

MID-AMERICA AND THE BIBLE

A Position Paper

One of the defining hallmarks of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary is our high view of the Bible as the pure and true Word of God. This commitment to the Bible was one of the motivating reasons for the birth of the Seminary. Our founders recognized the urgent need for a seminary where every professor would believe all of the Bible. The need for such a seminary is as urgent, if not more urgent, today. Throughout our history, churches and individuals have supported the Seminary because of this distinctive commitment to the Word of God. We have communicated to students that if they come to Mid-America they will receive solid biblical/theological training and preparation for ministry.

It is important that we communicate clearly the fact that our commitment to the Bible never changes. It is imperative that we do this to be faithful to the Lord, to fulfill our educational purpose, to undergird the confidence of our supporters and students, and to keep our distinctiveness at the forefront.

For years, we have all used the word *inerrancy* to express our position. Language, however, has a way of changing. Over a period of years, words that express concrete ideas can lose the precision and sharpness that they once communicated as they are used in different contexts and given added connotations. During the past few years, there have been those who have sought to add an elasticity to the word inerrancy and broaden its meaning. Thus, while we are all avowed inerrantists in the classical sense of the word, the best place for us to focus in communicating our unchanging commitment to the Bible is with Article I on the Bible in our Articles of Religious Belief. Article 1 affirms that “We believe that the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God, wholly without error as originally given by God, and is sufficient as our only infallible rule of faith and practice. We deny that other books are inspired by God in the same way as the Bible.”

In this article the Seminary makes a clear and unambiguous statement about the Bible. Each year when we sign the Articles and verbally affirm our agreement with them we, too, are making the same clear and unambiguous statement. Several assertions about the Bible are included in this statement:

1. God is the Author of the Bible. We recognize the divine-human aspect of Scripture, that God used human authors and utilized their personalities in the process of inspiration. God alone, however, is the ultimate Author of Scripture. He is the source of inspiration, the initiator of inspiration, and communicates His absolute truth through inspiration. What the Bible says is what God says.
2. Verbal inspiration affirms that God inspired the actual words of Scripture. What the human authors wrote is exactly what God intended to be said, and they wrote the words which God intended to be used to communicate His truth. The words of the Bible are the very words of God.
3. While the article does not forward a particular theory of inspiration, it communicates the result of inspiration. That result is absolute and perfect truth. The article affirms that the Bible is infallible, that it is incapable of error. Everything that the Bible declares—whether doctrine, exhortation, or history— is truth.
4. The Bible is our guide in faith and practice. Our response to reading and studying the Bible is the belief in and obedience to the revealed will and way of God.
5. The Bible is unique as the Word of God; no other book compares to it. The Bible alone is the deposit of eternal truth.

These assertions in turn give us guidance in:

1. Teaching. Our task is to foster in students complete confidence in the Bible and to equip them for effective Bible-based and Bible-centered ministry.
2. Translation. Because of our commitment to verbal inspiration, we believe that the task of translation is to translate accurately the words that God chose to use in the original languages. The standard of translation is fidelity to the words that God chose to use and not the accommodation to changing contemporary trends. We believe that God is omniscient. In His omniscience He knew that language would change and deliberately chose those words inspired in the original text to convey exactly what He wanted to be said.
3. Textual criticism. Textual criticism is a tool to be used reverently to examine the available texts and validate translations. In those very few instances where there are legitimate questions about the text, we continue research. If there is no legitimate question about the text, we believe the text to be the very Word of God. We believe further that textual criticism should never be used in a manner that will erode a student's confidence in the Word of God.
4. Scholarly research. Our purpose in scholarly research is the pursuit of truth, not just the increase of knowledge. Our commitment to verbal inspiration, therefore, does not restrict genuine scholarly research. This commitment, instead, provides the standard for directing and judging true scholarly research. Here we stand. By the grace of God, here we shall ever stand.

Note: The Trustees adopted this position paper as the Seminary's official interpretation and application of Article 1 of the *Articles of Religious Belief*.