

# The Messenger

COLDWATER CHURCH OF CHRIST

Sept. 18, 2011



## The Question of Inerrancy

by J.W. McGarvey

[Editor's Note: The following article was penned by J.W. McGarvey and originally appeared in the May 27, 1893 issue of Christian Standard, reprinted in McGarvey, 1910, pp. 36-39. While the specific occasion that elicited the article has long since passed, the principles have not, since they still afflict the thinking of modern liberal theologians. We commend this timeless article to your consideration.]

I believe it was Professor Briggs who first introduced the current use of the term "inerrancy" in the controversy about the character of the original Scriptures. If he did not, he at least has given it its chief conspicuity in recent discussions. It is well-known that no intelligent man claims inerrancy for the printed Bibles which we now use, whether in the translations or the original tongues. The question has never had reference to any other than the language of the inspired writers, as distinguished from the alterations and interpolations which have been introduced by copyists and editors. In other words, it has reference to the autographic writing of the authors of the books. Instead of meeting the question fairly, those gentlemen who are so fond of an errant Bible, have taken a great deal of pains to obscure the real issue by throwing dust into the air. Professor Warfield, of Princeton, has an excellent article in the Independent of March 23, in which he scatters this dust, and lays bare the real issue in a most intelligible manner. We quote him:

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*This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you... (1 John 1:5).*

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We have heard a vast deal of late of “the first manuscripts of the Bible which no living man has ever seen,” of “Scriptures that have disappeared forever,” of “original autographs which have vanished;” concerning the contents of which these controversialists are willing to declare, with the emphasis of italics, that they know nothing, that no man knows anything, and that they are perfectly contented with their ignorance. Now, again, if this were to be taken literally, it would amount to a strong asseveration that the Bible, as God gave it to men, is lost beyond recovery; and that men are shut up, therefore, to the use of Bibles so hopelessly corrupted that it is impossible now to say what was in the original autographs and what was not! In proportion as we draw back from this contention—which is fortunately as absurd as it is extreme—in that proportion do we affirm that we have the autographic text; that not only we, but all men, may see it if they will; and that God has not permitted the Bible to become so hopelessly corrupt that its restoration to its original text is impossible. As a matter of fact, the great body of the Bible is, in its autographic text, in the worst copies of the original texts in circulation; practically the whole of it is in its autographic text in the best texts in circulation; and he who will may today read the autographic text in large stretches of Scripture without legitimate doubt, and, in the New Testament at least, may know precisely at what rarely occurring points, and to what not very great extent, doubts as to the genuineness of the text are still possible.

The Professor might have added that this autograph, thus accurately preserved, and now in the hands of every reader of the corrected Greek text of the New Testament, is faithfully represented to the eye of every English reader in the renderings and marginal readings of the Revised Version. For while, as the textual critics make plain to us, seven-eighths of the words of the New Testament are now printed in the very form in which they came from the original penmen, and nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of it absolutely so in meaning; and while we can put our finger on every word about which there remains any doubt; the marginal readings of the revised New Testament enable the reader who knows not a word of Greek to put his finger also on these words, and to know that all the rest are precisely those of the autographs. It is a most mischievous and deceptive device, therefore, originating from the heat of controversy, to speak of the autographic writing of the apostles as though it were lost to the world, never to be known again except by conjecture.

Thank God, we have it in a purer form than our fathers had, even back to the early ages of the faith; and with this autographic writing in our hands, we stand before those who would criticize its representations, and say: Gentlemen, show us an error here which by a fair logical process can be certainly charged to the inspired penmen, and we will concede that to this extent their inspiration failed to guard against error. You have not done so yet; for all the specifications which you have made fail of this essential condition. We would caution them also to remember that there is the breadth of the heavens between infinitesimal errors of detail in a very few instances, and such errors as they are constantly charging upon the Scriptures, errors in which multitudes of facts, arguments and inferences in every part of the Bible are discredited at the good pleasure of every opinionated critic. The former would be a puzzle worthy of profound consideration and an earnest effort at solution; but the latter makes the Bible less reliable as a record of facts than Macaulay's History of England or Bancroft's History of the United States. We want no such Bible as that, and the coming generation will have none at all if that is the alternative

### REFERENCE

McGarvey, J.W. (1910), Short Essays in Biblical Criticism (Cincinnati, OH: The Standard Publishing Company).

<http://www.apologeticspress.com/APContent.aspx?category=13&article=3573>

Special Thanks to all who aided in feeding brother John Grubb each night of the meeting and for the presence of so many!

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