

[The Battle for the Bible](#)

By Harold Lindsell (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976, 1981), 218 pp., \$7 (paperback).

About the time I was graduating from high school and some 16 years before God would call me forth from spiritual deadness to life in Him, a battle raged within evangelicalism regarding the nature and extent of the authority of the Bible.

This book, by one of the founding faculty members of Fuller Seminary, explores the then-unfolding situation in major evangelical denominations, seminaries, and parachurch ministries wherein liberal-minded individuals began the process of subtly, but surely undermining the authority of Scripture while claiming to be championing the truth and serving the Lord who bought them with His precious blood.

In retrospect, Dr. Lindsell's book proved to be prophetic. Now that another 33 years have run their course, many, if not all, of Dr. Lindsell's predictions concerning the fruit which would grow out of the growing denial of the inerrancy of the Scriptures in his time have now come true in spades. The result is evident to all who have eyes to see: a large portion of "Christianity" – especially as embodied by major historic denominations – no longer considers the Bible to be authoritative on many of the subjects which it addresses. This has, in turn, led to a "Christianity" which, in many cases, denies the foundational teachings of the "Christ" after Whom it takes its name. As Dr. Lindsall observes in the book, the primacy of the saving gospel is jettisoned in favor social concerns, turning the priorities found within the Bible on their head.

Dr. Lindsall documents the then-ongoing battle over the nature and extent of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Does inspiration only extend to certain portions of God's Word? If so, how do we determine which portions are inerrant and which are not? Equally important is the question as to *who* determines those portions which are reliable (without error and therefore trustworthy) vs. the portions which contain inaccuracies and cannot be pressed too far?

One of the central messages of the book is this: once the inerrancy of Scripture is compromised, where can we draw the line? Can historic Christianity flourish or even survive in an environment where portions of the teachings of Scriptures are jettisoned as being unreliable? And even if one generation holds that "most" of Scripture is reliable, what is to stop subsequent generations of theologians and teachers from taking the next step down the slippery slope leading eventually to apostasy? Through many examples in the text, Dr. Lindsall shows how a denial of the inerrancy of Scripture leads inexorably to further concessions which finally result in extinguishing or fundamentally altering the faith of those individuals and institutions which embark on such a path.

The connection between the view of limited-inerrancy and the resulting loss of Scriptural authority is made explicit by any number of quotable passages:

Once limited inerrancy is accepted, it places the Bible in the same category with every other book that has ever been written. Every book contains in it some things that are truth. And what is true is inerrant. Only two things

remain to be determined once this position is acknowledged. The first is what proportion of the book is true and what proportion false. It may be 90 percent false and 10 percent true; or it may be 90 percent true and 10 percent false. The second thing that needs to be determined is what parts of the book are true. Since the book contains both error and falsehood, of necessity, *other criteria outside of the book must be brought to bear upon it to determine what is false and what is true. Whatever the source of the other criteria, that becomes the judge of the book in question. Thus the book becomes subordinated to the standard against which its truth is determined and measured.* If inspiration means anything, and if inspiration pertains to the totality of the Bible, then we must see what limited inerrancy means. First, it means that something outside of and above the Bible becomes its judge. There is something that is truer and more sure than Scripture and whatever it is has not been inspired of God. *So a noninspired source takes precedence over an inspired Bible.* Second it leaves us in a vacuum without any basis for determining what parts of the Bible tell the truth and what parts do not. [p. 203, emphasis mine]

The book caused me reflect back to the time just a few years after I had come to faith when I became convinced that it was God's call on my life to be a teacher within the Body of Christ and that I would benefit from additional training in theology and the original languages of the Scriptures, presumably at a seminary. As I investigated the various doctrinal positions of well-known seminaries and interacted with their faculty members, I quickly encountered what Dr. Lindsall observes in the book: the obviously unethical situation of Christian teachers who annually signed a doctrinal statement to which they themselves had no intention of adhering—facilitated by institutions which were unwilling or unable to uphold their own published doctrinal positions. I came to see why many cautious Christians referred to such an educational process as “attending *cemetery*” rather than “attending seminary”! Many are the promising young men who have undergone additional Christian training only to find their faith shipwrecked at the hands of liberal academics who populate many of these institutions—which often place a greater emphasis upon academic respectability than faithfulness to our Lord.

I especially remember a telephone conversation I had with the then president of the Seattle campus of Fuller Seminary. The level of unbelief and rationalistic reinterpretation of the miraculous exhibited by this faculty member astonished my naive faith. After hanging up the phone, I had prayed that Christ would keep me, by His Spirit, from a similar path as this liberal academic. How ironic: here was the same Fuller Seminary which had once been founded on the rock of an inerrant Word of God—how far it has since drifted away from a normative understanding of the Scriptures!

Later, I came to understand the “cycle of apostasy” which operates within almost all Christian institutions. This is a cycle of spiritual birth and death which is critical for believers to be aware of:

A small school splinters off from a group which is headed for liberalism and apostasy.

1. The small school struggles for many years. It is not highly regarded and not 'accepted' by other institutions--especially the big name places. Even though it has solid teaching, it is not well known or regarded.
2. Over time, graduates and instructors from the school become better known and the school begins to gain some acclaim--generally because God honors those who honor His Word.
3. The school becomes increasingly popular and begins to move toward seeking accreditation--thus beginning to lose control over the content (and doctrinal inclinations of its instructors).
4. As the school's fame increases, it strives more and more to interact with the academic elite in other liberal or secular schools. Eventually, academic respectability eclipses the importance of sound doctrine.
5. The school slides toward apostasy. New and novel (even heretical) teachings are tolerated and even promoted--all in the interest of 'academic pluralism and investigation.' Professors who are out of line with the school's doctrinal statement are not disciplined. In violation of their Christian profession, they routinely sign the school's doctrinal statement which they fail to uphold. Students who attend the institution are infected by these concessions in doctrine which the school's official position covers up.
6. A small group of core professors become so concerned they leave the school to form a new school--WE ARE BACK AT STEP #1.

How many solid institutions have been eclipsed by this cycle—or been born as a result only to wind up in apostasy later!

This book will be of particular interest to anyone who would like more background on the historical evidence for the views of the early church and reformers on the important matter of the reliability and authority of the Scriptures or anyone who has an interest in the more recent background of various Christian groups which now embrace unbiblical positions (e.g., ordination of homosexuals, denying the resurrection or divinity of Christ). It will also be of valuable for anyone who desires a greater understanding of the nature of the slippery slope leading to apostasy—and how it can be paved with seemingly small compromises, however well-intended.

To some, Dr. Lindsell's treatment will seem dogmatic and simplistic. But this is only because he is well-versed in the established pattern where a minor crack in an important doctrine leads inexorably to subsequent departures from important elements of the faith.

Reading the book drives us back to the Scriptures themselves to pay special attention to Paul's instructions to Timothy:

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. (1 Tim. 4:16).

Reviewed by Tony Garland of www.SpiritAndTruth.org.