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THREE DANGERS CURRENTLY CONFRONTING EVANGELICALS

Proclaim. *Engage.* Defend.



THREE DANGERS

Currently Confronting Evangelicals

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INTRODUCTION

**ARE YOU
READY TO
ENGAGE?**

With sexual, moral, and theological confusion abounding, how do you evangelize the lost and equip the saints in a post-Christian society? Christ-followers are called to combat false ideas that stand in the way of the Gospel. To effectively engage with the culture, you will need a deeply integrated understanding of theology, philosophy, and apologetics—the bedrock of a degree from Southern Evangelical Seminary and Bible College (SES). Whether you feel God leading you to pursue some form of professional ministry, or whether you simply want to be more equipped to teach Sunday School, talk with your coworkers, or train your family, there is good reason for you to consider earning a degree or certificate from SES.

We all understand that every culture is built upon ideas, whether good or bad, that influence every aspect of life. Our modern cultural context is the consequence of numerous bad ideas playing themselves out, which have resulted in a society that views Christianity very differently from years past. For example, two out of five Americans are now considered “post-Christian,” and 23 percent of American adults are considered “nones” (atheist, agnostic, or religiously unaffiliated).¹ Moreover, as much as 75 percent of youth are leaving the church after high school, and half of American skeptics now have a college degree.² Consider this: the Christian birthrate is around 2.1 compared to just 1.6 for “nones.”³ Yet, “nones” are on the rise and Christianity’s influence is declining. We are essentially breeding the next generation of skeptics!

What Do ‘Nones’ Think?

There are many reasons why people reject Christianity, some of which are emotional and willful. Nevertheless, when “nones” were specifically asked why they reject Christianity, their answers reveal the fact that they simply don’t think Christianity is true!

Instead, many often think one or more of the following:

- 1. Science and faith are incompatible because faith is irrational.**
- 2. There are no good reasons to believe in God.**
- 3. Christianity is bigoted, intolerant, and needlessly exclusive.**

While ministry within proper personal relationships is always important, as Barna Research Group has observed,

“... our research suggests that most of the efforts of Christian ministries fail to reach much beyond the core of ‘Christianized’ America. It’s much easier to work with this already-sympathetic audience than to focus on the so-called ‘nones’. ... Christians for whom ‘ministry is about relationships’ may be disappointed when they find that many skeptics are not as enamored of relational bonds as are those who are already a part of church life. ... New levels of courage and clarity will be required to connect beyond the Christianized majority.”⁴

Rather than run from bad ideas, believers are called to courageously be salt and light wherever they may find themselves (Matthew 5:13; Acts 17; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Titus 1:9; 1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3).

Why do *you* believe the Gospel is actually true? Why should anyone in a highly-educated, scientific, and technologically-advanced culture accept Christianity? Good theology, philosophy, and apologetics directly address all the issues listed above.

Dangers Within the Church

Many church goers, however, are often ill-equipped for addressing the key issues facing our culture and are just as confused as the “nones.” As more and more traditional Christian thinking is being forgotten, the bad ideas of the culture are being adopted by many modern believers. For instance, one survey found the following among *American evangelical Christians*:⁵

- 46% agree that God accepts the worship of all religions
- 23% agree the Bible, like all sacred writings, contains helpful accounts of ancient myths but is not literally true
- 24% disagree or are unsure that abortion is a sin
- 32% agree with, or are unsure about, the statement that gender identity is a matter of choice
- 29% agree that religious belief is a matter of personal opinion rather than objective truth

SES co-founder, the late Dr. Norman Geisler, said, “Apologetics is simply to defend the faith and thereby destroy arguments and every proud obstacle against the knowledge of God. It is opening the door, clearing the rubble, and getting rid of the hurdles so that people can come to Christ.” Sadly, the rubble and hurdles are many. This short e-book is intended to help you consider three dangers currently challenging evangelicalism that contribute to hurdles standing between someone and the Gospel.

Regardless of your particular vocation or ministry context, sound theology that is undergirded with good philosophy and apologetics is a must for doing the heavy lifting of

removing the obstacles standing in the way of someone coming to Christ. That is why SES offers students something that cannot be found anywhere else—accredited education programs that take an integrated approach to theology, philosophy, and apologetics. This deep and unique integration woven throughout each SES course will help you form a complete and systematic Christian world view. Such systematic thinking will equip you to more effectively *proclaim* the Gospel, *engage* the culture, and *defend* the Truth.

Please thoughtfully and prayerfully consider the following points, and know that we stand ready to come alongside you in your journey.





DANGER ONE

THE DENIAL OF OBJECTIVITY

All of us at one time or another have been involved with a Bible study where after reading a passage, the leader looks up and asks the group, “What does that passage mean to you?” On the surface it may sound like a reasonable, amiable question, but is the purpose of Bible study to bounce around *subjective* ideas based on changing times? Would not the serious student of the Bible want to know an *objective* meaning that is true for all people and at all time, one that reveals the mind of the Author?

What is objectivity when it comes to studying the Bible? Objectivity in Bible study means that it is possible to know what the text of the Bible actually *means*, to have a correct *interpretation* of the Bible even if there may be different *applications* to individual situations. However, for many Bible scholars today, objectivity is thought to be a kind of neutrality, or an approach to the text and to reality that is not determined by one’s own perspectives.

According to these scholars, objectivity is rejected as a naïve approach that ignores what they believe is the all-important perspective of the interpreter. Their position is that Bible study involves interpretation, and interpretation involves everything that we think and everything we are, what we believe, our point of view, what we think is true and false, what is important to us, what we think about our world, our training, dispositions, and opinions—all the factors that come together to form our personal world view. Our personal world view determines how we interpret the world. It is like having a set of glasses through which we look at and interpret our world. Since no two world views are exactly alike and since our world view determines the way we look at the world, they say it is not possible to have an objective understanding of the Bible. This is a belief held by almost *all* Evangelical scholars today.

For example, Evangelical hermeneutical scholar Grant Osborne says,

“The sociology of knowledge recognizes the influence of societal values on all perceptions of reality. This is a critical factor in coming to grips with the place of preunderstanding in the interpretive process. Basically, sociology of knowledge states that no act of coming to understanding can escape the formative power of the background and the paradigm community to which an interpreter belongs.”¹

In other words, according to this view everyone approaches the interpretive or understanding process, regardless of what is being interpreted, with a certain preunderstanding or world view that contains certain presuppositions that essentially serve as a filter or grid by which communication is interpreted or understood. Evangelical theologian Kevin VanHoozer agrees when he says,

“No reading is objective; all reading is theory-laden. There is no innocent eye; there is no innocent ‘I.’ ... The claim to see texts as they are is illusory. Every reader sees what one can see from one’s position in society, space, and time. ... Like it or not, what we find in texts is a function of who, and where, we are.”²

This understanding of objectivity is very similar to the standpoint epistemology found within critical theory studies. Evangelical scholar Nathan Luis Cartagena says, “[Critical race theory] scholars ‘reject the prevailing orthodoxy that scholarship should be or could be “neutral” and “objective.”’ ... Human beings are perspectival knowers. We

learn about, see, and treat things from tradition-bound perspectives. Our scholarship, then, never arises from a neutral, objective view from nowhere.”³

Even the popular apologetics world echoes these ideas, likely without even realizing it. For instance, Ken Ham of Answers in Genesis says, “In fact, there are only two kinds of glasses in an ultimate sense. We either wear God’s glasses or man’s glasses. ... There are only two starting points for our worldviews (sic): one either starts with God’s Word or man’s word.”⁴

Implications

There are two significant implications for Bible study that follow directly from these beliefs about objectivity. First, *if* objectivity is a kind of neutrality, then in order to be neutral, the reader must take off his glasses/world view. This creates a problem. If your world view is what makes understanding possible, then without your world view you cannot understand or know *anything*. When you take off your glasses, you cannot see. So then, no one can study the Bible without looking through his own glasses/world view. But, it is this very world view that unavoidably influences your interpretation. So, given these ideas, every interpretation will necessarily be a product, to some degree, of your own world view, and this fact militates against the degree of certainty about having arrived at the correct interpretation.

The second implication that follows is that with the rejection of objectivity there would seem to be no grounds upon which to decide whose interpretation is the correct interpretation. If every interpretation is the product of one’s own world view, then there can be no single correct interpretation. James Smart identified how the rejection of objectiv-

ity makes it impossible to know what God says in His Word,

“The danger inherent in this development was that theological interpretations of Scripture would be its meaning for this or that theologian. Thus, theological exposition, instead of penetrating to the one word of God in Scripture that brings all Christians into fellowship with one another, would give each segment of the Christian community the license to read its own theological convictions out of the text of Scripture.”⁵

Once we reject the possibility of objectivity, we have lost the very Word of God.

Connecting Different World Views & Objectivity

Does this mean that it is impossible to know what God says? In fact, objectivity is possible even though each person has his or her own world view. How is it possible? This is because there are some things in the world that are the same for all people, all the time, no matter where or when they lived. These things are known as the *first principles of thought and being*. First principles are truths that cannot be denied. They form the foundation of knowledge and make it possible for different people with different world views to connect with each other and communicate to each other.

One classical example of a first principle is the *law of non-contradiction* (also often referred to as the law of contradiction). This law means that a statement cannot be both true and false at the same time and in the same sense. So, if I make the statement that “God is good,” this statement cannot be both true and false at the same time and

in the same sense. Either God is good, or He is not. You cannot have it both ways. We know that this is a first principle because it cannot be denied. Anyone who says that the law of non-contradiction is not true must use the law in order to deny the law.⁶ Now, a statement can be both true and false, but not in the same sense. If I am living in Charlotte, NC, I can say, “I live in Charlotte, North Carolina,” and this is a true statement. However, if I were to move to another city in another state, then the statement “I live in Charlotte, North Carolina” is no longer true. So, the statement can be both true and false, but not at the same time or in the same sense.

The law of non-contradiction was as true for the biblical authors as it is for us today. Because of these first principles, like the law of non-contradiction, when the Bible says that “God is good,” then we know that this statement was as true for the authors of the Bible as it is for us today. Because these first principles are the same for all people at all times and in every place, we have a connection with the Bible that is not affected by our own personal world view. These first principles form the foundation upon which truth rests. These first principles also are true for everyone because that is the way God created the world, and because the first principles transcend our own world views, it is possible to have an objective interpretation, a correct interpretation, of the Bible. Let us now apply this solution to the question of objectivity.

1. Doesn't everyone have his or her own world view? We do not deny the fact that everyone has his or her own world view. However, we disagree that a person's world view makes objectivity impossible. The fact is, there are first principles that are common to all humans as part of the nature of humanity as God created it. For someone to say that there is no such thing as objectivity is to count on the objective meaning

of this very claim. To deny objectivity while counting on objectivity is self-defeating. Indeed, any claim that denies first principles is ultimately self-defeating and false. Although everyone has his or her own world view, the foundation of any world view is the same for all people, at all times, in all cultures, regardless of language, background, training, world view, perspective, horizon, etc.

2. Can any world view be universally valid? It is simply false to claim that no world view is universally valid. In fact, this very claim assumes its own universal validity. It is undeniably the case that there are aspects of every framework that are unavoidable, self-evident, and true. The basic laws of logic and the undeniability of truth are the same everywhere and at all times. Consequently, any claim that denies these foundational principles is self-defeating and false.

3. But, isn't universal validity implied in the notion of objectivity?

Not only is universal validity implied in the notion of objectivity, but it is also the very essence of objectivity. Anyone who attempts to deny neutrality assumes that his own claims are universally valid and therefore objective. To claim that there can be no neutrality assumes this very neutrality. All such claims are self-defeating and false.

4. Can an interpreter really be objective in interpretation? To claim that no interpreter can be objective in his interpretation is both self-defeating and false. For anyone to claim that no interpreter can be objective assumes that the one making the claim has been objective in his interpretation of the question of objectivity. Regardless of the fact that interpreters do not always *achieve* objectivity, the fact is that objectivity is *possible*.

5. If objectivity is possible, then isn't a "correct" interpretation also possible?

Since objectivity is possible, then so is a "correct" interpretation. To claim that there is no correct interpretation assumes one's own interpretation is the correct one. This too is self-defeating and false.

6. If objectivity is possible, doesn't that mean that it is also possible to judge whether an interpretation is correct or not?

In spite of their denials of objectivity, some Evangelicals still think that it is possible to decide between interpretations. It is not only *possible*; it is *unavoidable*. Every act of understanding is, in one way or another, an act of deciding between interpretations. We hold one thing to be true and its contradiction to be false. We accept one view and reject its opposite. It is not necessary for Evangelicals to compromise on the notions of objectivity and truth in order to accept the undeniable fact that all understanding is mediated through one's own world view. The fact of self-evident, undeniable first principles constitute a foundation upon which objectivity is based.⁷

While it may be true that each of us is wearing the colored glasses of our own perspectives, it is also true that we are, in principle, able to see past them and know reality in itself. We believe that the God of the Christian Scriptures has created us after His image, that we all share a human nature capable of knowing truths about reality, and this insures the objectivity of truth and a correct interpretation of His Word (or any other text) are in fact possible. As SES professor Richard Howe notes, "This is the only God-honoring view to hold, for it acknowledges that there is nowhere the unbeliever can hide in all reality where he is not standing on some ground that can be shown to point to its Creator."⁸



DANGER TWO

THE ADOPTION OF 'WOKENESS' IDEOLOGY

It seems as though “wokeness” ideology is taking over our society with everyone from churches, to schools, to giant corporations seeing who can be the most “woke.” Such ideas emphasize feelings over facts, pretend that individuals determine reality for themselves (i.e., your “truth”), put a priority on affirming feelings, ideas, or behaviors rather than willing someone’s actual good, and often deny even the ability to know objective truth. Being “woke” means you have become enlightened to the alleged systemic oppression of various groups and you vow to fight for “social justice,” which usually means working for equal economic and social outcomes in a given context.

In reality, the current popular understanding of “social justice” that undergirds the “woke” movement is the opposite of the good all humans should pursue and is anything but just (i.e., giving someone their due). Historic Christianity, and even things like logic and science, are seen as oppressive, racist, bigoted, etc. Today’s “woke” culture is tearing our society apart and erecting barriers to people considering the true Gospel and the freedom it provides. Too many believers are being taken in by these ideas, and too many relationships are being destroyed for us to remain silent. We will ultimately see many believers’ Christian convictions shattered by the end of it all. The Church should summarily reject the major notions of “wokeness” ideology, critical race theory (CRT), “white guilt,” and “white fragility” for several reasons.

Emotionalism and Platitudes

Undoubtedly, racism still exists in America, and of course we should do everything we can to combat it. However, the arguments often being used by many well-meaning Evangelicals in support of “white guilt,” “white fragility,” other “woke” ideologies, and even things like mobs tearing down monuments, are the very same types of emotion-

ally-charged arguments we have seen other professing Christians use to support things like homosexual behavior and transgender lifestyles. Rather than taking a step back, understanding terms (ex. “love,” “good,” or “justice”), investigating evidence (both for and against any particular accusation), and being prudent in our judgments, a vast number of Evangelical leaders have accepted current narratives without question, rushed to judgments, encouraged their followers to do the same, and tripped over themselves with virtue signaling less they be accused of being too “unloving” or something worse. In our experience, Christians who go down this path are one step closer to abandoning historic Christianity for a caricature of the real thing. Tragically, many Christians who accept such a caricature soon enough discard the faith altogether. As philosopher Edward Feser notes,

“[Forsaking a good because one cannot endure the associated difficulties] is rife among modern churchmen, who seem to fear controversy above all things, and especially controversy that might earn them the disdain of the secular liberal intelligentsia. And for most of the last few decades, the worst they would have faced is some bad press. The way Western culture is turning now, they will probably face far worse than that in the not too distant future – and will face it precisely because they did not speak and act boldly and consistently enough when bad press was all they had to fear. Appeasement only ever breeds contempt among those appeased, and spurs them to greater evil.”¹

Unsurprisingly, many conservative Christians doing their best to offer biblical responses to current issues do little more than quote Bible verses and say exactly what one

would expect a conservative Christian to say (at least prior to the days of cancel culture and mob rule). Needless to say, for most people engaging with these issues, quoting Bible verses means little or nothing as they do not accept the Bible as authoritative. Moreover, *why* does God say the things that He says about morality or human rights? These biblical appeals, while true, often become Christian platitudes with very little substance behind them. When Christians have no substance behind their platitudes, they are more easily persuaded to give way to emotionally charged rhetoric and either buy into the false ideologies or disengage altogether for fear of having nothing more to say.

Both of these scenarios are due in large part to the adoption of the underlying philosophical positions driving the denial of objectivity discussed earlier.

Truth and Goodness

It is time to love our neighbors well by boldly standing for truth and goodness. The Apostle Paul says, “Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ... ‘Awake, O sleeper! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!’ Therefore, consider carefully how you live—not as unwise but as wise, taking advantage of every opportunity ...” (Eph. 5:11-16, NET).

Classical natural law thinking found in scholars such as Thomas Aquinas gives us an objective basis, common to all human beings and consistent with God’s inerrant Word, from which we can fight the real evils of racism and bigotry while also shining light on the unfruitful ideas of the cult-like movement of “wokeness.” The robust natural law foundation from which SES operates provides common ground that allows anyone to understand properly what concepts like “good,” “love,” and “justice” actually mean.

Natural law morality is biblical (Rom. 1:20; 2:15) and provides a solid foundation from which to make moral judgments in the public sphere with both believers and unbelievers. This is the moral theory upon which much of the civil rights movement was based.

Our Christian convictions undergirded by this classical natural law reasoning compel us to fight real racism wherever it is found and to stand for truth, justice, natural rights, and the freedoms they secure. That is why SES is committed to equipping students with the philosophical and theological tools necessary to engage these cultural issues head-on. The current popular understanding of “social justice” is the opposite of the good all humans should pursue and is anything but just. As Feser ironically observes,

“The currency of the term ‘social justice’ originated in Thomistic natural law social theory. ... It has to do with the just or right ordering of society as defined by strong families and cooperation between husband and wife in carrying out their respective roles for the sake of children and elders, solidarity and cooperation between economic classes and other social groups, and scrupulous attention to subsidiarity in the state’s relationship to the [families, churches, civic organizations, etc.] of society.”²

Fighting for the true and the good in the public arena of ideas paves the way culturally for the seeds of the Gospel to have more opportunity to fall upon good ground. Speaking to leaders in the church, Paul says in Titus 1:9-14, “... hold firmly to the faithful message as it has been taught, so that he will be able to give exhortation in such healthy teaching and correct those who speak against it. ... For this reason rebuke them sharply that they may be healthy in the faith ...” (NET).

Ministry leader, are you equipping your flock with sound teaching that goes beyond self-help and biblical platitudes? Are you refuting those who contradict the truth? Are you equipping those you shepherd with the ability to proclaim and defend the Gospel? We cannot love our neighbors well and lead them to the Gospel if we sacrifice truth and goodness on the false altar of “wokeness” ideology. It is time to wake up.

A Natural Law Case Against ‘Wokeness’

- 1.** Neither an individual human being nor a society can become better without some end/purpose towards which each is directed to pursue. If there is no directed end/purpose, individuals and societies may change and become *different*, but they cannot actually become *better*. To become better implies that people or societies are becoming more perfect and are therefore more closely approaching what it means to be good. Hence, without this goal directedness (i.e., teleology) there can be no objective way to argue that one person or society is good and any other person or society is bad/evil.
- 2.** Something is good to the extent that it is perfect, and something is perfect to the extent that it fulfills the end/purpose towards which it is directed according to its nature (i.e., *what it is*). A simple way to understand this is to consider that a good eye is one that manifests the perfection of seeing well (sight being the end/purpose towards which an eye is directed given its nature; see 1 Cor. 12:15-20). This is arguably the only means by which to have an objective standard of goodness that is *discovered* (i.e., not invented) and that is objectively *true* (i.e., corresponds to reality) for everyone.
- 3.** The good for us as humans is determined by our shared nature as human beings (i.e., *what we are*) rather than any subjective thought, desire, or feeling a particular individual

may have. Human beings have an intellect directed towards pursuing truth (which is the good for the intellect) and a will directed towards obtaining what the intellect perceives as good. To deny the claim that your intellect is directed to truth (i.e., to say the claim is false) is in practice to validate it as you would be demonstrating the fact that, by nature, your intellect is directed towards knowing true things (John 8:32).

4. From these principles one is able to derive natural law morality (the good we as humans ought to pursue according to what is perfective of the various ends towards which our common human nature is directed) that provides an objective basis for human moral actions and human law.³ As Thomas Aquinas notes,

“Hence this is the first precept of law, that ‘good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.’ All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally apprehends as man’s good (or evil) belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided.”⁴

Much like the law of non-contradiction is discovered to be an indemonstrable first principle of reasoning that cannot be avoided, scholar Paul DeHart observes,

“No natural lawyer has ever proposed inferring oughts from oughtless facts. ... Natural lawyers of varying backgrounds begin moral reasoning from indemonstrable first principles of practical or moral reason that prescribe and therefore stipulate an ought right at the outset—namely, that good is to be done and evil avoided.”⁵

5. A modified form of natural law was the foundational statement of the United States' Declaration of Independence,

“When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”

Martin Luther King Jr. also referenced natural law in his famous *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*: “I would agree with St. Augustine that ‘an unjust law is no law at all.’... To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law.”⁶ We also see this notion referenced throughout the Bible, perhaps most specifically in Rom. 2:14-15.

6. Furthermore, human beings are social creatures (but not *socialist* creatures) who naturally depend on one another to fulfill some of our various ends/purposes while expecting others to not interfere with our pursuing of the good (Mark 12:31). Societies are simply collections of human beings living in proximity, striving for the common good. The nuclear family is the natural and most fundamental structure from which societies are built. Given these truths, it follows that all human beings have certain natural rights. To again quote our Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Happiness here is not to be understood as a fleeting emotion dictated by circumstances. Rather, true happiness lies in the fulfillment of our good as human beings (Prov. 28:12).

7. Natural law is the best foundation upon which to build an objective and robust basis for human rights, freedom/liberty, and justice. As Feser notes,

“While the very concept of a right entails a certain measure of liberty, that liberty cannot be absolute; for since the point of natural rights is to enable us to realize the ends set for us by nature, there cannot, even in principle, be a natural right to do what is contrary to the realization of those ends. In short, there cannot be a natural right to do wrong” (Gal. 5:13).⁷

True liberty, or freedom, is not the ability to do whatever one *desires*. It is the ability to do what one *ought*, that is, to do what is objectively good. Justice, in turn, is the good of giving people their due and not withholding what is owed. Without a robust understanding of objective goodness and natural law, we cannot have a proper understanding of liberty or justice (Prov. 21:15; Is. 1:17; Gal. 5:13). Properly understood, justice is based on truth, goodness, and equal *treatment* and/or *opportunity*. This stands in contrast to the popular understanding of social justice that is concerned with *status* and equal *outcomes* (Prov. 28:16).

8. From the above, it follows that *all forms of racism* are morally wrong and should be condemned and combated. Treating anyone as less than human (or as a lesser human) is objectively evil. It also follows, however, that homosexual and transgender behavior are contrary to the good of human sexuality and should not be promoted or affirmed. In

addition, it follows that dismantling the nuclear (i.e., natural) family and intentionally depriving children of life (i.e., abortion) or a natural family structure are necessarily evil.⁸ Something like the natural law reasoning above must be true in order for there to be an objective basis to say “black lives matter” or that any lives actually matter.

9. Each human being also has a natural right to private property, to engage in commerce, and to not be coerced by the government or fellow citizens to violate his or her own natural rights or the rights of others. Hence, free-market capitalism is the best economic system by which imperfect humans can best work together for the common good (Ex. 20:15; 1 Tim. 5:18).⁹

10. Government is for the people, not people for the government, and the goal of government is the common good of its citizens. As Aquinas says,

“Since then every man is a part of the state, it is impossible that a man be good, unless he be well proportionate to the common good: nor can the whole be well consistent unless its parts be proportionate to it. Consequently the common good of the state cannot flourish, unless the citizens be virtuous, at least those whose business it is to govern.”¹⁰

Both totalitarianism and egalitarianism should be rejected. Even with our sins and imperfections as a nation, this federal constitutional republic has always striven to be better (Rom. 13:4). Without the foundational principles of natural law, however, we will never be able to form a “more perfect union,” “establish justice,” or “secure the blessings of liberty” as promised in the preamble of the United States Constitution.

11. Classically understood, to love others is to will their good. Hence, based on the above, we truly love others when we graciously point them to truth and help them fulfill their good according to their nature as human beings. To encourage anyone to pursue anything contrary to the good is nothing less than hate. First Corinthians 13:4-7 describes love as follows:

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

12. It is certainly true that *all* black lives are sacred. It is also true that the Black Lives Matter (BLM) organization, along with its related positions and other “wokeness” ideologies, violate the natural law and cannot be classified as good. Granted that to love is to will the good of another, promoting the BLM agenda or “wokeness” ideologies cannot be considered loving. Therefore, individuals or societies that promote things contrary to the good by adopting such ideas cannot become better or become “more perfect.” While our ultimate good is only found in knowing God through salvation in Jesus Christ (i.e., the Gospel), we can strive to promote the common good (i.e., love our neighbors as ourselves) by working with our fellow citizens to argue for natural law, to defend natural rights, to help the oppressed, and to share the Gospel as often as possible (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 4:25-32; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Titus 3:1-11; 2 Peter 1:5-9).

[CLICK HERE](#) to read our full statement on racism and social justice.



DANGER THREE

THE WEAKENING OF BIBLICAL INERRANCY

The doctrine of biblical inerrancy has been under attack to various degrees for a very long time. It is unsurprising that the same underlying philosophical ideas driving the denial of objectivity are also fueling a new round of voices calling into question the Bible’s inerrancy. An abandonment of the correspondence theory of truth in favor of truth being defined as accomplishing an author’s intent, combined with the perspective-based way of knowing examined earlier, are leading to new redefinitions and misunderstandings of inerrancy.

For example, Evangelical scholar Peter Enns says,

“The bottom line here is that the Bible is too diverse and contradictory for ‘inerrancy’ to hold any explanatory power. ... A deep problem with inerrancy is that it presumes (or works best with) the notion that the Bible ‘properly’ understood will yield one and only one authoritative meaning. But the Bible is famously fraught with ambiguities, tensions, and contradictions that are *part of the character of Scripture* ... In the Bible, we read of encounters with God by ancient peoples, in *their* times and places, asking *their* questions, and expressed in language and ideas familiar to *them*. Those encounters with God were, I believe, genuine, authentic, and real. ... All of us on a journey of faith encounter God from our point of view ...” [emphasis in original].¹

Many people have misconceptions about the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. One popular misconception is they think inerrancy is based on an ancient reading of the Bible. That is, they think some ancient person or council, after collecting the biblical manuscripts,

read through them all, and upon not find any errors or perhaps corrected them if they did, pronounced the books inerrant. Another one is that inerrancy is true simply because the Bible claims to be inspired by God and God's word is true, thus implying the Bible is without error or inerrant. While true, this claim is not the only basis of inerrancy. If it were, we would be reasoning in a circle by saying this claim is contained in the very books we are asserting are completely truthful or without error. Hence, for inerrancy to stand, there must be a better basis. Indeed, these misconceptions about how we reason to an inerrant Bible could not be further from the truth. The doctrine of biblical inerrancy is not based on any person or group reading through the Bible looking for errors, and it does not suffer the pain of circular reasoning.

Also, we do not have to understand everything in or about the Bible to assert it is inerrant. No doubt, there are things in the Bible not yet fully understood. Some passages are difficult to interpret, and some interpretations are vigorously debated. However, many things in the Bible are plain and simple. Indeed, the essential teachings and doctrines are not difficult to discover. This should include such things as the triune nature of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, his substitutionary atonement, physical resurrection, the gospel, second coming, etc. To these we can say, "The main things are the plain things."

To be sure, if the Bible does have errors, it does not necessarily follow that the resurrection of Jesus is false. Nevertheless, an errant Bible provides *no firm foundation* from which to accurately know the Gospel and discover the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. Inerrancy is important because without it *we have no certainty* that these essential teachings are true. But how do we get to inerrancy without assuming it? Here are five important questions that reveal how to think well about biblical inerrancy.

Where Does Inerrancy Begin: “God” or the “Bible”? Rather than beginning with the Bible, we begin with what we can know about God apart from the Bible. First God exists, and we can come to that conclusion without the Bible. Indeed, as one ancient Jewish writer explained,

“Because what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they are understood through what has been made. So people are without excuse” (Rom. 1:19-20, NET).

One’s acceptance of God may be informal as when one sees creation and concludes God must have created it and sustains it, or formal, as when one gives a valid and sound argument for the existence of God. It could also be by faith as when one accepts God’s existence on the authority of another such as a teacher, parent, or pastor. None of these are mutually exclusive ways to God’s existence.

Second, one should reason from the existence of God, as the quote implies, to the fact that God is immaterial (not material) and eternal (not finite) having no beginning or end. That is, God is Pure Act. Such existence must be perfection or goodness itself, not merely approaching good or maximally good, but identical to absolute Goodness or Perfection. God, Perfection itself, could never create something imperfect. Such can only produce what is finitely good. This also stands for what God communicates to His creatures, which must always be good or true. Again, all this we can reason to apart from anything in the Bible.

Why is the Bible the Word of God? The Bible is a collection of 66 books that, from beginning to end, *claims* to be the Word of God and *proves* to be the Word of God. First, it claims to speak for the one and only true God from Genesis to Revelation. It proves this claim by offering a description of God identical to the one offered through reasoning about creation to a sustaining Creator. The Bible says God's divine nature is pure existence (Exod. 3:14), eternal (Ps. 90:2), immutable (Mal. 3:6), perfect (Matt. 5:48), and that He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). There can only be one God, one such being that is Pure Act. Therefore, the God of the Bible is the one true God (Deut. 6:4). Second, the Bible was written by prophets who offered multiple miracles to the people they knew to confirm they were speaking for God. Such miracles are clearly in the category of what God alone can do. They create life from non-life (Exod. 8:19) and raise the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24). Third, these prophets offered to their future readers hundreds of precise predictions hundreds of years in advance (Dan. 9:25-27). Finally, we know historically that Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be God incarnate (John 8:58), the promised Messiah who God raised from the dead. This same Jesus taught that the Bible is the Word of God from the mouths of the prophets (Luke 11:49-51) and promised the same prophetic ability for his immediate disciples and apostles (John 14:26). Such signs are unmistakable from the true God and used to back up the spoken and written word of the prophets.

God, because He is absolute perfection, would never allow real miracles or prophecy to be done through a false teacher or false religion. So, the religion that contains multiple miracles and prophecies that only God can do is the true message from God. These truths can be discovered by anyone's reading of the Bible, believer or not.

How is the Bible the Word of God? The apostles give us the best description of how the Bible is inspired by God. Peter says, “Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet’s own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:20-21, NET).

Peter teaches that the origin of prophecy is God. It is through a human prophet. It is verbal or in words. It is the prophet’s original words spoken (or written) from God that carry the divine authority from God. Written copies and translations of those words are not technically inspired but can only carry its divine authority to the extent they preserve the meaning of the originals.

Paul says, “Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16, NET). He says it is the written text (Scripture) that is inspired (breathed out) by God, and this applies to “all” or “every” Scripture. That is the entirety or whole of the written text. It is not limited to this part or that part or this topic and that topic in the text. It is all that is written by the prophet under divine inspiration.

What Does “Cannot Err” Mean and Not Mean? Philosophy tells us that truth is that which corresponds to reality. Jesus of Nazareth teaches us that the Word of God is truth (John 17:17), indestructible (Matt. 5:17-18), infallible (John 10:35) and has divine authority to rebuke even the highest of creatures (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). Hence, inerrancy follows from the perfection and power of God.

Inerrancy guarantees the truth of all the Bible teaches, implies, and entails whether spiritual (unseen) matters or factual (seen) matters. When the Bible speaks of how the heavens go, it is so. Likewise, when the Bible speaks of how to get to heaven, it is so. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, “If I have told you ... about earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?” (John 3:12, NET).

However, inerrancy does not imply that everything recorded in the Bible is true or even right. There are lies in the Bible (Gen. 3:4) and evil acts (Gen. 4:8), not everything recorded is approved. What is true is that someone lied or did evil as recorded in the Bible, not that the lie is true, or the act is right. Inerrancy does not mean that everything said must be mathematically precise, or all quotations must be verbatim, or that the truth revealed must be exhaustive. It does not mean that we must hold all the personal or cultural beliefs of the writers. It only entails that we must hold beliefs that are affirmed or taught in Scripture.

Finally, it does not mean everything in the Bible is literal. There are many figures of speech used and therefore many ways truth can apply to reality. Indeed, consider the following grammatical figures of speech used in the Bible that show different ways it can apply to reality: literally (Mark 1:16), allegorically (Gal. 4:23-24), metaphorically (Isa. 55:12), similarly (Isa. 7:2), analogically (2 Cor. 5:7), symbolically (Heb. 9:7-9), hyperbolically (Judg. 7:12), phenomenologically (Joel 2:31), informally (Num. 11:21), synecdochically (Matt. 6:11), and metonymically (Matt. 8:8; Luke 7:6).

Is There an Argument for Biblical Inerrancy? There is an argument for biblical inerrancy that is quite simple:

1. God cannot err.
2. The Bible is the Word of God.
3. Therefore, the Bible cannot err.

We know from reasoning about creation that God cannot *err*. We know the Bible *claims* to be the Word of God and *proves* to be the Word of God. Therefore, it cannot err. Logically, there are only two ways to deny this statement: “The Bible, which is the Word of God, cannot error.” One is to *deny* that the Bible is the Word of God. The other is to *deny* that God *must* always speak the truth (or be perfect). You likely will not find a Christian willing to say the Bible is not God’s word or that God can err. Yet, if you agree that the Bible is the Word of God and God is perfect, then you must conclude the Bible cannot err.

In the end, to deny or alter the inerrancy of the Bible is to attack the divine nature of God and the Son of God who taught it was completely true. Yes, inerrancy is as old as the Bible, and like all truth, it cannot go away. But it can be forgotten, misunderstood, poorly reasoned, and attacked. Hopefully, more will see biblical inerrancy properly understood and reasoned. Given that truth is that which corresponds to reality, that God, as ultimate reality, is Truth itself, and that the Bible is trustworthy when it claims to be the Word of God, then we have every reason to believe it is without error.





ONE MORE THING

**TAKING
YOU BEYOND
ONLINE
EDUCATION**

Your schedule is busy. We get it. Between family, work, ministry, sports, etc., how can you make time for class? We fully understand the complex demands on our students, so we have created seminary options for busy schedules like yours that take your learning beyond merely online education.

SES takes a *digital-first* approach by providing a *fully immersive digital campus experience* where every aspect of traditional education is achieved in a virtual environment by integrating industry-leading technologies for live-streaming, course management, and student interaction. Hence, every degree and certificate offered by SES can be completed via our digital campus (*the D.Min. program has limited on-campus requirements*). This format enables us to accommodate even the most demanding of schedules and allows you to get a first-class education without leaving your current ministry context.

Live-Streaming Courses

Our live-streaming format provides the best in distance education, allowing students to interact in real-time with their professors and peers. The live course lectures and interaction are also recorded and posted back to our course management platform for on-demand viewing throughout the semester.

Asynchronous Courses

Each semester, some courses are offered in a pre-recorded asynchronous format. Many of these courses utilize studio-produced recorded lectures that students may watch at their convenience while meeting syllabus deadlines. Additional live-streaming components and professor/peer interaction supplement the asynchronous format allowing students to remain connected.

A Truly Digital Campus

Our expansive *Digital Theological Library* gives our students access to over 650,000 eBooks, thousands of journal titles and peer-reviewed articles, and much more. Moreover, by using our learning management platform Canvas, we are able to create virtual hangouts, clubs, discussion groups, etc. that allow our students and professors to interact in real-time. Our integrated digital campus experience enables us to foster community and connectedness even while we may be physically distant.

This *digital-first* approach means SES is committed to meeting our students where they are by not only providing a challenging educational curriculum but also offering ways for the SES family to connect outside the classroom. Additional resources are currently being added to our digital campus that will further facilitate the spiritual growth, community, and educational experience of SES students as we continue to utilize Dr. Geisler's integrated approach to Christian thinking and move beyond online education.





CONCLUSION

**WHAT
ARE YOU
WAITING
FOR?**

You may indeed be struggling with valid questions: “How will I pay for this?” or, “How will I find the time?” Certainly, only by God’s grace and providence will this happen, and we do not counsel students to go into debt or sacrifice their family for a seminary education. Even with the challenges of time and money, most who have studied theology, philosophy, and apologetics in seminary will agree that going to seminary was one of the most important things they ever did, and they would do it again if needed. Most things in life that are truly helpful, worthwhile, and lifelong take time, effort, and commitment to have any payoff. A theological education is no different. Hence, that diploma is a valuable historical record of your learning experience.

Southern Evangelical Seminary and Bible College is not just for pastors. It is for high schoolers, homeschool parents, Sunday school teachers, lay ministers, lay missionaries, and of course, the professional Christian schoolteacher, minister, missionary, and pastor. SES is for anyone wanting to be more equipped to effectively engage today’s post-Christian culture with the truth of the Gospel.

Here are five reasons to be thankful for a theological seminary education like you will find at SES:

1. Be thankful for good philosophy. Philosophy is the *fabric of theology*.

It is interwoven throughout and holds all truth together. Theology is possible because philosophy can demonstrate the existence and nature of God without relying on the Bible. Yet, it gives us the tools needed to explore the existence of God’s nature, which is in unmistakable agreement with the God of the Bible. Philosophy also

shows how we can meaningfully use language to speak about God, while recognizing that finite minds will never exhaust His majesty. The philosophical supporting of theology is just one unique and important aspect for which SES is known. True philosophy will always support the theological endeavor. Without this, one is more likely to support theology with wrong reasoning or see no reason at all for some theological assertions.

2. Be thankful for Biblical Studies. The Bible is the *bedrock*

of theology. Many who go off to secular colleges and universities have taken religion or Bible classes from a liberal professor. However, after hearing SES professors like Dr. Thomas Howe, you realize your education in the Bible has been a half-inch high (maybe less) and three miles long (or longer). It simply has no depth. Our professors provide amazing insights into the structure of the biblical books, explain how to deal with difficult passages, and demolish critical theories that undermine the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible.

3. Be thankful for Historical Theology. History is the *legacy*

of theology. Ignore theology's history and you might be led into error, or worse. Many cults and false teachers today are just repackaging errors found in dusty books. We must know our history and tradition, respect it and learn from it, but also bring it to the bar of Scripture. Because of the Reformation, we can rest assured the five Solas (Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone, and glory to God alone) will continue to be known if we have the Bible in the language of the people. You will treasure the Bible more and not complain of so many translations when you realize the price paid to put it in our tongue. Indeed, because men of God paid with their lives, the torch of God's grace has not gone out, and you are able to study your Bible.

4. Be thankful for Apologetics. Apologetics is the defense

of theology. Many today continue to hold to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible because of Christian apologetics. Apologetics must begin with reality or truth common to all, not just the Bible. It must dig deeply into philosophy, science, and history and pull out demonstrations for the truthfulness of Christianity.

One old but common objection to apologetics heard in church even today says, “The Bible, the Word of God, does not need to be defended. It is like a lion; all you need to do is let it loose.” Dr. Geisler insightfully answered this by saying, “The Word of God does not need a defense, but that statement ‘the Bible is the word of God’ needs a defense.” Otherwise, we would have no answer to other religions who claim their book to be the “word of God.” Indeed, we fear a lion only because we already know what a lion can do.

5. Be thankful for Systematic Theology. Systematic theology is the

fullest expression of theology. The problem with some people’s theology before seminary was that it did not have enough “systematic” in it. Granted, it may lack some “theology” too, but it is the *systematic* that makes everything stick together or make sense. Only systematic theology integrates truth outside the Bible with truth inside the Bible to give a coherent and full expression of all God’s revelation found in the created world and in the inspired Word. When we finally see how one doctrine affects another, then we understand that there is nothing more important for developing a true understanding of Christianity and the world.

For example, SES emphasizes the important philosophical and theological truth that God exists as pure actuality (Pure Act) with no potentiality to change because upon this truth hangs all the attributes of God. To not make sure all theological reasoning

adheres to this truth is to steer in the direction that makes God a mere angel or Superman. Likewise, we teach the importance of consistently applying the historical-grammatical method of interpretation to arrive at a correct understanding of every biblical doctrine. To not do so is to swerve theology in the direction of spiritualizing the scriptural text. SES consistently teaches that these five vital principles and God's unshakable truth that constitutes these subjects are relevant to the study of theology. As one SES student observed,

"I simply could not be doing what I am doing, the way that I am doing it, without the training I received at SES. ... I learned how to think through issues in a way that is simply foreign to most Christians, including graduates of other seminaries."

It is a heavy order to think you will be involved in providing theological education to the next generation. Such a responsibility must be taken seriously as teachers will incur a stricter judgment (James 3:1). We hope you take your theological education seriously and be thankful it is not deficient or missing from your ministry. One SES grad put it this way:

"The integrated approach of synthesizing a sound philosophy with classical apologetics and a cohesive, biblical theology is probably the thing I love most about SES. The value of such a systematized and integrated approach for one's apologetics, ministry, and personal growth is difficult to explain until you have experienced it for yourself."

The integrated approach to Christian thinking you will receive at SES is unlike anything you will find at nearly any other evangelical institution. Specifically, the classical philosophy that undergirds everything taught at SES provides a solid foundation from which to do theology (with a deep understanding of the nature and attributes of God), hermeneutics (sadly, as we have seen, most scholars now deny the possibility of discovering the objective meaning of any text, including the Bible), and apologetics (specifically *classical* apologetics). All this, of course, impacts the extent to which believers are equipped to remove the hurdles standing in the way of someone coming to Christ.

In short, believers are called to courageously be salt and light wherever they may find themselves. Your personal and professional ministry can have a greater impact with formal, and integrated, training in theology, philosophy, and apologetics. SES can give you that training and equip you to more effectively *proclaim* the Gospel, *engage* the culture, and *defend* the truth. As SES President Dr. Richard Land says,

“Over the years, it has become increasingly clear to me that the way we will spell evangelism, discipleship, missions, and Christian education in the 21st century is *apologetics*. ... Among evangelical institutions, SES uniquely infuses classical apologetics and philosophy throughout each of our programs to serve this end. Hundreds of SES graduates are proclaiming and defending the Christian faith from the pulpit, the mission field, on campus, and in the business world. Will you be next among them?”

So, what are you waiting for? To learn more about applying to SES, please contact one of our Admissions Counselors at admissions@ses.edu or call **(704) 847-5600 x216**.

Endnotes

INTRODUCTION

1. <https://www.barna.com/research/2015-state-of-atheism-in-america/>, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/14/the-factors-driving-the-growth-of-religious-nones-in-the-u-s/>, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/24/why-americas-nones-left-religion-behind/>
2. <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/are-young-people-really-leaving-christianity/>
3. <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/chapter-3-demographic-profiles-of-religious-groups/>
4. <https://www.barna.com/research/2015-state-of-atheism-in-america/>
5. <https://thestateoftheology.com/>

DANGER ONE

1. Grant R. Osborne. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 11528-11531, Kindle.
2. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Landmarks in Christian Scholarship) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 4008-4016, Kindle.
3. <https://faithfullymagazine.com/critical-race-theory-christians/>
4. <http://blogs.answersingenesis.org/blogs/ken-ham/2011/03/16/wearing-biblical-glasses/>
5. James D. Smart, *The Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 46.
6. In other words, by saying the law of non-contradiction does not exist, one is saying things can be true and not true at the same time in the same sense. If you insist that you are right that the law of non-contradictions does not exist, then you are saying what you just said does not need to be true. But you are insisting that it is true, so you are agreeing with the law of non-contradiction.
7. For a fuller treatment on objectivity, see Thomas Howe's *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015).
8. <http://quodlibetblog.wordpress.com/2011/07/12/its-worse-than-i-thought/>

DANGER TWO

1. <http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2019/11/against-candy-ass-christianity.html>
2. <https://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2017/10/liberty-equality-fraternity.html>
3. It should be noted that natural law provides a common ground for human moral behavior without the need to appeal to divine commands or the Bible. Natural law is biblical in that it lines up with biblical principles, but one can discover natural law precepts without appealing to God or the Bible. To be sure, however, humans only exist with the natures they have because of God's creation and His sustaining in existence everything that exists at every moment it exists. As Klubertanz and Holloway note, "A natural being is ordered to its proper end both by its nature [essence] and by an intellect. Immediately and intrinsically, it is ordered by its nature, but ultimately and extrinsically, it is so ordered by the divine intellect who has established the end and created the nature" (*Being and God*, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963).
4. Thomas Aquinas (2010-06-19). *Summa Theologica* (Complete & Unabridged) . Coyote Canyon Press. Kindle Edition. Kindle location 37699.
5. <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/07/64302/>
6. http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/630416-019.pdf (p.7)

7. <https://lawliberty.org/forum/natural-law-natural-rights-and-private-property/>
8. We understand that single-parent families or other circumstances are sometimes the unfortunate result of this fallen world, and we thank God that He is able to work through our broken circumstances for His good.
9. “Best” here does not imply perfection. Due to each human’s propensity to be led astray by the passions and not be led perfectly by reason and prudence, every human system will inevitably have issues.
10. I-II q.92 a.1 ad 3. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, n.d.).

DANGER THREE

1. <https://peteenns.com/what-is-the-bible/>



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