Giving Up Biblical Inerrancy

What is the Bible and what is it not?

Biblical inerrancy is a modern theological construct.
The systematic doctrine of a completely error-free Bible was formally articulated in the 20th century. It is not a category the Bible itself uses to describe itself.

Inerrancy typically assumes complete accuracy in every dimension of Scripture.
Depending on the theological framework, it claims the Bible is historically, scientifically, theologically, and morally without error.

"Inerrant" is the wrong category for Scripture.
The Bible speaks of inspiration, authority, and God's action in history, not of modern scientific or historical errorlessness. Calling it "inerrant" forces it into a framework it never claimed.

The Bible developed over time, it did not drop from heaven.
From oral traditions to handwritten manuscripts to gradual canon formation, Scripture emerged within living communities of faith over centuries.

The power of the Bible does not rest on its alleged errorlessness, but on its witness.
Its authority lies in its testimony to God's work in history, not in functioning as a scientifically or historically flawless document.

The contradictions in Scripture dispute the idea of strict inerrancy.
Different accounts such as those about divorce (Deut. 24:1-2; Mark 10:11-12; 1 Cor. 7:15), Judas' death (Matt. 27:3-10; Acts 1:18), or who caused David to take a census (2 Sam. 24; 1 Chr. 21) show that the Bible does not always present a perfectly harmonized version of events. These differences suggest that the authors were focused on theological meaning rather than modern factual precision.

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Discussion Round:

- If something extraordinary and real and compelling was happening in human history, how would it have been written down?
- Before tonight, what did you expect the Bile to be? A rulebook? A history textbook? A science book? A spiritual guide?
- When you hear that the Bible contains contradictions or multiple perspectives, does that weaken your trust in it, strengthen it, or simply raise more questions?

The right and wrong way to read the Bible.

The Core Insight

The main issue is not the Bible itself, but how it is interpreted.
No one simply "reads" Scripture, every reading is shaped by interpretive lenses formed by culture, experience, upbringing, and assumptions.
The question is not whether we interpret, but which lenses we choose.

Harmful Lenses:

Literalism: Treats every passage as modern historical or scientific reporting, ignoring genre and context.

Moralism: Reduces the Bible to a rulebook of right and wrong, detached from its larger redemptive story.

Apocalypse (Fear Lens): Focuses on end-times anxiety and destruction rather than renewal and hope.

Hierarchy: Uses Scripture to justify power structures that elevate some and burden others.

If our interpretation repeatedly crushes the vulnerable what does that say about the lens we're using?

Healthy Lenses

Jesus-Centered: Interpret Scripture through the life and character of Jesus.

Context: Consider genre, audience, historical and cultural background.

Flourishing: Ask whether the interpretation promotes life, dignity, and wholeness.

Fruitfulness: Evaluate by the outcome: Does it produce love, peace, and justice, or fear and exclusion?
To honor Scripture, we must read it consciously, responsibly, and in community, choosing lenses that reflect the heart of Christ.

Notes:

Further Reading:

(a.k.a. the books your pastor keeps recommending)

- Better ways to read the Bible by UMC Pastor Zach Lambert
- What is the Bible? By Former pastor Rob Bell