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CHAPTER 1

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Chapter Overview

The main difference between Hugh Ross and young-earth creationists such as *Creation Ministries International* is our different authority. CMI believes that the 66 books of the Bible, because it is God’s written Word, should be the basis for our thinking in every area on which it touches, including science. The Bible is *propositional revelation*, that is, it uses words to reveal true propositions, or facts about things. Therefore, it can be interpreted according to the rules of grammar and historical context. And because God wrote the Bible to instruct man, starting with the original readers, its propositions would be understandable.

Although many evangelical old-earth believers admit that Scripture seems to *teach* 24-hour days (and a recent creation and global Flood), they do not *believe* it because of “science”. Ross explicitly states that “nature” is a 67th book of Scripture. However, nature does not contain propositional revelation, but instead the data must be *interpreted according to a framework*. Ross, in practice, uses long-age interpretations of nature to reinterpret the written Word of God. This also entails that readers of Scripture before the rise of modern science would not have been able to understand what they read.

The Sufficiency of Scripture

The Reformers proclaimed the biblical doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone). This doctrine says that Scripture is inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient as a guide in matters of doctrine and morality for Christians. Thus, for salvation, no one is obliged to believe anything which is neither taught explicitly by Scripture nor logically deducible from Scripture. Although it is not his intention, the thrust of Hugh Ross’s teachings in general is a denial of this vital doctrine.

It is fallacious to limit scriptural authority to only those portions deemed to be about “faith and practice”. Doctrine is inextricably linked to history and science, so

that whatever Scripture affirms on historical or scientific matters is also true. For example, the key doctrine of the Resurrection is linked to the historical fact that Jesus' body had vacated the tomb on the third day. This also impinges on science, because naturalistic scientists assert that it is impossible for dead men to rise. And the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection is tied to the historical accuracy of the event recorded in Genesis (1 Cor. 15:21–22).

Jesus told Nicodemus (John 3:12):

I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?

If Jesus was wrong about earthly things, such as a recent creation (Mark 10:6 — see chapter 9) and a global Flood (Luke 17:26–27 — see chapter 8), was He also wrong about a heavenly thing like John 3:16? If not, why not? Scripture becomes a restaurant menu, where we choose only the parts that suit us, while we slide down to total unbelief in other passages. Many atheists testify that their rejection of the Bible and Christianity started with compromises on Genesis (see chapter 6).

Sola Scriptura is based on what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:15–17:

... and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- The Greek word for “Scriptures” in verse 15 is γραμματα (*grammata*), and must refer to the OT alone, as these were the only Scriptures Timothy would have known from his childhood.
- In verse 16, the word is γραφή (*graphē*), which would include the OT plus all the NT written by then (AD 63), i.e., probably all the NT except 2 Peter, Hebrews, Jude, and John's writings. As Paul's writings were divinely inspired, Paul's words would apply even to the latter books not yet written.
- “God-breathed” is indeed a correct translation by the NIV of the Greek word θεόπνευστος (*theopneustos*). If Scripture is “God-breathed” and God cannot err, it logically follows that Scripture as originally written cannot err.
- Scripture is able to make a man “wise unto salvation” and “thoroughly furnished unto all good works”. This implies that Scripture contains all the doctrine and moral law we need.
- 1 Timothy 5:18 cites both Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7 as *graphē*; that is, both the Old and New Testaments. This again shows that the NT was already regarded as Scripture even in apostolic times. And Peter affirms that Paul's writings were also Scripture in 2 Peter 3:15–16.

We can also see from the Apostles how important Scripture was:

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so (Acts 17:10–11).

Luke commends these Jews as a positive example for his Christian readers because they subjected even Paul’s teaching to the test of Scripture. So Christians today should follow that Berean example and test the teachings of any church or person by Scripture.

I would also agree with *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*,¹ a doctrinal statement Reasons To Believe officially adheres to.

Article X

WE AFFIRM that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only 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.

The Perspicuity of Scripture

This word “perspicuity” means that God intended ordinary people (with the help of the Holy Spirit — 1 Corinthians 2:14) to use sound hermeneutical principles to understand the gospel message of Scripture without needing an elite group to interpret it. This follows from the above verses, because the only way the Scriptures can thoroughly equip us is if they are *understandable*. Also, believing fathers were to teach the Scriptures to their children at home (Deut. 6:4–9, Eph. 6:4).

While in Reformation times, the above elite group was the Roman Church Magisterium; nowadays it appears to be “scientists”. In other words, the reformers opposed the prevalent church teaching that ordinary people cannot understand Scripture without the guidance of the “infallible” Church of Rome, led by the Pope. Now Ross’s claim, in effect, is that ordinary people cannot understand Scripture without the insight of modern interpretations of chronology, astronomy, geology, and biology from scientists (all of whom, like everyone else, are fallible and have

1. The *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* was produced at an international summit conference of evangelical leaders, held at the Hyatt Regency O’Hare in Chicago in the fall of 1978. The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy sponsored this congress. The Chicago Statement was signed by nearly 300 noted evangelical scholars, including James Boice, Norman L. Geisler, John Gerstner, Carl F.H. Henry, Kenneth Kantzer, Harold Lindsell, John Warwick Montgomery, Roger Nicole, J.I. Packer, Robert Preus, Earl Radmacher, Francis Schaeffer, R.C. Sproul, and John Wenham. The statement with exposition can be found at www.kulikovskyonline.net/hermeneutics/csbe.htm.

biases, and most of whom are extremely hostile to the Bible and the Christian faith). Both these errors put another mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), and contrast with the practice of the Bereans in Acts 17:11 (see above).

This would also mean that a man like Timothy would have had no way of understanding the meaning of many passages, despite what Paul told him. Timothy was expected to be able to understand them, and, most importantly, so was the original audience. The only exception is prophecies, which were explicitly stated to become fully understandable when fulfilled some time in the future. Otherwise, the true meaning of Scripture is the meaning the original inspired authors intended to convey to their intended audience.

The perspicuity of Scripture means that a good rule of thumb is, “If the plain sense makes sense, we should seek no other sense, lest we create nonsense”. But it must be used with caution. Too many atheist websites attack the Bible by reading it as an English newspaper, and ignore the metaphor, symbolism, and idioms of the language and culture that the original audience would have understood. The *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* states more tightly:

Article XIII

WE AFFIRM the propriety of using inerrancy as a 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.

Another document, the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics* says,

Article XV

WE AFFIRM the necessity of interpreting the Bible according to its literal, or normal, sense. The literal sense is the grammatical-historical sense. That is, the meaning which the writer expressed. Interpretation according to the literal sense will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text.

WE DENY the legitimacy of any approach to Scripture that attributes to it meaning which the literal sense does not support.

Analogia Scripturae

An important aspect of *Sola Scriptura* is the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture. The *Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics* states:

Article XVII

WE AFFIRM the unity, harmony, and consistency of Scripture and declare that it is its own best interpreter.

WE DENY that Scripture may be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that one passage corrects or militates against another. We deny that later writers of Scripture misinterpreted earlier passages of Scripture when quoting from or referring to them.

The perspicuity of Scripture does not mean that all Scripture is equally easy to understand (2 Pet. 3:16). But because Scripture is inerrant and sufficient, if we come to a difficult passage, we should be able to interpret it by referring to a clearer passage, and specific terms should clarify general ones. If we still cannot understand it, we should admit that the fault is in our interpretations and not in the Scriptures!

A large part of this book is devoted to analyzing the chronology of the Genesis creation account by comparison with the rest of Scripture.

The “Timothy Test”

Dr Russell Humphreys proposed a helpful rule derived from the above Scriptures that should help clarify the perspicuity of Scripture, and avoid those problems.

To make these points [of a plain meaning of Scripture] a little clearer, imagine a Jewish Christian of the first century who understands Greek, Hebrew, and the Scriptures well. Let’s call him “Timothy”, since Paul’s protégé was called that. But let’s also imagine that this Timothy knows nothing of the advanced scientific knowledge of his day, such as Aristotle’s works. All that Timothy knows is from either everyday experience or careful study of Scripture, which Paul says is sufficient for wisdom (2 Tim. 3:15). Now if Scripture really is straightforward and sufficient, then the meaning Timothy derives from the words is probably the meaning that God intended for everybody to get.²

(Ross supporter Perry Phillips³ criticized this test by alleging that sometimes the plain meaning could mislead. But both Humphreys⁴ and I⁵ responded by pointing out that Phillips had misunderstood the Timothy Test, and had instead set up a straw man. Phillips ignored that this “Timothy” had a good understanding of the biblical language and culture.)

This is a simplified way of pointing out that the NT was written in what anthropologists call a “high-context” society. That is, its members “presume a

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2. D. Russell Humphreys, *Starlight and Time: Solving the Puzzle of Distant Starlight in a Young Universe* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1994) p. 57. PDF and zipped-PDF files are available at www.trueorigin.org/ca_rh_03.asp.
 3. P.G. Phillips, “D. Russell Humphreys’ Cosmology and the ‘Timothy Test,’” *J. Creation* 11(2):189–194, 1997. PDF and zipped-PDF files are available at www.trueorigin.org/ca_rh_03.asp.
 4. D.R. Humphreys, “Timothy Tests Theistic Evolutionism,” *J. Creation* 11(2):199–201 (1997). PDF and zipped-PDF files are available at www.trueorigin.org/ca_rh_03.asp.
 5. J.D. Sarfati, “D. Russell Humphreys’ Cosmology and the ‘Timothy Test’: A Reply,” *J. Creation* 11(2):95–198 (1997).

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