' What he meant, of course, was that when we read the passage about Jesus walking on the water, we know instantly that He could not have done that. Consequently, we must understand the passage as an exaggerated or perhaps poetic account of what happened.

"I had never before been confronted as bluntly with what the liberal position means to ordinary Christians in multitudinous instances. It shocked me, and I began at that moment to feel that it could not be the truth. Despite all the difficulties, I began to feel my way toward convictions concerning the Bible as infallible revelation. It was God's Word. It was entirely dependable. It was the rule of faith and practice of every true Christian."

2. The issue now is this: If you reject Biblical inerrancy, HOW will you decide what in the Bible YOU will believe, and what you will reject?
- a. You can no longer say: This or that specific statement in Scripture is TRUE, *just because it is in the Bible*. (You can no longer do what Jesus did in John 10:35.)

- b. Instead, every individual statement in Scripture must now be evaluated and judged for its truth or falsehood by some other criterion, e.g., reason, experience, mystical sense of being guided by the Holy Spirit.
3. What we will find is this: if the Bible is not inerrant, we have *no objective basis* for accepting MOST of what the Bible teaches.
- a. Someone may say, “Not so! We can apply human reason—the commonly-accepted rules of evidence.”
 - b. This is true up to a point. I.e., we can use historical method to evaluate the historical claims in Scripture. Archeological research helps us to evaluate Biblical claims about geographical locations, the times and sequences of events, and the existence & identity of individuals named in the Biblical narratives. See, e.g., Luke 3:1, and similar claims throughout the Book of Acts.
 - c. But there are two serious limitations to the use of such reason as a criterion:
 - (1) It can be applied to only a small minority of Biblical claims of this nature; there simply are no relevant data for most historical claims. E.g., there is no objective way to individually verify that Jesus actually did most of the things the gospels say he did, or that he actually said the things the gospels say he said. (Cf. the resulting dilemma of John 10:35.)
 - (2) Even more seriously, there is no way to cite rational and historical proof for the great doctrinal claims of Scripture, e.g., the great doctrinal affirmations in such texts as Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 53; John 1:1; John 3:16; and Romans 3:21-31.
4. So what are we ultimately left with? Two things:
- a. *Subjectivity*. In the final analysis each of us will decide which Biblical teachings we will accept and which we will reject, based on something inside of us: our own experiences, our own feelings, our own desires, our own subjective judgments about what we deem possible or right or objectionable.
 - b. *Relativity*. There will no longer be any such thing as TRUTH in the genuine sense: no more objective, absolute truth, no more sound doctrine, no “place to stand” in order to establish some ideas as true and some as false. There will no longer be any agreed-upon authority, no agreed-upon authoritative source for seeking unity of doctrine.

C. Examples of what happens when inerrancy is denied: see Addendum II (p. 5 below).

IV. AN APPEAL.

- A. Today it is my earnest desire that every one of our students, and this school as such, and the Movement of which it is a part, will stand firm on the traditional belief in the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. It is also my earnest desire that we will see that, as creatures made in God’s image, we have the God-given ability to understand the God-intended meaning of the Bible’s contents.

- B. Unless we can do this, the *relativists are right*: there is no absolute truth in the world! If the Bible is not the inerrant Word of God, or if we cannot truly understand it, then we have *no place to stand*, no firm foundation on which we can take a stand on any belief.
1. Archimedes said: “Give me a place to stand, and I can move the world.” But in this post-modern world of relativism, where the Bible is seen as flawed or at least impossible to understand, *there IS no place to stand!* As Francis Beckwith has said in the title of one of his books, with relativism, we have our “Feet Firmly Planted in Midair.”
 2. No wonder so many Christians are reluctant to take a stand on “the BIBLICAL view” of this or that doctrine, or this or that issue. The ultimate result of denying the inerrancy of the Bible is the idea that DOCTRINE DOES NOT MATTER!
- C. But with an inerrant Bible (which we CAN understand), we DO have a place to stand; we have firm ground under our feet; we have no reason to doubt or apologize for our convictions. Standing firm on the Bible as the Word of God, we can boldly affirm and proclaim “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).
- D. See J. Gresham Machen’s book, *Christianity and Liberalism* (new ed., Eerdmans 2009), p. 42.
1. Here he discusses the strong difference between Martin Luther and his Lutheran cohorts (on the one hand) and Huldreich Zwingli and his followers (on the other hand). Their disagreement led to serious controversy and a great division between the Lutheran and Reformed branches of the Reformation. Machen remarks, “It is often said that the divided condition of Christendom is an evil, and so it is.” And as Machen saw it, “the calamity was due to the fact that Luther (as we believe) was wrong about the Lord’s Supper.” BUT – “it would have been a far greater calamity if being wrong about the Supper he had represented the whole question as a trifling affair. Luther was wrong about the Supper, but not nearly so wrong as he would have been if, being wrong, he had said to his opponents: ‘Brethren, this matter is a trifle; and it makes really very little difference what a man thinks about the table of the Lord.’ Such indifferentism would have been far more deadly than all the divisions between the branches of the Church. A Luther who would have compromised with regard to the Lord’s Supper never would have said at the Diet of Worms, ‘Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me, Amen.’ Indifferentism about doctrine makes no heroes of the faith.”
 2. Machen’s point is that it is better to be wrong about something, and better even to suffer division for it, than to refuse to take a stand and say, “It doesn’t really matter what view you take.” But this is ultimately where the denial of inerrancy leads. In fact, it leads to an even worse end: when we deny inerrancy, there is no longer any such thing as “a wrong view” about anything.
- E. Does this make us old-fashioned, antiquated, out of touch with the modern world? Maybe. But perhaps there is nothing wrong with this! Jeremiah 6:16 says, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.’” Jeremiah 18:15 adds: “Because My people have forgotten Me, they have burned incense to worthless idols. And they have caused themselves to stumble in their ways, from the ancient paths, to walk in pathways and not on a highway” (NKJV). I urge you to stay on the “old paths” when the winds of change want to sweep you along with the crowd, down the side trails that lead nowhere. This is the mature approach: “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects unto Him who is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:14, NASB).

ADDENDUM I: EXAMPLES OF INERRANCY IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Clement of Rome (early 2nd century), ch. 45. “Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit. Observe that nothing of an unjust or counterfeit character is written in them.”

Justin Martyr (mid-2nd century), “Dialogue with Trypho,” 65:2. He tells Trypho – If you think you can get me to “say the Scriptures contradicted each other, you have erred. But I shall not venture to suppose or to say such a thing; and if a Scripture which appears to be of such a kind be brought forward, and if there be a pretext [for saying] that it is contrary [to some other], since I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another, I shall admit rather than I do not understand what is recorded, and shall strive to persuade those who imagine that the Scriptures are contradictory, to be rather of the same opinion as myself.”

Irenaeus (late 2nd century), “Against Heresies,” II.28.2. If we find problem passages in the Bible that we cannot explain, “we should leave things of that nature to God who created us, being most properly assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit,” whose knowledge is infinitely beyond ours.

Augustine, Letter (to Jerome) 28:3, *Works* 6:80-81. He is commenting on Jerome’s suggestion that Paul may have deliberately misrepresented something in Galatians. He totally rejects such an idea, “For it seems to me that 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 books anything false. It is one question whether it may be at any time the duty of a good man to deceive; but it is another question whether it can have been the duty of a writer of Holy Scripture to deceive: nay, it not another question—it is no question at all. For if you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement as made in the way of duty, there will not be left a single sentence of those books which, if appearing to any one difficult in practice or hard to believe, may not by the same fatal rule be explained away, as a statement in which . . . the author declared what was not true.”

Ibid., 28:5, p. 82. If we admit that such falsehood is present in Scripture, “the authority of the divine Scriptures becomes unsettled (so that every one may believe what he wishes, and reject what he does not wish).” This is how it will be “if this be once admitted, that the men by whom these things have been delivered unto us, could in their writings state some things which were not true.”

Augustine, “Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon,” 11:5, *Works* 5:196-197. He grants that his own writings, and all writings since apostolic times, may contain errors. But “the authoritative canonical books of the Old and New Testaments” are different. “If we are perplexed by an 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.” “In consequence of the distinctive peculiarity of the sacred writings, we are bound to receive as true whatever the canon shows to have been said by even one prophet, or apostle, or evangelist. Otherwise, not a single page will be left for the guidance of human fallibility.”

Augustine, “The Harmony of the Gospels,” I:54, *Works* 8:194-195. Contrary to those who think they find contradictions in the gospels, they are in perfect harmony. Jesus as the Wisdom of God sent both the prophets in OT times and the apostles after His ascension. “He stands to all His disciples in the relation of the head to the members of His body.” As members of His body the apostles wrote only what He, the Head, wanted them to write. Anything He wanted to be preserved for our benefit, “He commanded to be written by those disciples, whom He thus used as if they were His own hands.” Thus we should look upon the gospel writers as we “might look upon the actual hand of the Lord Himself, which He bore in that body which was made His own, were he to see it engaged in the act of writing. For this reason let us now rather proceed to examine into the real character of

those passages in which these critics suppose the evangelists to have given contradictory accounts (a thing which only those who fail to understand the matter aright can fancy to be the case).”

John Wesley, *Journals*, July 24, 1776 (vol. 4:82). He is commenting on a tract that says the Biblical writers sometimes made mistakes: “Nay, if there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth.”

ADDENDUM II: EXAMPLES OF WHAT HAPPENS TO THEOLOGY WHEN INERRANCY IS DENIED

[In the following quotations, certain specific portions have been emphasized with **bold type**; the emphasis is not in the originals.]

I. Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate About the Bible: Inerrancy Versus Infallibility* (Westminster 1977).

To claim that the Bible is inerrant is to say that it “contains *no errors at all*,” e.g., in history, logic, and geography. But that claim “is one that in all humility I cannot affirm,” says Davis (16). **“I consider myself an evangelical Christian and yet I do not affirm inerrancy”** (18). Instead, he believes the Bible is “infallible,” i.e., “entirely trustworthy on matters of faith and practice” (16).

Later he qualifies this by limiting infallibility only to “matters that are *crucially relevant* to Christian faith and practice” (118, italics added). But in the end this means nothing, since he says, “I admit that I am unable to stipulate a clear and infallible criterion to distinguish Biblical passages that are crucially relevant to faith and practice from those that are not” (125).

But even if he could do so, it would not make any real difference, since he clearly says that his “faith and practice” distinction “does not necessarily mean that I find no *theological error* in the Bible as opposed, say, to scientific or historical error” (125).

In fact, Davis says, it is always possible that the Bible contains errors in any of its claims; the deal is that he has simply not found any yet in matters (crucially relevant) to faith and practice. “There are historical and scientific errors in the Bible, but I have found none on matters of faith and practice. I do not claim *a priori* that the Bible is or must be infallible, just that I have found it to be so. Perhaps someday it will be shown that the Bible is not infallible” (115-116). “I am open at any point to the possibility that the Bible is not infallible” (120).

What criteria shall we apply to determine if any given Biblical doctrine is indeed erroneous? His answer seems to be: human reason, i.e., an examination of the available evidence. “The only epistemological credentials a doctrine must have in order to be accepted by evangelicals is that it seem true on the available evidence.” **An evangelical accepts “evangelical doctrines . . . simply because they seem true to him.”** “I believe B, C, and D because I believe they are taught in the Bible and because I know of no argument or evidence that refutes them.” **No Christian can accept a doctrine on the basis of the Bible alone. “He must hold to some other authority or criterion as well. That authority, I am not embarrassed to say, is his own mind, his own ability to reason”** (71). **A Christian must “accept whatever the Bible says on any subject whatsoever unless there is compelling reason not to accept it. That is, everything in the Bible is authoritative and normative for the Christian until he comes across a passage which for good reasons he cannot accept. . . . One should reject something that the Bible says only where, having thoroughly examined the problem, in all humility one cannot accept what it says”** (75). “I believe that the Bible is or ought to be authoritative for every Christian in all that it says on any subject unless and until he encounters a passage which after careful study and for good reasons he cannot accept” (116).

Despite this ultimate appeal and apparent dependence on the evidential use of reason, Davis acknowledges “that sin has corrupted all aspects of human personality, including reason, and that reason is not therefore an infallible guide to truth.” But this does not change anything: “Corrupted or not, we have no choice but to listen to and follow the dictates of reason” (72).

Where does this leave Davis regarding his use of the Bible for deciding matters of faith and practice? It leaves him in the bottomless and shoreless sea of doctrinal subjectivity and relativity. To change the metaphor, his feet are “firmly planted in mid-air.” **He cites a kindred spirit, Daniel P. Fuller (whose father founded Fuller Theological Seminary), who says that regarding doctrinal errors in the Bible, “he has discovered none yet and hopes he never will.”** He labors on “despite his clear belief that a discovered error on a revelational matter makes the whole Bible questionable” (42). **Likewise, says Davis, he too must decide “whether or not there is compelling reason to reject some Biblical claim. For me this does not occur often, but it does occur occasionally. It has never yet occurred on a matter of faith or practice, and, like Fuller, I hope it never will”** (76).

In the midst of all this subjectivity, relativity, and uncertainty, Davis makes his final appeal to the most subjective criterion of all: the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit. “I do affirm the traditional Christian claim that the Holy Spirit guides us into truth, although I do not wish to explore here the question of how this guidance works in relation to Scripture, reason, or any other epistemological authority” (72).

II. Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (IVP, 1993); and Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture* (IVP, 1994). Two leading “left-wing” evangelicals speak on Scripture, errancy, and the witness of the Spirit.

A. “Many twentieth-century ‘card-carrying’ evangelicals have sought to understand the evangelical commitment to biblical authority in terms of the word *inerrancy*. Regardless of the usefulness of this term, the recent emphasis on inerrancy is an indication that many thinkers construct the doctrine of Scripture with a view toward the divine nature of the Bible,” thinking that “the Bible views itself as the Word of God” (Grenz, 110). Grenz himself rejects this (traditional) view as inadequate. Bloesch agrees: “I am not comfortable with the term *inerrancy* when applied to Scripture because it has been co-opted by a rationalistic, empiricistic mentality that reduces truth to facticity” (27). Their solution is to “revision the link between the Holy Spirit and Scripture” (Grenz, 113).

B. **As Bloesch implies, the truth of Scripture is not in the factual nature of its statements. The writers’ statements are but the “human witness” to the deeper truths to which they are pointing. “This truthfulness, however, is a property not of the human witness itself but of the Spirit who speaks in and through this witness”** (Bloesch, 27). **Contained in the words of Scripture, but on a deeper level (like vitamins and nutrients are contained in food), are these spiritual realities: “the words of everlasting life,” “the gospel,” “knowledge of divine truth,” and the divine message** (ibid., 111, 114). **“The Bible contains the perfect Word of God in the imperfect words of human beings”** (ibid., 115).

C. **How does this “perfect Word of God,” this imbedded truth, become known to us and alive to us? How do we distinguish it from the words of Scripture themselves? *Through the work of the Holy Spirit.*** Combined with His work of illumination, the Spirit bears witness to His inspiration of Scripture (Grenz, 117-118, 120-121, 125). Second Timothy 3:16 “declares that ‘God breathes into the Scripture,’ thereby making it useful. . . . Rather than supporting ‘the pristine character of the autographs,’ this text focuses on how valuable the Spirit-energized Scriptures are” (ibid., 120-121). “Both the historical development of Scripture and the ongoing piety of evangelicalism remind us that the acknowledgment of the divine character of Scripture is bound up with the work of the Spirit in illumination. As the community of faith hears the voice of the Holy Spirit in the pages of the Bible, it confesses that the Scriptures are the product of the inspiration of that same Holy Spirit” (ibid., 125).

D. **“The source of our knowledge of divine truth is neither the Scriptures expounded according to our private interpretation alone nor any private, individual ‘word from the Spirit.’ Rather, it consists in an external principle—inspired Scripture—combined with an internal principle—the witness of the Holy Spirit.** The Scriptures are the vehicle or instrumentality of the Holy Spirit through which he chooses to speak to the people of God. A revised doctrine of Scripture must incorporate this insight concerning the integral relationship between the Bible and the Spirit” (Grenz, 114).

E. **The bottom line is this: even though there are errors in Scripture, we can still discern the true Word of God contained therein through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit communicating with our spirits. Here again in our use of Scripture we are at the mercy of subjectivism.**

III. Scot McKnight, “Scripture: How So Our Authority?” an on-line essay, accessed 3/15/2010, at www.catalystresources.org/issues/333McKnight.htm .

“The standard words Christians use when asserting or claiming authority are *inerrancy* and *infallibility*, neither of which is a complete idea nor adequately describes the kind of ‘authority’ Scripture plays in the life of the individual believer or the local church. . . . A more complete idea for our relationship to the Bible is that Bible is ‘true.’ . . . For that reason, I suggest we learn to speak of the *truthfulness* of Scripture—which in and of itself raises another set of questions pertaining to the nature and extent of its truthfulness. . . . Are Scriptures true in matters of faith and practice, or in everything that comes up?”

What matters about the Bible is not the objective data recorded therein, but the *meaning* of events as discerned by its writers as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. McKnight sums it up thus: **“The truthfulness of Scripture is not found by reconstructing the event, but by recognizing that God’s Spirit, in God’s Church, has guided the writers so that the meaning of an event, told in the form of a narrative, comes to terms with the gospel. . . . Truth, in other words, is not completely shaped by event and its historical reconstruction, but by the ‘construal’ of that event as guided by the Spirit in the church as found in the early Christian witness: the NT.”**

How does this apply, for example, to the Gospels? **“I believe that Jesus really said the things—within reason—the Gospels record he said But, I do not believe their truthfulness is determined, at least not wholly, by our ability to reconstruct the words of Jesus”** Regarding Scripture in general, **“I assume Scripture is true, and I admit that I assume its facts correspond in some degree to what really happened, but that is not enough to describe our relationship to Scripture.”**

Our relationship to Scripture, says McKnight, is like a marriage. “What matters most is not the objective truthfulness of our marriage license or the objective memory of our vows or the objectivity of a wedding ring, but the personal disclosure” and the subjective relationships involved therein.

The main point McKnight makes throughout this essay is that Scripture, whether objectively truthful or not, is the means by which we can be involved in a subjective relationship with God. He says, “Rather than seeing the Bible, and therefore its authority, as document and artifact, the Bible more properly needs to be viewed as living relationship between the God who speaks through the Bible and its readers who engage with God as they listen to Scripture.” He says that the “magic” of Scripture “does not occur because I can reconstruct its truthfulness but because I face God in Scripture, God faces me in Scripture, . . . and that face-to-face encounter” forms my identity.” “In other words, Scripture’s authority is that of a relationship rather than that of a mechanical, imposed set of laws from the divine court of justice to which we simply submit in quiescence.” [This is a classic example of a false choice.]

IV. Luke Timothy Johnson, “Scripture & Experience,” an on-line essay created 06/11/2007 in an on-line magazine, *Commonweal* [<http://commonwealmagazine.org>] , as half of a two-part series, “Homosexuality & the Church: Two Views,” accessed 6/16/2011 at <http://commonwealmagazine.org/print/4188> .

Johnson defends loving homosexual relationships between committed same-sex couples, despite his acknowledgement of the fact that the Bible clearly condemns such behavior. He feels free to do this because he believes that the authority of our personal experience, rather than Scripture, is the final determiner of truth. By experience he means what goes on in “our lives and the lives of those we love,” as we perceive the way God is continuing to work therein.

“The task demands intellectual honesty. I have little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says, through appeals to linguistic or cultural subtleties. The exegetical situation is straightforward: we know what the text says,” even if our own views are “standing in tension with the clear commands of Scripture.”

“I think it important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us. By so doing, we explicitly reject as well the premises of the scriptural statements condemning homosexuality—namely, that it is a vice freely chosen, a symptom of human corruption, and disobedience to God’s created order.”

“Implicit in an appeal to experience is also an appeal to the living God whose creative work never ceases, who continues to shape humans in his image every day, in ways that can surprise and even shock us. . . . God *does* create the world anew at every moment”

“We are fully aware of the weight of scriptural evidence pointing away from our position, yet place our trust in the power of the living God to reveal as powerfully through personal experience and testimony as through written texts. . . . And if the letter of Scripture cannot find room for the activity of the living God in the transformation of human lives, then trust and obedience must be paid to the living God rather than to the words of Scripture.”

In reaching new conclusions concerning moral issues such as homosexuality, “what I find most important of all is not the authority found in specific commands, which are fallible, conflicting, and often culturally conditioned, but rather the way Scripture creates the mind of Christ in its readers, authorizing them to reinterpret written texts in light of God’s Holy Spirit active in human lives. . . . If it is risky to trust ourselves to the evidence of God at work in transformed lives even when it challenges the clear statements of Scripture, it is a far greater risk to allow the words of Scripture to blind us to the presence and power of the living God.”