**The Inerrancy of the Bible, No. 3 – BD45-01**

This morning I want to speak on a subject that is at the core of the thinking of Christian leaders and of knowledgeable Christians in churches everywhere relative to the Bible itself. It’s an issue that is coming more and more into the forefront in various circles, and which I think it is very important that the people who form the membership of local congregations be well-briefed on and clear in their understanding of the issues that are at stake. We are being confronted by very powerful, prestigious, important, and influential people who have a view of the Bible which is contrary to the view which the Bible presents about itself. If we do not have a Bible which is trustworthy, we have exactly zero as a basis for a knowledge of what God thinks. We don’t even know that there is God. We don’t know what He thinks. We don’t know what He expects of us. We don’t know what the human problem is. We know exactly zero if we do not have a Bible which is trustworthy.

There is a question today in theological debate that you would see if you were to read theological journals; if you were to read publications of various kinds; or if you were to attend the classes of seminaries and Bible colleges. And I’m not talking about liberal institutions. I’m talking about the people that we would put under the title of evangelical. You would discover that there is a raging debate over one primary subject which is as intense as was the debate in the reformation about how a person is saved. This issue is just as critical as was the issue of the reformers who had to hammer out exactly how a person went to heaven in contrast to the millions of people who had been channeled into hell by the Roman Catholic Church through their works system of salvation. This issue today is just as important as was the soteriological discussions of the reformation era.

The question in brief is this: Whether the Bible in its original writings, in its original manuscripts, was supernaturally preserved from recording any error whatsoever. Now we recognize that there have been introduced minor errors by copyists. We pretty well have pinpointed the areas of some question—all very minor indeed. Not a single one of them affects in any way a critical doctrine—any doctrine, for that matter. We have in all practical effects, exactly what Paul put down on the parchment, and exactly what Moses put down on the parchment. We have an accurate reproduction of the original texts. Nevertheless, the question remains. In spite of copyist errors, were the original documents supernaturally preserved from one single solitary error? So that you could pick up those documents and you could read those documents with the full confidence that what was being transmitted to you was what God thinks—that you had the mind of God without question and without any doubt about it.

If the Bible is the Word of God, and that’s what it claims to be, then obviously in the nature of the case it must be free from all error because God cannot lie. The Bible must be free of error in whole and in every single part. That is the way that it’s phrased—“in whole and in part.” If the Bible is the Word of God, then it must be free from error in whole and in part because God cannot lie. If the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, then it bears absolute and final authority over mankind relative to human conduct and to the matter of eternal salvation. So every time the discussion comes up relative to human relationships for example. If the Bible is the Word of God, then it is inerrant. It is without mistake and what the Bible says about human conduct is the truth and the way it has to be. There are no options. Therefore when the Bible says that certain relationships, for example in the area of sex, are right relationships and other relationships are wrong, there can be no question about that. You cannot discuss alternate lifestyles as if these were human options. When the Bible condemns homosexuality, there can be no discussion about whether homosexuality is right or wrong. The Bible has spoken and the issue is settled. Now that’s true only if the Bible is the Word of God. If it’s the Word of God, that is, words that God has spoken, God never speaks lies. God does not record what is not true. Now the Bible sometimes records a lie that somebody spoke, but we know that that lie is recorded accurately. God never records anything that is not accurately recorded as it was spoken. He records only accurate facts. The Bible is true.

So therefore, if it’s the Word of God, it is inerrant. What is says about human conduct must be obeyed. When the Bible speaks about the role of government in human society, you cannot discuss the issue. What the Bible says about the role of government is what is true. When the Bible says that the role of government is to act as an arbitrator of justice, to wield the sword of authority in order to preserve peace and order, law and order, and that government is restricted from any activity in economic matters, that is, seeking to create wealth or redistribute wealth, then there is no discussion. That is what the Bible teaches. When the Bible says that capitalism is the way for maximum human enjoyment of material things and personal prosperity, as it very clearly does, and that violating human volition in terms of doing what you wish with what you possess, that that is contrary to the Word of God, and there is no discussion about that. You cannot come in and talk about socialism as being an alternate economic system because the Bible already condemns that. You can only do that if you do not believe that the Bible is the Word of God. Once it has spoken, the issue is settled.

Now with the Word of God, the human race is able to escape hell. It is able to frustrate Satan’s organization of human society for his rebellion against God. That is the only way we can go to heaven—through information from the Bible, if it is the Word of God, and therefore true. The only way we can keep Satan from creating a hell on earth is if we know that the Bible is the Word of God and we follow its principles of organization—the divine institutions, and so on.

Without the absolute and final authority of the Bible, there is no way to prevent the development of a society which is based on satanic evils and which is doomed to self-destruction. This being the case, it is self-evident that Satan is going to do everything he can to discredit the concept that the Bible is the Word of God. If the Bible is the Word of God, then the devil is under control. Human beings have a way of controlling Satan. Human beings have a way of evading the consequences of human viewpoint and satanic delusions. Therefore, Satan will do everything he can to discredit the Bible as the Word of God. In order to do that he must discredit the accuracy of the Bible. That’s the only way you can discredit that the Bible is the Word of God.

I want you to notice what I’ve said again and again. I’ve been repeating it to try to drum it into our thinking. “Bible” equates “Word of God.” They’re one and the same thing. The Word of God is what God has said. A God who never lies speaks the truth. Since God is veracity, the Word He speaks is true. Since the Bible is the Word of God, and it contains what God has said, what God has written, therefore the Bible is true. Satan therefore realizes that the primary hindrance he has today to his plans is the Bible doctrine of inerrancy. That is the doctrine that the bible is, in its original manuscripts, without error, and that we have those manuscripts in all practical effects.

So the thing that the devil has to do is destroy the Bible claim of inerrancy. If he can destroy the Biblical doctrine of inerrancy, then the Bible is no longer the Word of God. That’s what he’s after. The devil is after creating the impression that the Bible *contains* the Word of God—that someplace within the writing of these Scriptures you will find some portions that are indeed the Word of God but other portions which are not the Word of God. And he understands that God is veracity, that God is true. Therefore the devil knows that the way to bring the Bible’s authority down is to say that the Bible doesn’t always tell the truth. Well, if the bible doesn’t always tell the truth, you have established your position that it is not the Word of God at certain points.

Now this is important to the devil because you cannot bring about the kind of society that is going to exist in the tribulation world, which is thoroughly evil and which worships Satan as God. You cannot create a society like that until you have destroyed the Bible as an absolute authority in spiritual matters. The way you destroy the Bible as being an absolute and final authority in spiritual matters is to show that within the Bible there is errancy—that the Bible is a book of mistakes, and that therefore it is not the Word of God. The Bible and the Word of God are not then equal terms. The doctrine of inerrancy must of course be destroyed primarily among Christians who hold that doctrine so that future generations of children who are born into those homes and under that influence of those Christians will no longer view the Bible as the Word of God, and they will no longer view the Bible therefore as absolute authority binding their actions and enabling them to judge society absolutely without apology by the divine viewpoint principles of the Word of God.

Now indeed there are people in society that will say to us a Christians, we who are fundamentalist Christians and therefore hold to inerrancy: This society will say, “Just who do you think you are, passing judgments on society? Who do you think you are condemning the president of the United States, and you say, ‘That’s contrary to what the Bible teaches and therefore that’s wrong?’”

Now of course this was the issue that brought down the wrath of the Roman Empire upon the Christians. The Roman Empire didn’t care a fig newton about the fact that some people wanted to follow Christ and be Christians. That was perfectly alright with them. Whatever religion you wanted in the Roman Empire was just great. But the thing that the Roman Empire could not forgive these Christians was that they came along and said, “We have a message from the living God who created heaven and earth and all mankind. We have it in absolute form without any error. In that book we therefore know how to judge the emperor and we know how to judge the empire and we know how to judge the society of the Roman Empire.” That the Christians could not be forgiven, and for that they were persecuted—not because they were Christians, but because they came and said, “We have an inerrant Scripture from the living God by which we can judge and condemn what you do as a nation.”

Now that of course is the rub, the point of friction, today. People who are disoriented to the Scriptures, to the Word of God, actually do come on the scene and they say to us Christians, “Just who do you think you are anyhow, being able to speak with such definitiveness?” Of course they then bring up code words to discredit us, like “simplistic,” and “acting as if there was no alternative.” Those are code words. Well, of course, “simplistic” means that you’re biblical. “No alternative” means that you’re biblical. That’s all it means so don’t be disturbed by those words. You say, “Yes, I’m simplistic, and yes, there are no alternatives.” That is exactly the problem that has corroded western civilization and the Unites States, the last citadel of freedom and of western civilization.

Now interestingly enough, something over 200 years ago, Satan began two lines of attack by which he was going to establish his rule in the millennial period of human history. That will be a rule when the people on earth will actually worship Satan as God. The will know that they worship a false trinity—that a false trinity dominates over them. This will be the false trinity of Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet. Worship will be given to Satan. Satan set in motion two lines of attack, of a plan to bring about this condition. Interestingly enough, wonder of wonders, you and I happen to live in the particular point in human history when these two lines of actions of the devil, begun over two hundred years ago have come to a climactic point and are beginning to join forces.

**Emotions**

Number one was to divert mankind from content of Scripture, from thinking in terms of what the Bible said. That was point number one—to remove mankind from functioning upon a mentality which is saturated with God’s divine viewpoint and to get men instead to act upon emotion. He wanted to bring about a condition where emotional domination of the soul was viewed as a walk with God. Emotional domination of the soul was viewed as the closest approach to God. That has culminated in the charismatic movement today. If you want to follow that in detail, you may go up to the tape room and get the series of tapes that describe the historical chain of slavery which Satan forged link by link through the centuries. Those tapes outline how each error was made until the full-blown charismatic movement came on the scene in the 1950s, and the complete emotional domination of the soul of these people manipulated by the devil while they should, “Lord, Lord,” and think they are serving the living God, but in fact are merely pawns of the devil.

It was very important for Satan to create this kind of emotional orientation as the basis of relationship to God rather than biblical content doctrinal relationship. The result of this has been that denominations from Catholics through Protestants have gathered together in one group. I don’t care if they are the most rabid liberal unbelievers who viewed Jesus Christ as merely the illegitimate son of Mary and a Roman soldier, to those who view Him as indeed the God-man, to the Roman Catholics with their pagan Babylonian mystery cult religion amalgamated with biblical Christianity—the whole group has suddenly found a ground of biblical fellowship, and they have united under one powerful movement called the charismatic movement. They could never, a few decades ago, gotten anywhere near one another. But now within a matter of 25 to 30 years, they’re all in one fellowship. They’re all united enthusiastically to one another. Their beliefs have not changed, but you’ve got a religious amalgamation, and it took something to get that together, and it’s the emotionalism that is characteristic of the charismatic movement which views that as an association with God.

It has spread, not only to those who have been related in the Christian context, but even to the religions of the world who are viewed as also approaching God, and they too have the same emotional attachment to some kind of a supreme divine being out there.

**The Historical Critical Method of Interpreting Scripture**

The other line of approach that Satan put into motion was an attack upon the Bible itself as being the inerrant Word of God. That has come down to us today in what we call the historical critical method of interpreting Scripture. I’ll give you more about that in a moment. It has been over 200 years ago that Satan began, in the middle of the 18th century, the charismatic movement, that he also began a second line of attack that eventuated today in the historical method of interpreting the Bible which has completely torn the innards of the Bible out. It has completely taken the Bible, and literally, if you wanted to illustrate this, taken a pair of scissors and just chopped the Bible page to page to page and tore it to shreds. Now that was important to Satan in order to destroy the authority of the Bible.

**Human Reason**

So, one line was emotionalism as the rallying point. The other line was human reason as the rallying point. These have come together now to establish the conditions that must exist for the tribulation world. The false prophet will have no difficulty whatsoever uniting the religious bodies of the world once the church has been removed because the charismatic movement will go right out into the tribulation fully functioning. Its emotional frame of reference orientation will be ready-made for the religious people of the world immediately to rally around. The Bible itself will not be a book that has any impact because it has been destroyed as an absolute authority because the Bible will have been established as a book written by men and therefore incorporating the error of those men. The Bible will be destroyed and discredited as a supernatural which God produced and preserved from all error. That is absolutely essential. The devil cannot establish a tribulation world if there is a Bible that speaks with authority to judge what He’s doing. He has to have a book that people will look upon and say, “Well, it’s a human book. It has errors, and some of the things it says are not true.”

Now the problem today is that most Christians who do believe in the Bible do not realize how widespread has become the problem of the undermining of the Scripture itself. The cancer of errancy has deeply infected not only the liberal religious groups, but those that we would consider in the evangelical camp—those who view the Bible as the Word of God. Most Christians do not realize how widespread this disease has become in Bible colleges and in seminaries that you and I would ordinarily view with esteem. It’s in evangelical schools where we cannot conceive that they would teach certain things which they could only teach once they rejected the inerrancy of Scripture—once they rejected the fact that the Bible was a supernatural book without error.

It would be comparable to this: Suppose that you would suddenly find that Dallas Seminary, which has been based upon the sacred Scriptures, and which has been dedicated to the unique ministry of producing expositors of Scripture, not on the basis of the English Bible, but on the basis of these original inerrant texts—and that Dallas Seminary which has been noted for its biblical stand should suddenly begin teaching in some of its classes, and permitting professors there to teach things such as this: If you were to hear that some student came and said, “Our professor told us that there is no such thing as everlasting punishment of unbelievers. He has discovered that that is a misinterpretation of what the Bible says, and that that would be a cruel, unusual, unhuman punishment, and that God would not do that.” And suddenly you hear that Dallas Seminary is teaching that there is no everlasting punishment for the unbelievers. There is no hell.

Or suppose that you would discover that some professor at the seminary was teaching that there was not a real snake used in the temptation of Adam and Eve—that that word “snake” is simply a symbol, but there wasn’t really a snake in the Garden of Eden. Or suppose that you would even more so learned that there was not an Adam and Eve—that the whole story of Adam and Eve is not history, but it is poetry. It is myth. It is putting together a concept but it has no relationship to history. There never was an Adam. There never was an Eve. They never did have children.

Or suppose that you would hear that some professor taught that there was no need for propitiating the justice of God. God’s wrath did not have to be satisfied so that man could be saved. Or suppose that they said that there was no need for expiation. That was not what the Bible taught. The Bible did not teach that sin had to be expiated; that is, that sin, of which we have been guilty, had to be paid for, by us or by someone else. Or suppose you would hear that Dallas Seminary, in one of its classes, was teaching that Jesus Christ was merely a man. He was a human being, a good man, but He was not God, and that He never claimed to be God. But his disciples got so excited and so carried away with them that they later said that He was God, but Jesus never said that He was God.

What would you think if you heard that Dallas Seminary was teaching that? Or suppose you heard that Dallas Seminary was teaching that the concept of the trinity was false. Jesus was human and there was no Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—that this was just symbolic talk. Or suppose that you heard that Dallas Seminary was saying that Daniel was not a prophet. Daniel did not predict governments that controlled the whole world and predict them in their pattern in which they would appear on the scene of human history. Daniel was not a prophet. He did not foresee these things. He did not predict these things, but somebody later, after these things took place, wrote a book and put his name on it.

Or suppose that you heard that here at Dallas Seminary they were now teaching that the story of Jonah and the whale was not historical either—that there never was a Jonah, there never was a large fish, and the incident never took place in time and place, but that it was simply a fable, a story to teach a lesson.

Now I hope you understand that I am not saying that Dallas Seminary is teaching these things. Some of you look terribly shocked already. I’m saying what if it did? How would you feel about it? Or if they came along and said that Moses didn’t write the Pentateuch? Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible. We would have a problem because Jesus said He did write it. We would have a problem with the Jonah story because Jesus said Jonah did exist. We would have a problem with Daniel because Jesus said that Daniel was a prophet. In spite of those things, they would say, “No, Moses didn’t write those books.”

Now I want to tell you that all of those things that I have mentioned thus far, and more that I have not mentioned, are now being taught in evangelical Bible colleges and seminaries who have been, in the past, in exactly the same position and category is today. Dallas Seminary continues to be sound and firm and true to the Scriptures, through an inerrant Scripture, but schools such as Dallas Seminary and Dallas Bible College have completely drifted away from these things to the utmost unbelief of what the Bible teaches. And it all began in these schools. It all began once the concept was accepted that the bible is an errant book, that the Bible has truth in it but it also has falsehood in it, that it is a book that is both true and false, and that it is not a book that was supernaturally produced preserved from all human error.

So the basic question then comes up, of course, where in the world are you and I as human beings going to get the information that we need to relate ourselves to God? How in the world, if there is a hell, are we going to escape it, unless we’ve got some information from God who alone can tell us how that can be done? Now the Bible claims to be the source of information about God. So the question that we’re talking about is, how trustworthy is the claim of the Bible?

Well, you can take three positions toward the Bible, and you must find yourself taking one of these three positions. This is the issue today. Position number one that is taken generally in the liberal camp is that the Bible is not a trustworthy source of information about God, and that it is a false basis for your beliefs. That’s position number one. The Bible simply is not trustworthy at all, period, over and out. The direction that the Bible teaches is simply false—totally unreliable.

The second position you can take is the one that we hold here are Berean church is that the Bible is fully trustworthy in all its parts, that it records only truth whenever it speaks upon any subject. That means that any time the Bible speaks upon a geographic matter, it speaks truth. Any time the Bible speaks in terms of numbers, it speaks truth. Any time the Bible touches upon a subject of science, it speaks truth. Any time the Bible refers to a matter of history, it speaks truth. Any time of course it speaks upon matters of faith and practice, it speaks truth.

The third position you may take, and this is the position to which evangelicals are rapidly devolving, is that the Bible is partly trustworthy—that it contains both truth and error, and that it is necessary for Christians, by their reason, to determine which part of the Bible is true when they read it, and which part of the Bible is false when they read it.

So there are the three positions that are at issue: the Bible is not trustworthy at all; the Bible is totally trustworthy; or, the Bible is partly trustworthy.

Now I must point out that the Christian church for almost 2,000 years from apostolic times has held to the full trustworthiness of the Bible. There have been few if any people over the centuries who have rejected the inerrancy or the infallibility of the Bible. I want to warn you that the opponents of an inerrant Bible today are trying to pull the word “infallible” away. They say, “We believe in an infallible Bible, but we do not believe in an inerrant Bible.” What they’re trying to say is, “We believe the Bible conveys truth but it doesn’t convey it in accurate language all the time. It says some things that are wrong. It has mistakes in it but it still conveys truth. Of course that’s a subtle game of logic but the dictionary equates the words “infallible” and “inerrant” as being synonymous.

I have been amazed to read that some of these leaders and professors in theological schools who are in and have been in the evangelical camp are actually now trying to claim that the doctrine of inerrancy has not been believed by the church over the centuries. That is a bunch of molded salami sliced thick. It has always been the doctrine of the Christian church from the very beginning, that the Scriptures were without error, that the Scriptures cannot be broken, that heaven and earth can pass away but not one jot or tittle of the Word will pass away. That has always been the position of Christianity. There have been few if any who have denied that. It was not until, in point of fact, the Renaissance that things began to change.

After the thousand years of the Dark Ages and the restriction of human learning brought about by the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church over human society throughout western civilization, the Renaissance broke forth upon the mind of man. It was a return to the enlightenment of study and of learning and of discovery and of science, which was born based upon the Scriptures—the fact that the Scriptures say that some things are right and some things are wrong, some things are this way and some things are that way, and there is a God who makes everything work. Modern science could not have come into existence were it not for the fact that they understood that there was a God who performed who had created inviolable natural laws by which the earth functioned. But the Renaissance elevated human reason above the authority of the Bible and everything supernatural was rejected. Part of this goes back to Thomas Aquinas who taught that man was fallen in all respects except his mentality—that his mind was not corrupted and that his mind could think itself back to God. His mind could think itself back to divine truth. That is false. Man’s thinking is among the most corrupt things. Man’s thinking is what brought on the flood of Noah’s day, as a matter of fact. It was the fact, the Bible says, that man’s thinking was continually evil that brought about that destruction of the human race.

The Renaissance however elevated human reason above the authority of the Bible and said there is no such thing as the supernatural. Reason and science then replaced revelation in spiritual matters and thus the Scripture first came into question and doubt. The Bible came to be viewed as merely a human book—a book that men had produced incorporating their own misconceptions of the era in which the writers lived. Now you say, “Why would these men say that Daniel was not a prophet, predicting these world empires, when Jesus said he was a prophet?” They will say, “Well, Jesus did know better, but people of the day thought that so He just accommodated himself to what they thought.” They do the same thing for why Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. “Well, because he accommodated himself to what people think.” Why did Jesus say that Isaiah wrote the whole book of Isaiah? The historical critical method said, “Oh no, just the first 39 chapters were written by Isaiah. From 40 on somebody else wrote it.” Jesus quotes from the latter part, in Isaiah 53. Jesus said that Isaiah said this. “Well,” they say, “Jesus knew better but he was just pretending. He was just accommodating Himself to the ignorance of the day.”

So the Bible is a book that’s merely men telling what they think about religious matters and incorporating their misconceptions which existed in their day. Therefore the Bible is to be viewed as merely a historic development—a book that has historically evolved out of human history, and that it must be critically examined by reason to sift out the truth about God. This is termed “historical criticism.” This is the historical critical method, that the Bible evolved over a period of time out of men’s writings and they incorporated their error, and now reason must analyze what is true and what is false.

**Johann Semler**

Now I want you to become acquainted with a name. Where did this whole concept of historical criticism begin? Well, it began with this man: Johann Semler. He lived from 1725 to 1791. In the 18th century, when the fruit of the Renaissance were reaching their maximum effectiveness, and when reason, the era of rationalism was at its peak, Johann Semler was a son of a Lutheran minister. The father belonged to what is called the Pietistic group of the Lutherans, and this was a very close, a very holy life devotion to the person of Jesus Christ. Johann Semler rebelled against this. He rebelled against his father’s orthodoxy. He rebelled because he was a secular man. He was a product of the age of rationalism that was peaking in the 18th century. He came up with a concept that said this: The problem with theology up to now has been that the Scriptures and the Word of God had been equated as one and the same thing. By “Scriptures” he meant the Bible. So it was Semler who came up with the concept that the problem with theology was that we are saying that the Bible is the Word of God, and he said that is wrong. They are not the same things. That within the Bible is to be found the Word of God, and reason must analyze which is the Word of God and which is not.

Semler says that Jesus Christ accommodated Himself to the prejudices, to the errors, to the superstitions of the times in order to win people, but He knew better. There are therefore in Scriptures, since there is no supernatural, there are no miracles, there is no such thing as demon possession, there is no such thing as resurrection from the dead, and Semler started the concept right down the line to make the Bible acceptable to the era of rationalism. Rationalism says that if I can’t understand it, then it can’t exist, and I don’t believe it. It had to be grasped by the senses.

Dr. Harold Lindsell in his second book, The Bible in the Balance, has a summary on Johann Semler because I think it will bring together for you in a very excellent way exactly what Semler set in motion. Everything we are struggling with began right here. Here’s where the devil kicked that second line of attack, that second pinser movement that he set in motion which was going to climax in his becoming the God of the tribulation world. On page 280, Dr. Lindsell says, “Johann Semler was born in 1725 at Saalfeld. He was the son of a pious Lutheran pastor, a fact that influenced him adversely so that he came to detest pietism. Strangely enough he was to occupy the chair of theology at Halle University which was of piteous background. Before that he taught at Coburg and Altdorf. In 1757 he succeeded Bumgarten as head of the theological faculty at Halle. He was the one who developed the principles of textual criticism of the Bible. He departed from the orthodoxy of his father when he challenged the idea of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, holding to a strictly historical interpretation of the Bible. Professor Eugene F. Klug had this to say about him and about the methodology he introduced into the bloodstream of the church:

“’The historical critical approach to the Bible has its history of course. Johann Semler, late 18th century, is usually designated as father of the technique which not only handled the Bible as an object for scrutiny and criticism, but also as a book little different from, and no more holy than, any other, and surely no to be equated with the Word of God. Very plainly he was saying that he rejected the divine inspiration of the text. This was but a symptom of his totally theological stance, a tip of the iceberg, so to speak. His was really a revolt against miracles and the supernatural in general, and against heaven in particular. God’s supernatural activity in history simply was not in Semler’s book. Not unexpectedly, under his and others’ hands, the Bible’s text and content suffered deliberate vivisection. The surgery was quite often radical and overt without benefit of anesthesia for those directly affected by it in the churches.’”

Gerhard Maier points out in his book, The End of the Historical Critical Method, at the heart of what Professor Semler thought and propagated is contained in one sentence he wrote: “The root of the evil in theology is the interchangeable use of the terms ‘Scripture’ and ‘Word of God.’” By this Dr. Semler meant that the Bible or Scripture contains the Word of God or that not all of Scripture is the Word of God. This meant that his goal from that point onward was to find the Word of God in Scripture. I started this chapter by referring to the Renaissance, stating that today’s situation can be understood only in the light of what happened as a result of that movement. Whether Professor Semler realized it or not, he was a product of Renaissance thinking. He was a secularist in spirit. He approached the Bible as a scientist with supposed objectivity and without bias. He did not therefore really acknowledge what had been the pre-Renaissance dictum that God had spoken and had not stuttered in His speech. He did allow that there is a Word of God but he set himself up as the one who determinates of what the Word of God is. This is exactly what lies at the heart of the historical critical method. Man is autonomous. He decides for himself what the word of God is. Once this becomes true, then all men are faced with the problem of determining which man is correct in saying what parts of the Bible are the Word of God. It leaves forever open whether I choose to believe one critic over another since all of them disagree with each other.

“It should be clear, for example, that if I accept the ruminations of Professor Bultmann, I have immediately rejected the viewpoint of all the reformers—the viewpoint of Augustine and the church fathers. I have effectively rejected the human authors of the Bible, from Paul and Peter to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Why then should I accept Professor Bultmann and reject the others? This is a question which must be faced candidly. J. I. Packer is surely one of evangelicalism’s great British scholars. He authored a book entitled Fundamentalism and the Word of God. Another book which is directly related to the present discussion was published in 1965 and is titled God Speaks to Man; Revelation and the Bible. Dr. Packer says that the churches have reached a point in which there is ‘a famine of hearing the words of the Lord (Amos 8:11 ff). He said at no time since the reformation has the church as a body been so unsure, tentative, and confused as to what they should believe and do. Preaching is hazy. Heads are muddled. Hearts fret. Doubts drain our strength. We stand under the divine judgment. For us too the Word of God is in a real sense lost.’

“Dr. Packer sees the source of the problem to be biblical criticism. He is talking about the historical critical method. He said, ‘Liberal theology in its pride has long insisted that we are wiser than our fathers about the Bible and must not read it as they did, but must base our approach to it on the assured results of criticism, making due allowances for the human imperfections and errors of its authors. This insistence has a threefold effect. One, it produces a new papalism, the infallibility of the scholars from whom we learn what the results are. Two, it raises a doubt about every single Bible passage as to whether it embodies revelation or not. Three, it destroys the reverent, receptive, self-distrusting attitude of approach to the Bible without which it cannot be known to be God’s Word written.

“The result: the spiritual famine of which Amos spoke, ‘God judges our pride by leaving us to the barrenness, hunger, and discomfort which flow from our self-induced inability to read His Word.’

“While Dr. Packer acknowledged some of the valuable results of much of modern careful Bible study, he asked how it could at the same time be so destructive. Its mistake was that it separated the Bible from the Word of God. In short, it was the error begun by Johann Semler and perpetuated in the historical critical method to this hour. Inerrancy is impossible to accept once this deadly distinction is made. So speaks J. R. Packer, one of evangelicalism’s most careful scholars.”

So that puts it all together. The whole issue begun by Semler has now born the bitter fruit in our day of a Scripture that has been placed in a position where scholars have to decide what can be understood and what cannot be understood.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1971