

Commentary: Inerrancy still matters; so does integrity

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FORT WORTH (BP)—I believe in inerrancy. I also believe in integrity. One would think if one affirms the former to be true, then it would be obvious the latter also would be true—both in word and in deed.

After all, what we believe about a virtuous Christian life, including matters of personal integrity, is a necessary consequence of the conviction that God has spoken on these matters clearly and unambiguously through his inerrant written word.

Tragically, however, such too often is not the case.

There is a great deal of talk among Southern Baptists presently about our views concerning Scripture—including issues of authority, sufficiency and inerrancy. These conversations are important; indeed, as people of the Book, it is important for every generation of Southern Baptists to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the Bible as the word of God.

I believe these discussions are moments where we need to be able to speak to one another with a level of conviction and civility, but also a level of honesty about who we are and where we find ourselves.

“I am unashamedly ... a biblical inerrantist”

I am unashamedly proud to call myself a biblical inerrantist. As an inheritor of the legacy of the movement of God among Southern Baptists known as the conservative resurgence, I believe in the inspiration, truthfulness,

infallibility and indestructibility of the Bible as the written word of God, and do so without any hesitation or mental reservation.

As president of Southwestern Seminary, I lead an institution long marked by a commitment to inerrancy, beginning with our founder and first president, the great Baptist pastor and statesman Benajah Harvey Carroll. Our seminary's legacy of holding unswervingly to a high view of Scripture continues today.

Under my leadership, every faculty member of Southern Baptists' "crown jewel" seminary not only has signed the Baptist Faith and Message (2000) as their confession of faith, but also has affirmed the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy as a fuller explanation of what we mean when we say the Bible is true.

In the last six months, our publishing arm, Seminary Hill Press, has republished two seminal works about the Bible: a 40th anniversary edition of *Baptists and the Bible* by L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles—both professors at Southwestern Seminary when the book was first released in 1980—which arguably was *the* critical scholarly work substantiating the historicity of the inerrancy claims of the conservative resurgence; and *The Doctrine of the Bible* by David S. Dockery, an important book released during those years of debate, which also strongly affirmed and explained inerrancy.

Personal integrity equally important

As vital as the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is, so is the demonstration of personal integrity. It is not enough to affirm the Bible is true if one does not actually do what the Bible requires.

That is to say, claiming to believe in inerrancy does not have true meaning in mere affirmation; it must be backed up with a life of integrity lived out in

humble submission and surrender to all the inerrant Scriptures call me to be and to do as a disciple of Jesus and minister of the gospel.

What is needed is not just our verbal allegiance to an inerrant Bible, but a vivid and visceral commitment to a life of integrity, lived out in keeping with the ethical and moral teachings of our Lord.

To that end, I challenge all of us to consider these questions:

- By our actions, is it evident that we love one another?
- Do we treat one another with Christian dignity and respect?
- Do we seek to believe the best about each other, rather than assume the worst?
- Do we truly work to find ways to come together, rather than to tear each other apart?

False and inaccurate claims about fellow Southern Baptists, sister churches or our Southern Baptist entities are made far too often by those who never have asked the brother, pastor or leader about the matter in question.

As Southwestern Seminary's president, it almost is routine—tragically so—that untruthful claims about my leadership and our institution finding their way to my desk fall into that category.

We Southern Baptists *must* do and be better than this; after all, God's inerrant word teaches us it simply is what Christ expects from *all* believers.

My vision for Southwestern and Southern Baptists

As the ninth president of Southwestern Seminary, I often have said my desire for this institution is to be Southern Baptists' "big tent" seminary, committed to a high view of Scripture, confessional fidelity, the Great

Commission and cooperation.

I believe these four pegs of the “big tent” simply represent a reanimation of B.H. Carroll’s original vision for this school. And I believe these commitments not only should characterize our seminary, but our entire Great Commission Baptist family.

In short, I believe inerrancy without integrity is meaningless. May the Lord bind these two things together in us, afresh and anew, in our daily lives.

Furthermore, may the Lord make each of us agents of reconciliation and grace with each other and to those outside our faith family.

Yes, inerrancy matters. But so does integrity. It truly is not “either/or,” but “both/and.”

I pray for all of us across the entire Southern Baptist Convention landscape, that a watching world will increasingly see a people of God who do not just say we “believe the Book,” but who truly live according to the Book.

Let any talk about our love for and our commitment to the inerrancy, authority and sufficiency of Scripture be seen in the light of lives lived in authenticity and humility, empowered by the Spirit of God and dependent upon the Lord, as we go and make disciples, until Jesus comes again.

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