DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

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I. Revelation and Necessity of Scripture

A. Scripture is necessary, because general revelation is not sufficient

1. What is "revelation"? (*God's active self-disclosure of his existence, attributes, will, and works*)
2. What is "general revelation"? (*communication by natural means, to all men, that attests God*)
3. How does God provide it? (*in the created world, providence, and human nature, esp. conscience*)
4. How useful is it? (*exalts God, leaves sinners without excuse, but doesn't communicate redemption*)

B. Scripture is necessary, because other modes of special revelation have ceased

1. What is "special revelation"? (*communication from outside the created order to certain sinners*)
2. How has God provided it?
    a. theophanies (*localized manifestations of God*)
    b miracles ("*signs and wonders" declare something about God or authenticate messengers*)
    c. messages
        i. via an audible voice (e.g.: Garden of Eden, Mount Sinai, Jesus' baptism)
        ii. via tangible items (e.g.: Law tablets, Urim & Thummim responses to "inquiring")
        iii. via dreams and visions (which could be given even to unbelievers, like Pharaoh)
        iv. via messengers: prophets and apostles (Jeremiah 1:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 2:13)
    d. Incarnation
        i. Christ is the true, final prophet who speaks for God (John 7:28-29; 17:8)
        ii. Christ was sent as God's living communication (John 1:1, 14, 18; 1 John 1:1-3)
        iii. Christ himself is God's image (John 14:9; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3)
3. How do we know that special revelation has ceased?
    a. Christ has completed God's special revelation, surpassing other forms (Hebrews 1:1-2)
        i. he is the focus and fulfillment of all prior revelation (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:46)
        ii. he reveals God by his apostolic word and Holy Spirit (John 6:68; 14:26; 16:13-14)
    b. foundational role of apostles is finished and unrepeatable (cf. Ephesians 2:20)
    c. warning against adding to a completed divine book (Revelation 22:18-19)
    d. observable first-century decline in authentic messages and authenticating miracles
    e. side note: extraordinary providences have not ceased, but they are not new messages
4. Why do we look to Scripture for special revelation?
    a. prophets and apostles were told to write (Exodus 34:27; Jeremiah 30:2; Revelation 21:5)
    b. writing preserves and propagates verbal communications (e.g., Luke 1:3-4; Isaiah 8:20)
    c. writing is God's way to make special revelation useful (Romans 15:4; John 20:30-31)
    d. this written word *is* special revelation—not just *attests*, *contains*, or *becomes* revelation

II. Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture

A. Meaning of inspiration

1. Scripture is breathed out by God (2 Timothy 3:14-17)—not just "moving" or thought-provoking
2. Scripture is the tool and voice of God's Spirit (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 3:7; Acts 1:16; 28:25)
3. full authorship: what Scripture says, God says; the book's words are God's words (Jeremiah 36)

B. God's use of human authors

1. concurrent speech (2 Peter 1:19-21; cf. 2 Samuel 23:2; 2 Kings 24:2)

a. versus mere human writings, which God motivated beforehand or blessed afterward

b. versus mere divine writings, merely taken by dictation (though it *contains* such oracles)

2. God used the language, logic, concerns, and culture of human authors in producing his word

C. Plenary verbal inspiration

1. inspiration is granular not approximate: (Matthew 5:17-19; Luke 16:17; John 10:35)
2. this is not a hermeneutical or homiletical prescription; meaning still depends on context
3. this is not a guarantee against copyist errors or manuscript variants

D. Inerrancy follows from inspiration

1. because God the author is truth and cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18)
2. inerrancy means it *doesn't* make mistakes; infallibility means it *cannot* make mistakes
   (but some now try to construe "infallibility" as general reliability apart from factual truth)
3. inerrancy is alleged to be a recent position (Chicago Statement only dates from 1978)
4. inerrancy applies to things the Bible itself asserts

a. versus restricting it to moral or theological matters; it makes serious historical claims

b. versus pressing it for unwarranted inferences—e.g.: scientific, sociological, linguistic

E. Inerrancy and alleged errors in Scripture: Things to keep in mind

1. presuppositions decide outcomes (do you look for problems or solutions? assume univocality?)
2. many prior "errors" have been resolved (e.g.: regnal years, House of David, Pontius Pilate)
3. some allegations of error fail to account for genre, context, and phenomenological language
4. some allegations of error assume false standards of chronology, quotation, or consistency
5. distinguish actual Scriptural assertions from the comprehension and inferences of mere men
6. allow for the progressive revelation of major concepts instead of expecting homogeneity
7. remember what you've already learned to be *right* about Scripture—because it's a package deal

a. its spiritual power

b. its coherent worldview

c. its long record of vindication: fulfilled prophecies, historical events, human psychology

8. don't make believing the Bible contingent on every possible puzzle; learn to trust the Author

Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978)

A Short Statement

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms: obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

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 within 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 the 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 Biblical 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 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.

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 the 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 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.

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 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.