

Movement Seminary

A Position Paper on Hermeneutics, Canon and Higher Criticism

Prologue: Because of the constantly changing hermeneutical landscape of evangelicalism, we deem it prudent to clearly express our hermeneutical approach and theological assumptions with regard to the Holy Bible. These are the standards to which we subscribe and submit as Movement Seminary staff.

1) List of Affirmations and Denials regarding Scripture

a) The Truthfulness and Authority of the Bible

- i) We affirm that the original manuscripts of the 66 books of the protestant canon are without error in all that they affirm, while recognizing the Bible seeks to do more than simply affirm propositions. We are open to the possibility of (relatively minor) inspired updating of some earlier books by later prophets/inspired individuals, prior to the end of the apostolic age.
- ii) We affirm that the early church correctly recognized the New Testament documents as Scripture, just as the people of Israel did the Old Testament canon before the time of Christ. God sovereignly presided over this process.
- iii) We reject the addition of any other material to the protestant Bible.
- iv) We affirm that every word of Scripture is inspired.
- v) We affirm that what Scripture says, God says.
- vi) We affirm that the modern critical editions of the Old and New Testament preserve the text of the original autographs to such a high degree that we can say with confidence that we possess, "God's Inerrant Word."
- vii) We reject the tendency of higher criticism to "amend" the text, without support from the original manuscripts and ancient editions.
- viii) We deny that, just because a book is quoted in Scripture, it bears the same authority as the Scripture itself.
- ix) We affirm that, although there is diversity in emphasis and approach to various issues and themes in the Old and New Testament, they are fundamentally united and reconcilable in their message, because they proceed from God himself.
- x) We deny any concept of theological diversity which sees fundamental contradictions in the Scriptures.

b) Our Approach to Scripture

- i) We affirm that we want to honor and love God as the author of the Bible in every hermeneutical tool we apply.
- ii) We reject a hermeneutic of suspicion being applied to the Bible as this dishonors God, the author of Scripture.

- iii) We reject the reinterpretation of the Bible through any agenda or ideology which is not in concert with the purposes of the Bible itself.
- iv) We reject theological innovation and novelty in interpretation which would distance us from the historic Christian church.
- v) We affirm harmonization as a legitimate tool when rightly applied to the Scriptures.
- vi) We affirm exegesis which pays careful attention to the meaning of words, phrases and sentences within their literary, social and historical context.
- vii) We reject the usage of source, form or redaction criticism in ways that contradict the inerrancy of Scripture.
- viii) We reject any revisionist readings that seek to undermine biblical prohibitions of homosexual desire and practice.
- ix) We reject any revisionist readings that seek to undermine the biblical commands affirming male servant leadership in the family and the church.
- x) We reject any revisionist readings that seek to distort the historic doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement.
- xi) We affirm the need for genre-sensitive biblical interpretation.
- xii) We affirm the usage of symbolism, imagery, exaggeration and other normal functions of human language within Scripture.
- xiii) We reject the usage of sociology to rewrite biblical history.
- xiv) We affirm the interpretation of the Old and New Testament narratives as both historical and theological documents.

c) Our Ability to Read Scripture

- i) We affirm that, despite our sinful and finite nature, we can, through the work of the Spirit, understand Scripture (and so God) truly, even if not exhaustively.
- ii) We reject any hermeneutical theory which posits that we can only read the Bible in circular ways, only engaging ourselves and not the meaning which the author(s) of the text intended.
- iii) We affirm the ability of God's people with the help of the teachers of the church to understand God's Word. The truth of God's Word is accessible to all and not simply specialists.
- iv) We affirm the authority of the Word of God to judge all statements about itself and how it should be interpreted.
- v) We reject any human tradition, whether from the church, the academy or the world, as the rubric by which the Bible must be interpreted.

d) God's Self-Revelation in Scripture

- i) We affirm that God has revealed himself in both words and actions in the Bible and that these are mutually interpretive.
- ii) We reject an anti-supernaturalism that denies the reality of predictive prophecy in the Old or New Testament.
- iii) We reject an anti-supernaturalism that denies the reality of miracles in the Old or New Testament.
- iv) We reject an evolutionary history of religions approach to the Old Testament which denies its fundamental narrative and the revealed nature of Israel's faith as described in Scripture.
- v) We reject any evolutionary history of religions approach to the New Testament which denies the revealed nature of Jesus' divine sonship and the doctrines of the New Testament church.

e) Jesus Christ as the Fulfillment of Scripture

- i) We affirm that, although the Old Testament is used in various ways in the New Testament, the New Testament authors use the Old Testament in ways that reflect the original meaning of the Old Testament passage.
- ii) We believe that Jesus is the Christological fulfillment of the Old Testament texts and that he was truly prophesied in the Old Testament and that the Old Testament finds its natural fulfillment in him.
- iii) We believe that Jesus brings clarity to the meaning of several Old Testament prophecies, which might be otherwise ambiguous.
- iv) We reject attempts to interpret the Old and New Testaments in isolation from one another.

2) List of Historical Affirmations and Denials

a) Old Testament

- i) We affirm the historicity of Adam and Eve, the first humans, who fell into sin and so tainted the whole human race.
- ii) We reject a mythical (that is, unhistorical) interpretation of the flood and tower of babel narratives.
- iii) We affirm the historicity of the Exodus: that a very large number of Israelites left Egypt, crossed through the sea, wandered in the desert, and resettled in Palestine, partially conquering and driving out the earlier inhabitants.
- iv) We affirm the fundamental historical character of the narrative of Israel's monarchy and sojourning in exile.
- v) We affirm that some Old Testament books are anonymous, and so we cannot be dogmatic regarding their authorship.
- vi) We affirm that although sources (oral or written) may have been used in the composition of the Pentateuch, they have been

thoroughly integrated under Mosaic supervision and that the Pentateuch as a whole (except for minor inspired editorial updating) is of Mosaic origin.

- vii) We affirm that all literature which bears an Old Testament prophet's name and is cited by the New Testament as being from that prophet, is indeed composed (with exception of minor inspired editing) by the said prophet. Thus, Isaiah son of Amoz wrote the book of Isaiah.

b) New Testament

- i) We affirm the historical reliability of the synoptic gospels and that they present the truth of Jesus' life and message without alteration, although also being documents that are theological in nature.
- ii) We affirm the reliability of the Acts of the Apostles and its ability to be harmonized both theologically and historically with the letters of the New Testament.
- iii) We affirm that all the letters which claim to be written by an apostle in the New Testament are indeed written by the said apostle.
- iv) We reject any understanding that Jesus was mistaken about the coming of the kingdom of God in his own lifetime or that his apostles were mistaken in being certain of his return within their lifetime.
- v) We reject the use of pseudonymity in any form in the New Testament.
- vi) We affirm that the book of Hebrews, although traditionally attributed to Paul, is formally anonymous, and so we cannot be dogmatic about its authorship.