

# **“The Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy and the Chicago Statement”**

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(Full paper outline available at [WayneGrudem.com](http://WayneGrudem.com))

ICBI Summit Conference #1: October 26-28, 1978

Location: Hyatt Regency O'Hare hotel, Chicago

279 participants, 3 days



## A) The Meaning of Inerrancy (90-92)

- 1) The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.

**Ps. 12:6:** The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.

**Prov. 30:5:** Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

**Num. 23:19:** God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

This definition does not mean that the Bible tells us every fact there is to know about any one subject, but it affirms that what it does say about any subject is true.

**Amos 5:8** He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the LORD is his name;

**Hebrews 11:3** By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

2) The Bible can be inerrant and still speak in the ordinary language of everyday speech.

a) The Bible can speak of the sun rising and the rain falling because from the perspective of the speaker this is exactly what happens.

**James 1:11** For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

b) Inerrancy has to do with truthfulness not with the degree of precision with which events are reported.

“I live 7 miles from Scottsdale Bible Church.”

3) The Bible can be inerrant and still include loose or free quotations.

4) It is consistent with inerrancy to have unusual or uncommon grammatical constructions in the Bible.

- spelling variations, incomplete sentences, unusual grammar, etc.

## B. Influence of Chicago Statement

1. Bethel College and Seminary: immediate rush to publicly align with Chicago Statement

2. I was rejoicing b/c of the Chicago statement

a. Had been a student at Fuller 1970-71

- various faculty claiming factual errors in Scripture
- Bible had diminished importance and practical classes (preaching, evangelism, counseling)
- transferred Westminster for second and third years of M.Div. (1971-73)



b. During PhD work in Cambridge 1973-76 - confidence in the truthfulness of Scripture was strengthened

c. Bethel College: concerned about the diminishing esteem given to Scripture by departments outside the Bible and theology department

d. My Introduction to Theology class (required)  
- added the Chicago Statement to required readings and devoted lecture time to it

e. Moved to TEDS in 1981

Systematic Theology (published 1994) - I included Chicago Statement among other historic confessions



### 3. Wider acceptance of Chicago Statement in the evangelical world

(thanks to Jesse Slebodnik for much of this info)

a. ETS 2004

b. Other parachurch organizations:

Gospel Coalition, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, several others (CHA)

c. Denominations with clear affirmation of inerrancy

d. Educational institutions

e. Faculty interviews

## C. Broader results

1. A reclaiming of the word "inerrancy"
2. A clear, thoughtful, responsible definition of "inerrancy"
3. A noticeable shift in the atmosphere of evangelical scholarship

Additional signers were added by January 1, 1979:

Hudson Armerding

D. A. Carson

Robert Coleman

John Frame

Jack Hayford

Hal Lindsay

J Robertson McQuilkin

Stephen Olford

Luis Palau

Eckhard Schnabel

Luder Whitlock

## D. Reasons for this wide influence

1. **God's favor** and guidance on the entire project
  - times of worship and prayer at all 6 plenary sessions scattered over three days

The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD. (Prov. 21:31, ESV)

Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. (Ps. 127:1)

2. **The right timing:** 1978 – the right time for this statement:

In 1976, *The Battle for the Bible* by Harold Lindsell

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. (Gal. 5:25)

**3. High-level academic leadership** by widely respected evangelical scholars from diverse denominations

6 plenary session speakers:

Anglican: J.I. Packer

Lutheran: Robert Preus (president of Concordia Seminary-Ft. Wayne)

Baptist: W. A. Criswell

Presbyterian: Edmund Clowney, James Montgomery Boice, R.C. Sproul

14 position papers presented at workshops by respected evangelical scholars

4. **The right goal:** not to convince people who opposed inerrancy but to define inerrancy clearly for those who supported it, and to unify them behind a cause

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him. (Tit. 3:10)



5. **The right participants:** remarkably widespread evangelical participation
- But no opponents of inerrancy

“in abundance of counselors there is victory” (Prov. 24:6)

ICBI Summit 1: Summary of Participants by Occupation		
	Total	% of whole
Faculty: Full professor (38sem 34c)	96	34%
Parachurch staff (38 org)	64	23%
President or exec. dir., etc.	60	22%
Pastor	47	17%
Faculty: asst. or assoc. prof.	33	12%
Missionary or international rep	14	5%
Layperson: business	12	4%
Student (in seminary)	10	4%
Layperson: lawyer or judge	4	1%
Layperson: Medical doctor	2	1%
<b>Total no. of participants</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>100%</b>
(note: some are counted in more than one category)		

96+33=129  
 faculty,  
 60 CEOs or  
 COOs

Some participants:

Jay Adams

Brooks Alexander

Gleason Archer

Cal Beisner

James Montgomery Boice

Bill Bright

Russ Bush

Edmund P Clowney

Chuck Colson

Alan Coppedge

WA Criswell

John Jefferson Davis

Norman Geisler

John Gerstner

Stan Gundry

Howard Hendricks

John Hughes

A. Wetherell Johnson

Walter Kaiser

Kenneth Kantzer

D. James Kennedy

Jay Kessler

Dennis Kinlaw

Tim LaHaye

Gordon Lewis

Harold Lindsell

Josh McDowell

John MacArthur

Sam Moore

J.P. Moreland

Roger Nicole

Harold Ockenga

J. I. Packer

Edwin Palmer  
Paige Patterson  
Vern Poythress  
Robert Preus  
Earl Radmacher  
Moishe Rosen  
Charles Ryrie  
Robert Saucy  
Francis Schaeffer  
RC Sproul  
Jerry Vines  
Bruce Waltke  
John Woodbridge  
Edwin Yamauchi  
Ron Youngblood

→ If 279 respected evangelical leaders of this much influence unite behind a single cause, it will very likely gain widespread support.

**6. A sound process:** the process provided a limited but genuine opportunity for the participation of every attendee

Thursday: draft of statement handed out

Friday: 8:00 AM: individual suggestions to be handed in to central committee

Friday 12 o'clock noon: small group discussions of different portions of revised document

Friday 3:00 PM: large group discussion of revised document

Saturday 8:00 AM: final document handed out; then singing & signing

7. **Wise leadership**: Leadership by a group of mature, well-informed, and wise evangelical scholars
- initial draft of Chicago Statement by R.C. Sproul
  - wise revisions by a strong central steering committee  
James Montgomery Boice, RC Sproul, JI Packer, Roger Nicole, Edmund Clowney, Robert Preus, Earl Radmacher, Norman Geisler, Moishe Rosen ?  
(unsure of exact membership)

“By wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory”

(Prov. 24:6)

9. **Enough money**: Adequate funding to pay for travel and lodging for participants who requested it

BGEA: gave \$10,000 (= \$42,000 in 2021)

total cost for 279 participants: very substantial

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:19)



10. **Immediate publication** (I think) in *Christianity Today*  
(Harold Lindsell was on the participant list but did he attend?)

and *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*  
(editor Ron Youngblood was a participant)

11. **The quality of the final statement:** It immediately commended itself as a faithful representation of the Bible's teaching about itself.

a. Tone: It contained a tone of humility and graciousness (see preface:)

We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

b. Scope and precision: Its affirmations and denials effectively affirmed everything essential to inerrancy and denied all the common evasions of inerrancy

c. Contents:

1. Source of authority: God
2. Scripture is our supreme authority
3. Scripture is revelation
4. Human language is adequate
5. Progressive revelation is not contradictory
6. Plenary inspiration includes the very words of Scripture
7. Mode of inspiration

8. Role of human personalities
9. Finite content but still entirely true on all subjects
10. Inspiration and inerrancy apply to the autographs
11. Both infallible and inerrant
12. Truthful on all topics including history, science, and creation
13. Inerrancy a useful term. Qualifications regarding the nature of ordinary language.
14. Scripture is noncontradictory. Alleged errors do not disprove inerrancy.
15. Inerrancy taught in Bible and affirmed by Jesus
16. Church history affirms inerrancy
17. Witness of the Holy Spirit
18. Grammatico-historical exegesis. Internal claims of authorship are true.
19. Inerrancy important but not necessary for salvation

12. **My personal conclusion:** The Chicago Statement  
Biblical Inerrancy deserves a place alongside other  
historic confessions of faith.

# Articles of Affirmation and Denial

## *Article I*

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.

We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.

## ***Article II***

We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.

We deny that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.

## ***Article III***

We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.

We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

## ***Article IV***

We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

## ***Article V***

We affirm that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive.

We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.



## ***Article VI***

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of original, were given by divine inspiration.

We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

## ***Article VII***

We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.

We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

## ***Article VIII***

We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.

We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

## ***Article IX***

We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Bible authors were moved to speak and write.

We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

## ***Article X***

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

## ***Article XI***

We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all matters it addresses.

We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

## ***Article XII***

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.

## ***Article XIII***

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

## ***Article XIV***

We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth of claims of the Bible.

## ***Article XV***

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

## ***Article XVI***

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.

We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

## ***Article XVII***

We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.

We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

## ***Article XVIII***

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.



## ***Article XIX***

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.