

Sooner or later, you have to choose between the Bible and inerrancy

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A discussion I've been part of on Facebook illustrates something that I have said before on numerous occasions: ultimately, for those approaching the Bible as a sacred text, one has to choose between showing respect for the Bible above all, or giving ultimate authority to a doctrine of Biblical inerrancy.

This was illustrated in a discussion of the genealogies in Matthew and Luke. The two do not agree between David and Joseph. The most common approach to harmonizing them is to claim that one of them is Mary's genealogy.

But that is *not* what the text says. Both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke explicitly say that they are giving Joseph's genealogy.

And so this provides a nice test case for my point about the incompatibility of inerrancy and giving one's ultimate respect to the Bible. If one is committed above all else to a doctrine of Biblical inerrancy, then you will be forced not just in this particular instance, but time and time again, to sacrifice what the Bible actually says in order to harmonize texts. Those two Gospels can say explicitly and unambiguously that they are giving Joseph's genealogy. But you will deny that they mean what they say, in order to insist that both are right – even though, ironically, you are in fact saying that one of them, taken at face value, is wrong. And so with the very sword you picked up to try to defend your doctrine of the Bible, you do damage to the Bible, cutting off anything that is a threat to your doctrine.

Inerrancy is not and can never be a doctrine that respects the Bible. It is a framework imposed on the Bible and which is antithetical to giving the Bible respect, to say nothing of authority.

As [I shared in a quote by Theodore Vial earlier this month](#), there are Christians who claim to be committed to inerrancy and the literal truth of the Bible, but the two inevitably conflict, and when they do, it is the latter that is sacrificed at the altar of the former.

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