

Inerrancy and the Authority of Scripture

A Statement from the Eldership of Raleigh Street Christian Centre

In our capacity as the elders of Raleigh Street Christian Centre, we felt it would be timely to clarify the church's position regarding the truthfulness and authority of the Bible, for two reasons.

First, our culture is changing rapidly; consequently, its conclusions regarding issues such as sexuality, gender, freedom, the purpose and value of life, and our relationship to the environment are sometimes coming into tension with historic Christian positions on these matters of ethics (i.e. how we should live). Inevitably this leads Christians to reflect again on their positions. Such humble re-examination can be a good thing; we believe our current ethical stances should remain open to possible revision in the light of fresh insight. However, such revision cannot happen in contravention of the Bible. **When re-examining ethical issues, we want to affirm that scripture remains the foundational normative basis for our decisions.**

Secondly, our culture is increasingly skeptical of the Bible. According to Wilberforce Foundation research published in 2018, questions about the reliability and validity of the Bible block 35% of New Zealanders from considering Christianity. Furthermore, almost every other belief blocker surveyed by the Foundation has a clear link (whether perceived or real) to Biblical teaching. Amongst New Zealanders trust in the Bible is increasingly counter-cultural, and such trust is often questioned within the church as well as by our secular neighbours. **In response to widespread skepticism, we want to affirm our confidence in the truthfulness of the Bible.**

Our confidence in the truthfulness of scripture, and its resulting authority for Christian ethics, stems from the following considerations:

1. **We believe in a communicative God**, who has revealed himself to humanity:
 - a. In a general sense, God has communicated something of who he is through the majesty, beauty and order of the created world (Psalm 19:1-4, 104:24, 139:14; Romans 1:18-20).
 - b. More specifically, God has communicated through prophets, and ultimately through his Son Jesus Christ, variously called 'the truth,' 'the Word,' 'the wisdom of God,' and 'the exact imprint of [God's] being' (Hebrews 1:1-3; John 14:6, 1:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30).
2. We believe that **in the Bible, communication from God takes a written form**:
 - a. Old Testament prophesy is frequently described as the word of God (the possible citations are very numerous, but include Jeremiah 1:4-10; Ezekiel 2:1-7).
 - b. The good news of Jesus Christ conveyed by the New Testament is also described as the word of God (Acts 13:44-49; 15:7; 1 Corinthians 1:18; Ephesians 1:13).
 - c. The book of Hebrews implies the Bible is God's word by direct attribution of Scriptural quotations to God (Hebrews 3:7; 4:7; 5:5-6; 10:15).
 - d. Scripture teaches that its nature is 'inspired,' that is, breathed out by God – we therefore believe that when the Bible speaks, God speaks (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

3. We believe that **when God communicates, he speaks truth** and is true to his word:
 - e. God's character is truthful (Numbers 23:19; Matthew 22:16; John 14:6, 15:26; Rom 3:4; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18; 1 John 5:20).
 - f. Consequently the word of God, including Scripture, is true (2 Samuel 7:28; Nehemiah 9:13; Psalm 119:151; 19:9; John 17:17).

4. As followers of Jesus Christ, our confidence in scripture finds additional support in the fact that **Jesus trusted the Old Testament, and commissioned the New Testament:**
 - g. Jesus taught the Old Testament's authority and value (Matthew 5:17-19; Mark 7:11-13).
 - h. Jesus referred to all three parts of the Jewish Old Testament (that is, Law, Prophets, and Writings) as authoritative in disputation (e.g. Matthew 15:7-9, 19:3-6, 21:15-17).
 - i. Jesus commissioned the New Testament in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2; Luke 24:46-47; Mark 3:14; John 15:26-27; John 20:21; Acts 2:42).

Christians have often affirmed the truthfulness of Scripture through the use of terms such as 'inerrancy' (meaning Scripture is without error) and 'infallibility' (meaning Scripture will not fail to achieve God's intent amongst his people). **We affirm both the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture.**

In recent decades a debate has emerged among evangelical Christians about the extent of inerrancy: Is inerrancy *limited* to matters of Christian faith and practice, such as the nature of God and salvation, or is inerrancy *unlimited*, such that the Bible speaks truth on every subject it addresses, including matters of history and science? **We continue to affirm unlimited inerrancy.** However, it is important to distinguish unlimited inerrancy from unwavering literalism or traditionalism; careful attention to individual Biblical texts ought to establish what the Bible is claiming in any particular case. We aspire to believe all that the Bible teaches, neither pushing beyond what the Bible itself claims, nor holding back from accepting its authority in all of life.

The Bible is a book God intends to be read widely by ordinary people; its central ideas can be understood by everyday readers, leading to acceptance and belief amongst those guided by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the Bible is also a complex ancient text that rewards extended study. It contains a wide range of types of literature, and its diverse writings were revealed at specific times and within specific cultural contexts. Before it became God's word for us, the books of the Bible were first of all God's word to specific original audiences: the Israelites, the church in Rome, the seven churches of Revelation, and so on. In other words, as a general principle, we understand that the Bible was written *for* us, but not directly *to* us. All this means that **the Bible is a book that requires some interpretation** in order to understand its implications for Raleigh Street Christian Centre in the present day. We have total confidence in the word of God, and therefore in the Bible, but as fallible human beings we also admit the necessary imperfection of our interpretations of God's word.

The fallibility of human interpretation means that **it is possible for Christians to disagree over the ethical implications of the Bible.** As Christians, we trust the Spirit of God to grant us

increasing insight and discernment as we give our lives over to him, and as we learn from one another. We also know that we will need to show forbearance with each other in the process of Biblical interpretation: virtues such as grace, humility and patience are important as we seek to hear one another, and step towards a fuller understanding of what it means to live a holy life before God.

As an eldership, it is our intention to constantly, carefully, and prayerfully consider what God would teach us from scripture about Christian life in the 21st Century. We ask for your prayers and your assistance as we carry out this task.

The undersigned Elders of Raleigh Street Christian Centre, 29 March 2021.