

# The Authority of Scripture

by Mark Dever

I remember a few years ago, I was talking to a friend who had just come to a college christian fellowship he'd been excited about going to.

So I asked, "Well how was the time?"

Well, he was kind of downcast. Sad looking. He said, "Well it was kind of disturbing."

And I said, "Well why is that?"

He said, "Well for about an hour we stood there and sang and prayed and cried out to God to speak to us. And that was really the whole meeting. And then we left. The whole time we were doing that, I noticed people's Bibles were laying around on their chairs closed. No one spoke from the Bible. They never opened their Bibles. They didn't look and see what God's word said."

What's going on? Well I think among the rising generation of people that consider themselves christians there is a growing fascination with this life as opposed to the next, with the variety of ways we express ourselves with Christ as our example, and with the importance of our own good works. But previous generations have seen such emphasis before. 50 years ago J. I. Packer summarized the theological liberalism of the last century. This liberalism, he said, swept away entirely the gospel of supernatural redemption of sinners by God's sovereign grace. It reduced to grace to nature, divine revelation to human reflection, faith in Christ to following his example, and receiving new life to turning over a new leaf. It turned supernatural Christianity into one more form of natural religion--a thin mixture of morals and mysticism.

My friend, the questions before you today are: "What do you believe? What will you do?" How will you answer those questions? The question of authority is a vital one for all christians. You read your New Testament and you see that clearly. You see that in the way the apostle Paul rebukes the Galatians for even beginning to listen to and heed a message that is false. In Jesus' own ministry he warned again and again about the danger of blind guides or of ferocious wolves who would be dressed up in sheeps clothing.

Packer again: "The problem of authority is the most fundamental problem that the Christian church ever faces." This is because Christianity is built on truth. That is to say, on the content of a divine revelation. Christianity announces salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, in and through whom that revelation came to completion. But faith in Jesus Christ is possible only where the truth concerning him is known. So what should we believe? What should we do? This is the issue of authority. It effects everything we think or do. It will do that today.

Now, the earliest Christians were taught to believe the Bible, to trust the Bible, as their authority. Rival ideas of what should be our authority have grown up. The two leading ones being the ever changing tradition of the church and our own subjective reason and experience. Christians continue to understand and insist that the Scripture is and must be our authority.

Now what we want to do with this time together is to consider a little more thoroughly and carefully how it is that we can have such confidence and what that confidence means. Now before i go any further i want to suggest just a few good books. Alright, bibliography time, three books. If you are interested in this topic, write them down. Of the three im going to tell you, three of these are very good. And I want you just to consider trying not to pay for a copy to let it stay and live in your house, but actually open it and read it. Maybe if you just take one a decade, then over the next 30 years, you could have read all three of these books, and they will be worth you taking that time to read them.

First, FF Bruce, *“The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?”*: If you have particular questions about how do we actually think we have the same thing that was written down, this is the book for you.

Second, J.I. Packer, *“Fundamentalism and the Word of God”*: It may seem like a strange title. It had to do with a dispute going on in the 1950's in the times of London and the correspondence section. This little 150 page book is extremely good about laying out the basic ways Christians look at authority. Is it Scripture? Is it reason? Is it tradition? And he lays it out biblically, theologically, historically, superbly.

Third, John Winnom, *“Christ and the Bible”*: This one basically says, you should trust the Bible because Jesus did. That's its thesis. But I would encourage you to read it. I have to say, unlike the other two, this one is out of print. But, a couple of things on that. There are libraries and now that we have amazon and you can immediately go to books out of print, buying an out of print book is as easy as buying an in print book. I would commend all three of these books to you.

## **Part One: The Reliability of Scripture**

Behind the question of the authority of Scripture is the question of the reliability of Scripture. So, i want to first consider the question of the reliability of the Bible, and then turn to the question of its authority. So first we will consider the apologetic question of the reliability of the Bible. and then the question, the theological question, “Is the Bible to be our authority?” So, you might want to think of it like this: In my first question, i want to talk to those who are here who are not Christians, or those of you who are here who are Christians, but you are really struggling with doubts about this. You have always been told you should believe the Bible, but you're not quite sure how you can do that. Then in the second half of the message, I want to speak to those of you who

are Christians and who are wondering, “Well what does the Bible teach about this?” I’ll spend more time talking to you, then.

Alright, first, certainly some people deny, or at least question, our ability to rely on the Bible for truth. They question the reliability of the Bible. They wonder, how can we honestly receive such a book as this as an authority in our lives.

Let me begin by saying I certainly don’t know everything about the Bible. I don’t know where Eric got that thousands of years statistic. I don’t think it’s true. I was in school for a long time, but not that long! I don’t understand everything about the Bible. I’m sure that in a crowd this size, there are those of you that have questions that you’ve thought about that have never even occurred to me. But I think there are things that we can consider together that might be helpful to you because I was someone who at one point, in my life, for years, denied the reliability of the Bible. I would informally argue against Christians. And through continued study, I became somebody who, by God’s grace believes in the reliability of the Bible. And so maybe there are a few thoughts that I can share with you, that you would find useful.

There is a lot to cover in this topic. I mean, being from DC, I’m going to give you like one of the quick tours of this topic. You know, we see people who do DC in a day or three hours. We are going to do this question in about 10-15 minutes. But here we go, the reliability of the Bible.

And just a note to my skeptical friends here: I would encourage you, as you are trying to understand what we Christians believe about the Bible, why we trust it like we do, to concentrate on the Gospels. Concentrate on the Gospels. Don’t run around through the Old Testament looking at every king, or in the book of Revelation trying to figure it out. Concentrate on Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Because if you find that they are historically reliable and if you find that what they claim is actually true--Jesus is God incarnate--then you will find there are other ways to establish the authority of the rest of the Bible. That will save you a lot of time. So rather than digging through everything, if you’re a skeptic, let me encourage you to go to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and put your time into studying them and particularly, Jesus Christ. That, I think, will be your key to understanding the truth of the Bible and how we Christians understand it.

Now, when somebody asks the question, “Is the Bible reliable?” Over the years I’ve talked with people about this. I think that there are four different components about that. Four different things they may mean. Let me address each of those briefly in turn.

### **1) What about different translations and Interpretations?**

First, when some people say, is the Bible really reliable, they’re referring to all the different translations and interpretations. When you’ve got the ESV and the King James. You’ve got the NIV and the NASB. You’ve got The Message and The New Living Translation. I’ve had non-Christians sometimes speak to me and say, “Which Bible?” as kind of the knowing climax of their argument. “Which Bible?!” And I understand. I mean if you’re not a Christian, if you’re not brought up looking at that

whole evangelical section I understand how that could be confusing. My simple response to this is that all the different translations should not cause you to miss the fact that translation is possible.

We actually have a lot of good translations of the Bible. You know how a translation, a major committee translation, like the ESV or the NIV or the NASB, you know how they happen? You have scholars from every English speaking country in the world, and different denominations, and they work for a decade or two. Translating and arguing with each other in committees. Going through structures of review and review again and review again. All to get what you get by simply paying 20 bucks for a Bible. There have been decades of labor that go into all of what you would call the major committee translations. With excellent translations.

We rely on translations in all of life. I have friends in our congregation who are lawyers, and they do commercial law. They do contract law with corporations from other countries doing multi-billion dollar deals, and they have to translate all of these legal contracts. But you know what? It gets done. People understand the same thing, it works. So, if your confusion is over why are there so many different Bibles, they're different translations and they all say the same thing.

There's a lot more we could say about that. But if you are here and you are skeptical, I don't want you to be confused by the way we have different translations. Because if you stand there, and you look up John 3:16 in four different translations, you'll find the point is clearly the same.

## **2) Is the Bible today the same as what was written down all those years ago?**

Number two. Often when people ask, "Is the Bible really reliable?" What they're really asking is, "Is this really what was written down all those years ago?! So, let's say, I'll give you we can translate, but I'm wanting to know what we've translated. This document here in Hebrew. Or this document in Greek. Is what's being translated into English, really the same thing that was written down all those centuries ago?"

It's a good question. The answer is yes. It is the same thing. We have texts of the Bible far more older than even your grandmother's copy of the King James. We have texts of the Bible that go back into the 19th century. Into the 18th century. We've got texts of the Bible that you can see and hold from the 17th century. Even the 16th century. We've got them from the 15th and the 14th century. We've got them from the 13th and the 12th century. We've got them from the 11th and the 10th century.

Now, here's what you're thinking: "Well so what? This was still centuries after these books were written." Friends we've got poetics from Aristotle. We have one copy, and the copy we have was written 1500 years after Aristotle wrote that. I can tell you as a historian, we have an amount of evidence for the New Testament that is unheard of when dealing with ancient documents.

We have copies of the Bible from the 9th century. From the 8th century. From the 7th century. From the 6th century. From the 5th century. From the 4th century. Do you know how much survives from the 4th century in writing? Not much. We have copies of the Bible from the 3rd century. We have copies of the Bible from the 2nd century! Now, do you know when we think that the latest books of the Bible were written? I don't know, maybe 80 A. D.? Do you know what the earliest copy we have of the New Testament portion is? From about 130 A.D.

I can tell you as a historian, that there are no other books that we study from the ancient world, where there is anything like the amount of evidence we have, that the thing that we're looking at and calling a certain book, is actually exactly what was written down. Because not only are the copies that we have old, we have so many of them. So, for example, for other books we may have one copy. Like of the *Poetics of Aristotle*. Of the New Testament alone, we have 22, 000 manuscripts of either the whole New Testament or whole books, or portions of the New Testament. 22,000 ancient manuscripts. Now if you've got a friend that studied classics at a university, you'll know there isn't anything else out there like this. That's not a Christian statement, that's a scholarly statement. There isn't anything else out there like this.

So, Eric gave you the litany of some of the schools I've been at. I can tell you at Duke and at Cambridge, well-known schools academically, in the Religion department for theological reasons, Scripture was often trashed. But in the History department, in the Classics department, where there wasn't a theological dog in the fight, the Bible is the gold standard. That's how you know that something is historically reliable. So, if, for example, Luke mentions a particular Roman office in the book of Acts. If you're a classic historian, you may be a Christian or Buddhist or of some other religion, you'll know that that office existed, because that is about the best historical evidence you can have. Not because of Christian faith, just because you're a good historian. And you realize that the track record of reliability, of things that have first been questioned, but then in scholarship has continued and people have found out, you know, he was holding that office at that time in the very year Luke represented it. We just found this stone that has his name on it. That happens in archaeology with the study of the Bible again and again. So, basically, what I want to say to you here is what we have is substantially and essentially what was written.

### **3) I what was written down by the original authors accurate?**

Alright, a third question. People might say, "Okay I hear what you're saying. I certainly think we can translate things, okay and I take your point. What we have, that is basically what is translated from today was basically the same thing that was written down then. Okay, my question is, '*Was what was written down by the authors accurate?*'" Because sometimes people say they weren't written down immediately although, we don't know that.

We do tend to think in our culture that writing something down is safer than oral memory. And there are some ways in which that may be true. Thus, God has his word committed to writing. But it's also true that in the modern west, we're not familiar with

the power of memory. Especially considering what ancient cultures were. So for us, it's amazing when our brother memorizes Psalm 19. And I would commend you to do that. But there are people in the world today, in other cultures especially, who have memorized vast amounts of text. I was re-watching recently Roots I and Roots II, and at the end of Roots II Al Haley goes back to West Africa to find the particular tribe that his people had come from. What he finds is this sort of village historian, the person who, in his head, can remember back generation to generation to generation to the one who was actually captured and taken as a slave over to North America in the 18th century. So, that kind of memory is a known thing in the world. Rabbis; teachings in Jewish cultures in the first century were memorized.

#### **4) Is the Bible historically reliable?**

So, it's certainly possible that people can remember things for a year or ten years and then commit them to writing. People might say, "Of course it's possible, I should have used a different word. I know it's possible, but is it really probable that these things are? These people had a point of view. After all, they were propagandists. They had a point they wanted to make."

I love the story of Winston Churchill in the House of Commons one afternoon. He was attacking a certain aspect of government policy, and referring to Stanley Baldwin, who was the Prime Minister then, Churchill declared, "History will say that the honorable gentleman was wrong in this matter..." and after a brief pause he added, "I know it will, because I shall write the history." Well, some people ask, "Is the Bible really reliable? Can we responsibly take the Bible as our authority?"

They know full well the integrity of the text before them. What they are asking is, "Is what's here really accurate? Is this really what happened?" People want to know about the New Testament. Is this a reliable, historical record? Or is it like the historical writing Churchill was going to do? To take a bunch of deliberately, manipulated facts and turn it into propaganda. That's a fair question. It's not wrong to ask that question.

My first piece of advice to you would be, if you find yourself doubting the historical reliability of these documents, I think the responsible thing to do would be to try to ask yourself "Why? Why do you doubt the reliability?" And try to be very honest with yourself and then isolate those concerns specifically and investigate them. A few specific concerns I may perhaps be able to allay a little bit. Christians are used to questions. That's not new to us. Some other religions are just beginning to experience the enlightenment, and having their holy books questioned. We've been having this done for 6 or 7 centuries now.

There have been occasions where the Bible has been ridiculed in large parts of academia, but then it's vindicated by archaeological finds. And that's been true with a person who was a procurator. That's been true with someone who's been involved with the city government of Corinth. That's been true with the Hittite empire. There have been things with secular scholarship, because they haven't had archaeological finds outside of the Bible, have mocked, and then what happens is we get an archaeological

find and its the very name that we know, from the very time period it should be. There is just a relentless traffic in archaeology confirming the Bible. The Bible is clearly historical. And when you read it, it's clearly concerned about historicity. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:16, "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

When you come to the Bible, if you're used to reading other holy books, you will be surprised at the concern these writers take about being historically accurate. That's a mark of Christianity. Luke, in the beginning of his gospel, tells us that, "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of these things that have been fulfilled among us. Just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word. Therefore, since I, myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good for me to write an orderly account for the most excellent Theophilus. So, that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." And as you continue to read through Luke's gospel in particular, you see that his care even extends to these things like Roman, political offices. In Luke 3:1 you can see an example of that.

Another example of this that Christians seem to stub their toe on and don't really think about it very well, is in 1 Corinthians 7. Maybe you've read those like verses in 10, 12 and 24 where Paul says, he'll refer to something that the Lord says, and then he'll say now I, not the Lord. And this has confused many a young Christians. Some have misunderstood this and thought that it was like Paul kind of had the inspiration spigot turned on for this, and then now...hold on...wait...no, I'm not getting anything from the Lord on this one right now. But I tell you this. The rest is inspiration, this is opinion. Well, that's not what it means at all. What Paul was doing there, he was referring by the "Lord's" to Jesus Christ, and particularly, do we we remember is there any written teaching on this topic that Christ gave us while he was with us on earth, bodily. So, when he says "the Lord" you can insert the word "Jesus." Do we have a teaching of Jesus on this? And so when he says I, not the Lord, he's not saying here's a grade level B of inspiration. Really do what you want with this one. No, what he is saying is, I don't think we have any teaching of Jesus on this, but I tell you. And that is exactly what Paul has been doing through the rest of the letter. He has, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, been instructing the church.

Now what I want you to note, is that so far where the early Christians, far from fabricating stories about Jesus, and making up these gospels, that even when Paul was writing a pastoral letter to a local church, not an academic place, but to a local church, he was concerned that Jesus Christ be represented exactly accurately. He did not want to fabricate anything. He wanted to be specific about whether or not we actually had an account of Jesus of Nazareth teaching on this particular topic. Why? Because God is a God of truth. He's concerned about truth. And you will find this concern for historicity is common in the writings of the New Testament. Paul did not want to create words of Christ. Historicity and accuracy are important when you worship the God whose Word is Truth.

Accuracy was clearly a concern of the original authors. And you see that in so many things. They record in aramaic words of Jesus on the Cross. Why? Perhaps because the cry was especially precious to them and dear. Perhaps because it was after they had just denied Christ. Those words were particularly emblazing. As they wrote them down, knowing they had happened, translating them into Greek for their heroes, they could not help but hear in their own memories, those words cried out in aramaic, "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?!" The New Testament is a book that is concerned with historical accuracy.

Oh, my non-christian friend, you are welcome to ask us questions about the accuracy of the text. The New Testament relays facts that would not have been fabricated. There are all kinds of things in the New Testament you would not make up if you were starting a religion. I mean the big thing would be a crucified Messiah--doesn't work with Judaism and its expectations. It's not what the Greeks were looking for. You simply wouldn't do that. But lots of little details even, like the fact that you have women as the first witnesses of the Resurrection, when Romans, Greeks and Jews all agreed that women's evidence was not allowed in court for important matters. Why would you then present women as the first witnesses of the Resurrection? Because God decided it would be that way. Because that's the way it happened.

The New Testament is not trying to fabricate something, it's trying to faithfully record what in fact did occur, whether or not it's comfortable or easy or sells well in the culture of the moment. So, there are all the tell tale signs of good history. That's why in all four gospels of the New Testament you'll see there are appeals to eyewitnesses. You go to Peter in Acts 2, he's even appealing to his enemies as eyewitnesses of the truth of what he is saying. This points up the fact that these documents are originated and were circulated in a time where claims to truly represent things could easily have been confuted. If the disciples were inaccurate to some of their claims, it would have been so easy for someone to come forward and say "Hey! That isn't true, look at this evidence! We have this counter testimony. We know that these things occurred. He wasn't there then. This never happened." But that's not what you see. It's very interesting, in early apologetics against Christianity, that people don't take on the fact of the Resurrection. That's the obvious thing to go for. Why not?! Well, it's just speculation, but I guess because just too many people knew it was true. Too many people knew it happened.

So, you can take on what it means, what it's significance is, but you can't take on the fact itself. You look at things like when the gospels show the faults of the people who would have been the leaders of the community when the gospels were written down. They show the competition between the disciples. Their flight when Jesus is arrested. Peter's denial. The times where they asked Jesus to perform miracles and he didn't. Accusations that Jesus was insane. Their own misunderstanding of who Jesus was. Jesus' confession of ignorance about the time of the end. Jesus' passionate feelings of anger or sadness. None of this stuff would you make up if you were trying to forge a good first century document to show the truth of Christianity. You and I would

likely edit out, delete, all kinds of stuff that these books have left in. Why is that? Because those things really happened. And these books are true. This is accurate. This is reliable.

This brings me to a further question about reliability. Some people may say, "I understand you can translate things, and I understand that what you are translating is basically the same thing that was written down 2000 years ago, and yes, I do hear what you are saying, that what they wrote down was accurate in the sense that they were recording what people really said. I guess my real question is what the Bible, correctly translated, and obviously it's been beautifully transmitted, and let's say it was accurately written down in a trustworthy fashion.....Is it true? Is this thing that Jesus actually claimed, is it true?" Now friend, that's the question you really want to spend your time on. All the other stuff, I can save you time, this is an accurate account. The question for your life is, "Is it true?"

Now, when I was not a Christian, what God finally used to sort of flip me on that is looking at these kind of questions. I loved history. And as I went back and began to look I thought well this great world religion had to come from some place. It's not just a philosophy. Not just a way to look at life. And so I looked back to earlier centuries and earlier and finally got back to the disciples, as they are recounted in the book of Acts. Then I read through the gospels. I believed the things that were not supernatural-- thinking there is nothing wrong with a rabbi who walked around Judea and he had disciples.

But what began to stump me was the disciples. I couldn't understand as an agnostic reading this, why these disciples, who were following Jesus around for three years, but then when the rabbi was lashed all fled because they didn't want to get caught up in it. Why a few days later, did they all start telling this strange story, and they all tell the same story, about their Rabbi being raised from the dead. Why did they do that? They clearly were terrified. They clearly did not understand this during the three years of Jesus' ministry. Again and again he would tell them, I'm going to be crucified and raised from the dead. And it's like they don't even hear them. They don't understand. Why is it all of a sudden, they start telling this story? And then, they don't just hang around in Jerusalem, and build some psychologically, self forming community, where they can all keep telling themselves, "We believe the fable. We believe the fable. We believe the fable." But they scatter all across the world! From England to Russia to India, deep into Africa, telling this same strange story and almost all of them are killed for telling this story. Well, let's at least grant them sincerity. They must have at least thought it was true. Why did they think it was true?! Why would they think such a crazy thing? That a man got up from the dead.

Well, when I was reading this, I wasn't an atheist. I was always very proud of the fact that I wasn't an atheist. I considered atheism a poor position intellectually. Atheism makes this absolute claim, there is no God when it admits it has no source of absolute knowledge. So I always thought Christians were smarter than Atheists. At least Christians think there is a God that has spoken to them. Thus, they can make absolute

statements. But atheists, they're making it just out of the blue. They've got nothing. No offense to atheists present, but that's what I thought. I always thought agnosticism was the very intelligent position. Agnosticism was the, "Do tell. Really? Could be! Perhaps. You know there are some good reasons for that. Have you read this?" And that's the way I read the New Testament. I was an agnostic. I was, "Well it could be. I don't know. How can one really know that?" But what I was confronted with, is I kept studying. If I wanted to be honest with myself, was the fact that something had happened in history. Not just somebody's idea, but in history. Something had happened that I had no good explanation for.

As I read the gospels and kept editing out the supernatural in my mind, I thought, "Why would they do this with just a rabbi, what is going on? What could have happened?" And then I realized, i was reading the gospels as if I were an atheist. As if I knew there was no supernatural. As if I knew this couldn't have happened the way it was written. And so I thought, "Okay, I don't know there is not a God. And I guess there could be a God even of the Bible. Alright, Ill read Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts as if it's all true. Because I don't know it's not true." I had read it several times as if the supernatural stuff weren't true. "Okay, I'll be fair, I'll be the agnostic I'm proud of being. There could be a God like this, and he could have done this, and I'll read it."

And all I can say is at that point, reading through the gospels, God converted me. It became clear to me: "Oh my goodness! This is all true. This makes complete sense. Everything here makes sense now. History starts to make sense now. my life starts to make sense now. I am made in the image of God. I've sinned against him. That's why I feel like this. That's why I have this conscience and these guilt feelings. I don't deserve to be in this God's presence. I don't deserve to be accepted or loved by him. But He has undoubtedly loved me through what he's done in Jesus on the Cross. Dying, for me." So, I realized that I needed to repent of my sins, turn from them, and trust in this One as my Savior. Because I needed a Savior. And this is the only Savior there is. Praise God. Friends, that is the only way, finally you are going to come to believe in the reliability of the Bible in any way that will matter. It's interesting in the early church, the facts about Jesus' life, the facts aren't the center of controversy. It's the claims of who he was and what he was doing. And that's where you need to give your attention. Who was He?

So, just to summarize what I'm saying here, whether you are referring to a major translation of the text or the transmission of the text, or the trustworthiness of the text, or the truth of the text..I am convinced that the Bible is reliable.

Now, my Christian friends, you have been very patient, as I've tried to walk through my doubts and my questions with non-christian friends here, or those of you who are Christians who are asking questions. Now if you would let me turn and talk just to the Christians for a moment especially.

## Part Two: The Authority of Scripture

Christians, this should not surprise us at all, because theologically we understand that the Bible is to be our authority. We step inside the Scriptures as it were, and we see all of this. We see that it teaches us, it all fits. It all makes complete sense because the Bible tells us that there is a God, and that this God speaks! This is how God makes himself known. You know, we are intimidated today by the idea that our knowledge is incomplete. Our knowledge is partial. But friend, that's not a new idea with post-modernism. We've always understood that. That's the nature of human knowledge. Especially our knowledge of the infinite God of the Bible. But, just because I don't know everything, doesn't mean I don't know anything. And listen because some of you are being taught cruddy stuff in your philosophy classes at college. I want you to pretend like you're grade schoolers and repeat this sentence after me: "Just because I don't know everything, doesn't mean I don't know anything."

That's important because you've got people teaching you in philosophy who are saying, because you don't know everything, you can't know anything for certain. That is false. It's actually a root of a very satanic falseness at that. All of human knowledge works in truly knowing things, but knowing them partially. And with the Bible and Christianity we have even more than that. Because in 1 Corinthians 2, we see the Christian's knowledge of God is not built on our cleverness, on our ability, but on God himself communicating with us. Revealing himself to us. If there is anything that the Bible teaches us about God, it is that he is a personal God. That he is a communicating God. He made us in his image specifically so we could be receiver sets for Him. Specifically so we could know him. So he could reveal himself to us and so that we could truly know him. So, how deeply satanic is it for us to be being taught, we can't know anything truly at all. Don't you hear the hiss of the serpent in that? We are made in God's image so that we can know him! And we know Him not because we are clever, or we come to a good conference, or we read a good book but because God himself has decided that he will know us! And so Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2 that by His Spirit, he reveals himself to us. He takes the deep things from himself and reveals the truth about himself to us. Praise God that he's done that, that He has revealed himself in this way.

Now, warning, for the rest of the talk, there are going to be more Bible verses you could look up if you were a fundamentalist in a Bible sword drill. So, at this point in time, you just need to surrender. If you want to write down the references, feel free. But here we go. Im going to go over the Old Testament, the New Testament and finish with Jesus.

### Old Testament

Here we read in Exodus 24:4 that when the Lord would reveal Himself to his people He spoke, and Moses wrote down everything the Lord had said. Because the God of the Bible is a speaking God. From Genesis 1 when he speaks the World into being to Genesis 12 when He speaks out his promise and Abraham believes it, to this point in Exodus 24, to Ezekiel 37 where we have the vision of God speaking and bringing life to

the valley of dry bones, to John 1 where the word of God comes, made incarnate, to Romans 10 where we see that faith comes by hearing the message about Christ. That's how God brings life. He speaks.

Well, God, by his Spirit has inspired the Bible. All of it is His word infallible and inerrant. Now, as Christians, we understand that this conviction about the truthfulness and the reliability about the Scriptures, is what Christians before us had thought. This is the historical position on the Bible. This is Christianity. Look, you can grab Esther and Luke and Revelation and try to make your own religion. But that's not Christianity. This is Christianity, accepting this as the Word of God is fundamental to Christianity. If you're doing something else, it's another religion. This is what Christianity has always thought and understood. Follow the trail back. We find that this is completely consistent with how the Bible regards itself.

So we read in Deuteronomy 4: 1-2 “Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I command you.” In fact, there's a whole section in Deuteronomy 17 about how the king, when there is a king someday, is supposed to write down his own copy of God's laws and that he, the king should obey Scripture. He was writing out that copy so that he would always have one with him to keep and to read. That's what we find in Deuteronomy 17:19. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God, and follow carefully all the words of this law and its decrees. When Joshua succeeded Moses as the leader of the nation of Israel, he read all the words of the law to the whole assembly of Israel.

God's word has always been central to the life of God's people. So, we have Psalm 19 that we heard so well recited. That Psalm is a beautiful Psalm on God's word. Particularly, listen again to verses 7-10: “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, they are sweeter than honey. Than honey from the comb.”

The longest chapter in the Bible is, what? Okay, this is a very educated conference, Psalm 119. And do you know what that's all about, it's all about the Word of God. The whole thing is celebrating the Word of God. This is where we find many of the verses that are dearest to Christians about the Bible.

\_Psalm 119:11: “I have hidden Your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

\_Psalm 119:89 “Your word, O Lord is eternal, it stands firm in the Heaven.”

\_Psalm 119:05: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

\_Psalm 119:140: “Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.”

God's commands are things we Christians are to believe in. And we do. His word is something we obey. Isaiah tells us that the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. Friends, that's quickly the Old Testament.

### **New Testament**

Now, the New Testament. There are so many places that we could go to show the Apostle's understanding of Scripture's authority. So just for example, Acts 1:16, Peter says, "Brothers the Scripture had to be fulfilled. Which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as a guide for those who arrested Jesus." Then Peter goes on in Chapter 2 to explain the strange happenings on the day of Pentecost, by turning to the Scriptures. He goes to the prophecy of Joel to understand what was going on. Trusting the Scriptures is commended again and again.

So, in Acts 17:11 we read, "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures everyday to see if what Paul said was true." How can we tell if this guy is speaking truth? We will pick up the canon, the standard, the measuring ruler- the Scriptures, and we will judge it against it. And see, that way, if what he is saying is true. That's what we do if we believe in Jesus Christ. If we would be His followers. We read it.

Romans 15:4: "For everything that was written, was written in the past to teach us, that would be referring to the Scriptures, so that through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope." Do you realize that Bible study is one of the main things that can encourage you in your faith? It's one of the main ways that you are to be given hope. The Scriptures are prophetic by the command of the eternal God, Paul says in Romans 16. Their instructions are to be kept, as James says in James 2:8. In fact often New Testament writers will quote an Old Testament text introducing it with the simple words, God says. Even when God was not represented as the speaker in the passage quoted in the Old Testament.

So in Acts 4:25, Peter quotes from David in Psalm 2. But he says to God in prayer, You spoke, by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of your servant, our father David. That's Acts 4:25, now that's an interesting example. The primary cause is clearly God, but we also have what we call the secondary cause, David. Both God and David could rightly said to be the author of the words that are quoted there in prayer by Peter. They are no doubt what David meant to express, but they are also exactly what God wanted to have expressed in that situation. That's what we understand about the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. They are words of a human author, with intent at the time, but they are also so sovereignly super intended that they are also the words of God. Exactly what he desired written for our understanding and edification. Other times in the New Testament they will speak of God as if he were his word, or the Scriptures.

The point is clear that the earliest Christians understood the authority of God to be revealed to us in God's word and that God's word perfectly reflected God's own will. So, when Paul, at one point, is going to quote Genesis 12:3 about all nations being

blessed through this promise to Abraham and trust in God and his promise, Paul says when he quotes it in Galatians 3:8 that the Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham, and then he quotes Genesis 12:3. You see how Paul presents the Scriptures as having the attributes of God. For seeing God's plans and announcing them. That's because he understood that God was a God who revealed himself, who worked through His word.

We read in 2 Timothy 3:16, that, "All Scripture is God breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." You understand with me what he claims here, it is that all Scripture is breathed out by God's own Spirit. It is ultimately of His creation. Whatever humans may have been involved in the composition, its authority ultimately derives not from the human author as from the God who inspired them. The Divine Author who inspired his word. The sovereign God has decided to use human authors to record and proclaim His truth, and to graciously use his written word in our lives.

So we read in Hebrews 4:12, "For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Did you realize all that was going on when you read the Bible the morning in your quiet time? God is active in his word. You come to think, if you are going to be sufficiently awake or attentive, to pay attention to it. Oh, my friend, far more is going on than you realize. God is speaking to your soul. His Spirit is putting things in you that you may not even realize at the time. And He is raising questions with you that are going to recur to you through out the day and through out your life. The Word of God is active. God uses his word in our lives. He has fashioned in himself to do just that.

So we read in 2 Peter 1:20-21: "Above all you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the own prophets interpretation, for prophecy never had its origin in the will of man. But men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." And, oh by the way, this Scripture includes the New Testament. In John 16, Jesus had promised to give his Spirit to lead his disciples and to guide them into all truth. So in 2 Peter 3:15,16, Peter even refers to some of Paul's letters as Scripture. 2 Peter 3:15,16-In all this, the Bible is regarded as the Word of God. It's recognized as the Word of God.

Now, Jesus. If we are disciples of Christ, then we will follow Jesus' example in this. Jesus took the Bible to be true. He was brought up to be a Jew, a member of a religion that understood they were God's people. They were ruled by God's written Law. Jesus, rather than objecting to this or all through out the understanding of Scripture, accepted this and affirmed it. When Jesus was tempted by the Devil at the very beginning of his public ministry, he responded how? By quoting Scripture! And one of the Scriptures he quoted was Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Brothers and sisters,

even while he was quoting that He was exemplifying it. That's what believers do. We trust God in his word. We feed on it and are sustained by it.

In Matthew 5:17,18 Jesus says: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets, I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished." Another time Jesus spoke of his own words in that same way. He says in Luke 21:33: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will never pass away."

In Matthew 19:5, when Jesus is questioned on adultery...very interesting. He quotes the Creator, that's what He says. He quotes the Creator as saying, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two shall become one flesh." But then when you turn back to Genesis 2, and you find that statement in verse 24, it's not represented as being in the mouth of God. We simply find this statement written by the author of Genesis. But do you know who Jesus takes to be the author of Genesis beyond just Moses? The Creator. God, Himself. Jesus' assumption is that what Scripture says, God says. Listen to the way Jesus assumed the authority of Scripture in John 5:46,47: If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about Me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say? In John 10:35 He says in the middle of an argument of some teaching, and just in a side, a phrase, you see a bedrock assumption He makes. As a side he says, "And the Scriptures cannot be broken." It's not a long argument, He just informs you. "The Scriptures cannot be broken." This is a fundamental presupposition in the teaching of Jesus. The Scriptures cannot be broken.

The Lord Jesus' whole life was governed by what he understood Scripture to teach. As Jesus prayed in John 17, "Sanctify them by the truth, Your Word is truth." After His resurrection he was appearing to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and he said to them, "How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." Which means that Jesus clearly taught that everything the prophets said was to be believed. So He taught his disciples later in Luke 24:44, everything must be fulfilled that is written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Jesus knew the Scriptures were true and he taught us much.

Friends, when we believe the Bible, we are following the example of Christ. If I am a disciple of Jesus, he treated the Scriptures as the argument ending Word of God, Himself. If I am to be His disciple, I must treat Scripture as Jesus treated Scripture. That's how we know it's to be our authority as Christians. The Bible teaches truth. Through visions and poems and images and metaphors and proverbs and letters and historical narratives. God gives us truth about Himself. God teaches us by His word. The Bible is totally trustworthy, inerrant, our authority. It is sufficient to tell us all we need to know about Salvation and life in Christ. Normally we are to experience this fully sufficient authority of God's Word in the context of a health, local church--just as Eric was saying right before I came up--with elders who are gifted to understand and teach, and with a congregation in dwelt by his Holy Spirit, living out and studying and reading

and loving God's Word and caring for each other. In our own lives and in our churches, we are to live seeking God's truth in his word. We should regularly be being fed by faithful expositions of God's Word. That is where it is taken up and read and explained and applied. That's what should be happening every week in the weekly gathering with your congregation. And you should find that's reforming your beliefs, your understanding, and your living, and your actions, your practice by what you are finding in God's Word.

In Ephesians 5:10, we are told to find out what pleases the Lord. Why? Why should you listen to an hour long lecture on the authority of the Bible on Memorial Day weekend. Why? Why do you want to know what the Bible says? Well friends, if you think God exists and if you think this is actually His Word, if you want to please Him, then it makes sense that you can find out how to do that by studying His Word. What has He said about himself? What has he said about us? What has he said about his will for us? Why do we study the Bible, just to know it? Just so we can be the one at the Bible study who answers all the questions? No, that's not why we study the Bible. We study the Bible because, yes, as Christians we want to know it but we want to know it in order to change. In order to be transformed increasingly into the image of Christ. As Martin Luther said, "You cannot read too much in Scripture. And what you read, you cannot read too carefully. And what you read carefully you cannot understand too well. And what you understand well, you cannot teach too well. And what you teach well, you cannot live too well."

Friends, this is not optional for us, as Christians. One danger for the kind of people who would take their Memorial Day to come to a conference like this, is that you'll think it's a big deal for you to know Scripture even if you never put it into practice. And that's a very, very dangerous illusion. If you are not a Christian, you don't need to listen to this part, this is just for the Christians. Listen, if you think you are following Jesus. If you collect his words like a butterfly collector collects butterflies, but you don't put them into practice, be very careful you are not deceiving yourself. Spend some time today opening up your life to a good friend. Be honest about what's going on. Jesus in Matthew 7:24-27 says: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, [we know they are His words, we accept them as that], and puts them into practice, is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew, beat against the house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the Rock. But, everyone who hears the words of Mine [you know they are His words, you accept them as that], and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down and the streams rose and the winds blew, and beat against that house and it fell with a great crash."

Christians live by realizing that God changes us by his Holy Spirit. And what is the main means his Spirit uses? His Word. It's inspired for us. That's what we have been seeing through this study. So, what is the authority for our lives? God's Word. So, we can say with the Psalmists' in Psalm 119, "All Your Words are true. All Your righteous laws are eternal." And if this is true, are we not to believe what Scripture teaches? Are we not to do whatever Scripture instructs? Scripture is our authority.

Long ago, and far away, I was lecturing in a church in London. I was giving a Saturday long series of lectures on Puritanism. So, if you are wondering if there is anything more obscure than you sitting here listening to a lecture on the Bible on Memorial Day weekend, it might be throwing away a normal Saturday in the basement of a church, listening to a series of lectures on Puritanism. At one point in these lectures, I would simply mention have any of you ever seen in eastern England these iron pieces that come out from the end of a pulpit, and then come up and have a circle right here? And a few people lifted up their hands. Anybody know what they are? Nobody knew what they were. There was no reason they should have known. Well, those were actually gifts of the congregation that would have been given to the preacher. And it's almost certain that it would have been from the late 16th century. So, 1570, 1580. And I said that they were hour glass holders. They were there to hold the hour glass. Because the preacher would be given either one or two turns of the hour glass in which to preach. Gasps came forth from the assembled crowd. One person shouted out, "What time was there left for worship?!" And when I heard that question, I thought in part of my own heart, and how much I misunderstand and ignore God's Word.

I thought of the Reformation and what it was about, and I said, "Ah, friend, these Christians in 1570 or 1580 in England, when they gathered to hear God's Word, when they would even take up money and make up a gift of something like this for the preacher, you realize that there would probably be some of them their in the congregation old enough to remember the smell of burning flesh of people who were burned alive for translating God's Word into English. They were desperate to hear what God has said. They knew God had existed, but they didn't know what He said! They didn't know what He desired, what pleased Him. No one had taught them. And so if they could sit there and be instructed for one hour or two hours or three hours in what this God had said, they couldn't imagine a greater way of worshipping Him than hearing his word, and being transformed in their whole lives by it."

Friends, that's what goes on. Do you realize that even while we're meeting, I'm pretty sure that Christians are being tortured. Not for an ethnic reason, not because they are part of a Christian ethnicity, but because they are Christians. In Aretria, in Burma... Friend you have a privilege of meeting here right now. Your home congregation has a privilege of meeting around God's Word to hear what God says that generations before you had not had. That many people today do not have. And frankly, people half my age, it's a privilege, I can tell you I don't know how long you will have. I've seen things happen in my life, changes in our culture, that if you had told anybody about it in the year that I was born, you would have been speaking jibberish. They wouldn't have thought a whole culture could change fundamental assumptions in the way we've changed them. You think, "Mark, it's unthinkable that we ever wouldn't have our Bibles. And 15 different translations available in every store to read whenever we wanted and to have assemblies taught on whatever we wanted!" You only say that because you haven't traveled enough. Because you haven't read enough history. Because you don't know the depths of evil in your own heart well enough.

Friends, I don't know how long we will have the privilege of being able to study God's Word like we have right now. We have no promise about how long that privilege will remain. We know the Church will survive, and will in some ways thrive in Christ until he returns. But we don't know the favorable circumstances that we'll be under. And if anything, as I read my New Testament, it seems like persecution increases as time goes on. What use will you make of God's Word? Is His Word precious to you like this?

Let me conclude by leading us in prayer from the very end of Psalm 119. Some wonderful truths about the precious Word of God: "May my cry come before You, Oh Lord. Give me understanding according to Your Word. May my supplication come before you. Deliver me according to Your Promise. May my lips overflow with praise. For You teach me Your decrees. May my tongue sing of Your Word. For all of Your commands are righteous." Amen.