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## Question 41 - What is the difference between inspiration and inerrancy?

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## 101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

### 41. What is the difference between *inspiration* and *inerrancy*?

A. The definitions involved

1. Inspiration. Paul Enns writes:

“Inspiration may be defined as the Holy Spirit’s superintending over the writers so that while writing according to their own styles and personalities, the result was God’s Word written – authoritative, trustworthy, and free from error in the original autographs.” (*Moody Handbook*, p. 160).

The term *inspiration* is found but once in the New Testament. This occurs in 2 Tim. 3:16. Here Paul says, “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God.*” The Greek word is *theopneustos*, and literally means “God-breathed.”

2. Inerrancy.

Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs, properly interpreted, will be shown to be wholly true in everything they affirm, whether this has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences. (Paul Fineberg, *Inerrancy*, Edited by Norman Geisler, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 294).

Stated another way it affirms that the Scriptures in their original manuscript format did not include any thing that was contrary to fact.

B. The summations involved the following may be seen from the above definitions:

1. Inspiration has to do with the divine *process*, that is, the *channels* (human authors) used by God regarding the scriptures.

2. Inerrancy has to do with the divine *product*, that is, the *correctness* assured by God regarding the scriptures.

Thus, it can be readily seen that inerrancy logically follows inspiration. One is the means to the end, the other is the end itself.

A prominent theologian aptly summarizes:

“While many theological viewpoints would be willing to say the Bible is inspired, one finds little uniformity as to what is meant by inspiration. Some focus it on the writers; others, on the writings; still others, on the readers. Some relate it to the general message of the Bible; others, to the thoughts; still others, to the words. Some include inerrancy; many don’t.

“These differences call for precision in stating the biblical doctrine. Formerly all that was necessary to affirm one’s belief in full inspiration was the statement ‘I believe in the inspiration of the Bible.’ But when some did not extend inspiration to the words of the text it became necessary to say, ‘I believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible.’ To counter the teaching that not all parts of the Bible were inspired, one had to say, ‘I believe in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible.’ Then because some did not want to ascribe total accuracy to the Bible, it was necessary to say, ‘I believe in the verbal, plenary, infallible, inerrant inspiration of the Bible.’ But then ‘infallible’ and ‘inerrant’ began to be limited to matters of faith only rather than also embracing all that the Bible records (including historical facts, genealogies, accounts of creation, etc.), so it became necessary to add the concept of ‘unlimited inerrancy. Each addition to the basic statement arose because of an erroneous teaching.” (Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*. p. 67)