

**Reformation Fellowship Notes • Spring 2014**  
**Teacher: Jack Crabtree**  
**A Case for Biblical Inerrancy**  
**Handout #4**

This handout makes essentially the same argument as the one covered by Handout #3. However, hopefully this is a clearer and more readily accessible presentation of that argument than the notes in Handout #3.

**I. Question: Is it not possible that “Scripture” exists within the Bible but that not each and every assertion found in the Bible is absolutely authoritative and inerrant?**

**II. Answer I offered last week: That would negate the very purpose for which God gave us Scripture (a set of absolutely authoritative assertions) in the first place.**

A. If the set of absolutely authoritative (inerrant) assertions are contained right alongside fallible assertions, then, practically speaking, we might as well not possess any set of infallible assertions at all.

1. We are not substantially better off than if we had never been given any set of infallible assertions in the first place.

**III. God gave us the Scriptures so that we can know a priori that what they teach is true.** We cannot know a priori WHAT they teach. But we can know a priori that whatever it is that they teach is true.

A. The Scriptures cannot function as a check against and a challenge to our false beliefs and values unless we can know a priori that what they teach is true.

1. Otherwise, why defer to the teaching of the Scriptures over our own personal judgment? If what the Scriptures teach can be mistaken, then perhaps my beliefs and values are right and good while the Scriptures have got it wrong.

B. The bottom line is this: God’s purpose in giving us such an unusual thing as an absolutely authoritative Scripture is so that *we can know a priori* that what they teach us is true.

C. My contention is that this purpose—the purpose of having us know a priori that what the Scriptures assert is true—cannot be successfully served by anything short of an absolutely and totally inerrant Scripture. Anything less than TOTAL inerrancy could not fulfill this purpose.

**IV. Illustration of the above point / a thought experiment:**

A. Contest

1. Take 500 pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, and hide them in 500 different hiding places in the city.

2. A single contestant is given the opportunity to find every piece of the puzzle and put it together. If he is successful, he gets a million dollars.

3. Contestant is given 2000 cards that each have a set of clues or hints pertaining to the whereabouts of a single puzzle piece. Five hundred of the cards provide clues that point to an actual hiding place of one of the puzzle pieces. The other 1500 cards contain false clues. They are intended to lead the contestant astray.
  4. Each clue or hint is a clue to the identity of a certain person, place, or thing.
  5. All of the clues or hints are cryptic and riddle-like.
- B. Now, as the one who has designed every aspect of the contest, I decide to help the contestant out. I take every card that offers valid clues to an actual puzzle piece and put it in a special bin. Let's call it the USEFUL bin.
1. The contestant now knows that, if he takes a card from the USEFUL bin, that card provides a set of true and valid clues.
  2. He knows a priori, before he even reads the clues on one of those cards, that the clues contained on it are true, valid, and useful clues.
  3. It should be obvious why creating this USEFUL bin would be extremely helpful to the contestant.
- C. Now, suppose, I modify the content of this USEFUL bin. I add to the USEFUL bin 500 of the other 1500 cards that contain false clues.
1. Where does that leave the contestant? Is he any better off than if I had never created the USEFUL bin to begin with?
    - a) Not really. There is a higher probability that the clues on a card taken from the USEFUL bin are real clues, but he has no way of knowing a priori that any card contains real clues.
- D. Now, what if I make sure that all of the 500 false clue cards that I put in the USEFUL bin happen to be clues that identify a person or a thing but never a place?
1. Would that change anything? Would the USEFUL bin become useful once again?
    - a) Not really.
      - (1) Note that I would have to "solve" the riddles contained on the card to know whether a card identified a person, a place, or a thing.
      - (2) I know that IF a clue identifies a place, it is a real, valid clue. However, if it identifies a person or a thing, I cannot know if it is a real, valid clue or not. For it could be a real, valid clue even though it identifies a person or an object. The only thing I know for sure is that no clue that explicitly identifies a place is a false clue. However, a person or object that is identified by the clues on a card might be a valid clue to a hiding place. I would not be able to know a priori whether such a clue was a real, valid, helpful clue or not.
      - (3) Once again, the contestant is little better off than if the USEFUL bin had never been created. He has a higher probability that the clues on a card

are real clues, and he does have a way, in principle, to determine the validity of *some* of the cards. But he has no way of knowing *a priori*—with respect to any card—that it contains real clues.

- (a) He cannot determine the validity of any card without first interpreting the clues on the card and determining that those clues explicitly identify a place. Hence, his knowledge that a card is a valid card is utterly dependent upon his rightly interpreting the clues on the card.
  - (i) He has absolutely no way of knowing *a priori*—apart from a prior subjective judgment about the meaning of the clues on a card—that a card contains a set of real, valid clues.
- (b) Hence, while he is a little better off and while the probability of a card being valid is higher, he nonetheless is in *substantially the same position* that he was in before the USEFUL bin was created.
  - (i) He has a set of clues. Some of them are valid; some of them are not. And he can have no *a priori* knowledge of which is which.

E. Arguably, making a USEFUL bin for a contestant is not really very useful unless each and every card within the USEFUL bin can be known to be a card that contains true and valid clues.

- 1. The moment any false cards are introduced in any significant numbers, the USEFUL bin cannot serve the purpose that it was created to serve—even if a principle exists for identifying some of the valid cards within it.

**V. So, given that God gave us the Scriptures so that we can know *a priori* that what they teach is true, it follows that, as in our thought experiment, the Scriptures do not allow us to know *a priori* that what they teach is true unless each and every assertion contained within the Scriptures is necessarily true.**

A. If we assume that fallible assertions are contained right alongside true and infallible assertions within the Scriptures, then the Scriptures cannot serve the purpose that they were given to serve—namely, so that we could know *a priori* that what they assert is true—even if a principle exists for identifying some of the infallible assertions within the Scriptures.

**VI. It follows from all of the above that the Scriptures do not allow us to know *a priori* that what they teach is true unless they are totally inerrant.**

**VII. Hence, while there does exist a meaningful purpose that could be served by God's granting us a TOTALLY inerrant Scripture, there is no meaningful purpose that could be served by God's granting us a Scripture that is NOT totally inerrant.**

A. For a NOT-totally-inerrant Scripture would put me, the would-be follower of God, in a position that was substantially the same as if I had no inerrant Scripture (that is, no set of inerrant assertions) at all.

B. What possible purpose, then, would such a "Scripture" serve?

**VIII. Therefore, given that our Messiah clearly believed and taught that God has granted us an absolutely authoritative "Scripture," it only makes sense, in light of the above considerations, that that Scripture is *totally* inerrant and absolutely authoritative *in each and every assertion* contained within it.**

**IX. Objection: But why should I care about the irrelevant assertions contained within the Scriptures?**

A. Because Scripture cannot be broken—that is, because it cannot be fragmented, divided, and broken up into individual pieces. The Scriptures have a unity and integrity such that they must stand or fall together. Either they are worthy of my granting them authority, or they are not. If the relevant assertions are worthy of my respect, then so are the irrelevant assertions. If the irrelevant assertions are not worthy of my respect, then on what basis are the relevant ones? The same process gave me both.

1. The claim with respect to Scripture is this: God has "inspired" a set of writings wherein one can know *a priori* that what they say is true. Either the process that gave us this set of writings (that is, the process of inspiration) is reliable, or it is not. In other words, either the process of inspiration gave us writings worthy of being granted absolute authority, or it did not give us writings so worthy. If this process of inspiration was reliable, then everything it gave us is worthy of absolute authority. If it was not reliable, then I have no basis for granting absolute authority to anything that it gave us.

a) Jesus maintains that we do have a basis for granting absolute authority to "Scripture."

b) Therefore, given the above considerations, we must assume that Jesus believes in the total inerrancy of that Scripture.