

Even the Devil Believes the Bible

by John Piper

The glory of God seen in Scripture is both the goal of the soul's satisfaction and the ground of the soul's certainty, and this is the key to understanding why ordinary people can know the Bible is true.

Duration: 46:49

Scripture: Psalm 19:1, Isaiah 64:4, John 1:12, Romans 1:19-21, 2 Corinthians 4:4-6

Topics: "Biblical Authority", "Divine Revelation"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing the divine glory in the Scriptures as a means to confirm their truthfulness and authenticity. It draws parallels between seeing the glory of God in creation, in Jesus Christ, and in the gospel, to understanding and affirming the truth of the Bible. The speaker highlights the need for God to open our spiritual eyes to perceive His glory in the Scriptures, leading to a well-grounded confidence in the Word of God.

Transcript

Let's pray one more time. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. The wisdom that is from above is first pure.

So God, we want to be wise and we want to see you. So make us pure, I pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

I thought I might begin this talk by affirming that the devil could be a member of the evangelical theological society. And the reason I thought that might be true is because you only have to affirm two things to be a member here. The Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the word of God, written, and is therefore inerrant in the autographs.

And God is a trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory. And I've often said, and I still believe, that the devil is doctrinally more orthodox than most evangelicals. And the difference is that he hates almost everything he affirms in the Bible.

So I thought perhaps he could be a member of ETS because he could affirm these truths. But on second thought, I don't think so. I don't doubt that the devil affirms the existence of the Trinity as much as he hates the beauty of it.

But I do doubt that the devil affirms the inerrancy of Scripture. And the reason is that the Scripture affirms not just the truth of things, but the value of things. Oh, how precious is your steadfast love, oh God.

I don't think the devil affirms that truth. The devil does not agree with that. And which of the following affirmations would he agree with? The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More are they to be desired than gold, even much fine gold, and sweeter than honey and drippings from the honeycomb.

I don't think the devil can affirm any of those, or does affirm any of those statements. The Word of God restores true life, makes wise, gives the best joy, enlightens the eyes, surpasses the value of gold, is sweeter to the soul than honey to the tongue. I don't think so.

Which has this important implication for membership in ETS. What keeps the devil out and keeps us in is the connection between the truth of the Word and the beauty and preciousness of what it reveals, not just its truth. What keeps him out and us in is the connection between affirming the truth of the Word and the Trinity and treasuring the value of the Word and the Trinity.

The devil wants to break that connection. We don't, right? What keeps the devil out and keeps us in is that we treasure the glory of the Trinitarian God as revealed in Scripture. He does not.

For us, the glory of the Trinitarian God revealed in Scripture is a source of great joy. We don't just declare it to be true. The devil does that.

We delight in the glory of the Trinitarian God. The glory of God is the ground of our joy, and that's the most important difference between us and the devil. Now, the connection between that and where we're going in this address is this.

I've devoted most of my life to trying to understand and proclaim and live the relationship between God's glory and human happiness. That's what I've spent most of my time doing is trying to figure that out, preach it, live it, write about it. And I've argued on countless occasions that not only were we made to be supremely satisfied in the glory of God, but this satisfaction itself is the way that God's glory is seen to shine most brightly.

The greatness of the glory of God is what makes us supremely glad. And our supreme gladness in the glory of God is what makes the greatness of His glory shine in the world. If you strip out of Christianity, treasuring the glory, delighting in the glory, valuing the glory, being satisfied in the glory, it disappears from the church.

What I have not spent much time on is giving an account of why I am warranted to spend a lifetime basing so many claims about ultimate reality on a book, the Bible. Though I have said over and over, if you can't see what I say in the Bible, it has no claim on you. But for the last three years, that's what I've been thinking about.

Namely, that the glory of God seen in Scripture is both the goal of the soul's satisfaction and the ground of the soul's certainty. The glory of God in Scripture proves itself not only to be incomparably rewarding to the heart, but inescapably real to the mind. The quest for truth and the quest for joy are the same quest.

The path to unshakable conviction and the path to unending contentment are the same path. Knowing for sure and rejoicing forever happen by the same discovery of the glory of God in the Bible. The way you know for sure what is true and the way you find everlasting happiness is the same, namely, by seeing the peculiar glory of God in the Word of God with Jesus Christ and His saving work as the clearest expression of it.

40 years ago, when I was 30, Jonathan Edwards sowed the seed that finally grew into a published plant, namely, *A Peculiar Glory, How the Christian Scriptures Revealed Their Complete Truthfulness*. So what I want to do in our few minutes together is invite you into the process of my thinking that led me to this peculiar way of articulating the ground of my confidence in Scripture. Now notice, I did not say that I'm inviting you into the process of my thinking that led me to confidence in Scripture.

I said I'm inviting you in to the process of my thinking that led to this particular way of articulating my confidence in Scripture because I was confident in Scripture when I was seven years old. And have never not been confident in Scripture. So I'm not inviting you into the process of thinking of a seven-year-old.

Get the difference? It's owing to the very nature of the ground of that confidence that makes it possible to be confident with a genuinely warranted, well-grounded confidence when you are seven and yet not render a full articulation of that ground until you're 70. It's owing to the nature of the ground of the confidence that makes that possible. It's like knowing that I could see when I was seven and then writing a theory of light and a physiology of the eye when I'm 70.

Off and on then for the last four decades since Edward sowed this seed in the religious affections, section four, I have pondered, prodded by Edwards, how can ordinary, uneducated, childlike, even primitive people know the Bible is true? That the message about Christ and His saving work in it is true. I'm not, even today, mainly driven by trying to answer modern skeptics. I want to know, how do children know it's true? I want to know how a Muslim villager in South Sudan or a preliterate people in the mountains of Papua New Guinea, three weeks after they hear its message, can, without being fools, die for it? I think that's a vastly more important question than how to answer a Richard Dawkins or Hitchens or whoever.

Though I'm so glad those of you who write those answers write them, because those kinds of things had an important place in my pilgrimage. This is not what moves me today or has mainly all the way along. I want to know how those people and that child know that the Bible is true.

How can they know it with such a certainty that three weeks into their walk with Christ, they will die for it and not be idiots? Which clearly, the Bible assumes they can. The answer that I have tried to unfold in these last couple of years is that there is a divine glory, a peculiar glory, a spiritual glory, not a physical one, a distinguishing spiritual beauty. These are very Edwardsian terms.

I think they are unbelievably helpful. There is a peculiar glory that shines through the meaning of the Scriptures that shows it to be the Word of God. And this divine glory can be seen for what it really is by the eyes of the heart.

That's a phrase from Ephesians 1.18. And you should devote much energy in your soul to knowing what they are in you, the eyes of your heart that really see different than this. It's huge, huge for the world, for churches, for how you teach, for how you study. So you need to know what are the eyes of your heart and how do they function and what do they see differently than these see.

Because this is a biblical category, not just an Edwardsian one. So to shed light on how this works, let me mention two historical pointers that pushed me this direction and then three biblical analogies to try to persuade you that this way of articulating the ground of our confidence is biblical. So historical pointer number one, Jonathan Edwards.

1751 to 1758, Edwards was a pastor in Stockbridge, Massachusetts after he had been let go from his other pastorate. And he's a missionary to Indians there. And his concern for the evangelization of the Indians extended back 10 years earlier to when he was writing or preaching on the religious affections in response to the revivals.

And here's what he wrote. This is what I read 40 years ago that set me on this trajectory off and on. Miserable is the condition of the Housatonic Indians and others who have lately manifested a desire to be instructed in Christianity if they can come at no evidence of the truth of Christianity sufficient to induce them to sell all for Christ in any other way than historical reasoning.

In other words, if the only way to come to a confidence in this book is by sophisticated historical reasoning, miserable are the Housatonic Indians who can't even read. So what's the alternative then? And he answers, thus a soul may have a kind of intuitive knowledge of the divinity of the things exhibited in the gospel, not that he judges the doctrines of the gospel to be from God without any argument or deduction at all, but it is without any long chain of arguments. The argument is but one, and the evidence direct.

The mind ascends to the truth of the gospel, but by one step. And that is its divine glory. That's pretty heady for a 30-year-old to read.

Wow. It's epic making. And then he finishes like this, unless men may come to a reasonable, solid persuasion and conviction of the truth of the gospel by the internal evidences of it, namely by a sight of its glory, tis impossible that those who are illiterate and unacquainted with history should have any thorough or effectual conviction of it at all.

What a claim. So Edwards is arguing that the path to a well-grounded, zero leap in the dark here, leaps in the dark honor the dark, not the light. I'm not into getting glory for darkness or heroic leaps.

I'm into glorifying light, right? It's what we're about. You don't honor the light by leaping in the dark. So that's not what he's talking about at all.

Edwards is arguing that a path to well-grounded conviction of the truth of the gospel and the scriptures that tell the story of the gospel is a path that a seven-year-old John Piper, a Sudanese villager, a Papua New Guinea tribesman can follow. It's a path they can follow. It's a path that anyone can follow who has eyes to see, namely the path of seeing the glory of God in scripture.

Historical pointer number two, the Westminster Catechism. Very suggestive. I had never thought about this phrase until about three years ago.

You read the question. You know the question. You know most of the answer.

I wonder if you thought about this phrase. How does, this is question number four in the catechism, how does it appear that the scriptures are the word of God? Very interesting way of posing the question. How does it appear that the scriptures are the word of God? Answer, the scriptures manifest themselves to be the word of God by familiar phrases, their majesty and purity, by the consent of all the parts, and then this

one, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God.

What in the world does that mean? Let me boil it down. The scriptures manifest themselves to be the word of God by the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God. They meant something by that.

And I don't want to know what it was. I mean, you can see how this is pushing me to say, whoa, what does these wise divines mean by that? I think scope of the whole means, roughly, all that the Bible takes into view in the totality of its writings. In other words, the whole Bible, properly understood, has this divine aim, to communicate, display, reveal the glory of God.

So Edwards was saying that the mind ascends to the truth of the gospel and the word that reveals it by one step, a sight of the glory of God. And the catechism, 100 years earlier, is saying that scriptures show themselves to be the word of God by the fact that the revelation of the glory of God is the aim of the whole. Those were my pointers towards this way of articulating the ground of our confidence.

And I don't doubt, as I look out here, goodness gracious, it's early in the morning. How could I not think this? I don't doubt that most of you, I hope all of you, have experienced what Edwards is describing, even if you have never thought of it in precisely these terms. It's almost always the case, isn't it, that God opens the eyes of our hearts and convinces us of his truth, gives us faith, saves us, and only later, maybe 40 years later, we discover how to articulate what happened to us.

I think that's true with most people that come to Christ. They don't know how they got saved, and if they get saved in a very bad church, they grow up thinking all kinds of wrong thoughts about how they got saved, and they're really saved. If that's true, your question may not be whether the experience is valid.

That may not be your question. Your question may be, it's mine anyway, whether the Bible encourages us to think in these categories. Is this just Edwards mumbo-jumbo, or is this biblical, glorious talk? That's my question.

So let's move now to the three biblical analogies. So what I'm trying to do here is move from biblical analogies of how a sight of the glory of God brings warranted conviction about God as revealed in different ways and take us to that truth about Scripture. So analogy number one, the Bible shows that God intends for us to have a well-grounded conviction that He is powerful, wise, merciful, creator, and sustainer simply by our seeing His glory in and through creation.

Or put another way, God intends for us to know, know. In fact, He doesn't just intend for us to know. He says, we know.

Every person on the planet knows that God made the world, or the world is God's world. It's God's handiwork because in and through it, we see divine glory. Two texts.

Number one, Psalm 19, verse one, the heavens are telling the glory of God. Now notice, the heavens are not the glory of God. We're not pantheists.

The heavens are not God, and their glory is not God's glory. They tell, they point. Their brightness seen by the physical eyes points to the glory of God.

Unbelieving scientists see the physical glory better than most Christians see the physical glory. Charles Meisner said of Einstein that he had seen more glory and more majesty than the preachers had ever

imagined. It seemed to him, they were not talking about the real thing.

And when I read that, what, 20 years ago, I thought, God, spare me that. Spare me that any scientist who had looked through a telescope to see the endless reaches, almost endless, of the galaxies would hear me preach and say, he doesn't know what he's talking about because his God is so tiny. There's no connection between what I've seen and what he's talking about.

I just think, God, please, don't let that ever happen. Spare your church such an indictment. So Psalm 19, one, the heavens are telling the glory of God, means God expects us to see through creation to the glory of God, and he holds us responsible for it.

And that comes clear in Romans one, this is the other text, 19 to 21. This is one of the most amazing passages in the Bible about the knowledge of God through created reality. What can be known about God is plain to them, everybody, because God has shown it to them for his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, has been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things, in the things that have been made, so they are without excuse.

For although they knew, there it is, three times he says they know, although they knew, they did not glorify God. But became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. My guess is that most of you have never stumbled over the claim that God's invisible power and divine nature are revealed in and through creation, and that we are accountable to see it under penalty of hell if we don't.

But you don't see it with the physical eyes. The physical eyes and the physical glory of the galaxies are lenses, apertures, through which you do or don't see God. And if you don't, you're guilty.

That's an amazing text. No excuse. Seeing the glory of God, you can know that this is God's world.

He made it, he owns it, he rules it. And you can know a lot of other things about him by inference, but that's enough. My argument, I think it's Edward's argument, is that the same thing happens when you read the Scriptures.

Galaxies, word of God. The Scriptures reveal themselves to be the word of God, the way nature reveals itself to be the world of God. God's glory shines in and through the meaning of these words, and authenticates their divine origin the way God's glory shines through the creation, and authenticates its divine origin.

How could it be otherwise if these are God's words? Analogy number two, and we're moving towards the most important one. I think they get increasingly fraught with implications for Scripture. Namely, the glory of God in Jesus Christ, the God-man.

God expected people in Jesus' day to see the glory of God in Jesus, and know, know that he was the son of God. Even though he was really human, looked like other people. Two passages, John 1, verse 12.

John 14, the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. And put that together with John 14, eight.

Philip said to him, Lord, show us the father. It's enough for us. And Jesus said to him, he said, have I been with you so long and you still don't know me? That's frightening.

Because so many of us have lived with him for so long. May he not say that to you ever or me. Whoever has seen me has seen the father.

Haven't you? I think he's, haven't you? No. Evidently, not yet. Many people looked at God incarnate and didn't see God.

They didn't see God. And many people today hear God's word and don't hear God. But the son of God was really there.

And those who had eyes to see the glory could see. And the word of God is really here. And those who have ears to hear can hear.

The glory of God in Christ was missed by many. And the glory of God in scripture is missed. By many.

But neither Christ nor the scriptures are deficient. The problem was not that the glory of Jesus was inadequate to manifest his deity. Or that the glory of the word is inadequate to manifest its divine origin.

The problem, as Jesus said in Matthew 13 was, seeing they do not see. And hearing they do not hear. Finally, analogy number three.

This is the most important one. It's been the one that has made the most difference in most of what I think. Second Corinthians chapter four.

Namely how, so we move from nature to Christ to gospel. This is gospel. How does the New Testament describe the gospel being known with certainty as God's gospel? Here's the way Paul puts it in Second Corinthians 4.4. The God of this world, Satan, has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

So the gospel and the story of how God saves sinners, that story, the gospel, emits a divine supernatural light. That's the name of one of Edward's sermons. A divine and supernatural light.

He gets it from this verse. To the eyes of the heart, not the eyes of the head, to the eyes of the heart, the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, Christ's self-authenticating glory shines through the gospel. Then, verse six, God shatters the blindness that keeps us from seeing it because of Satan's agency.

God who said, let there be light, God who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the gospel of the glory of Christ. The knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. So when Greg and I prayed for you this morning, that's what I prayed.

I prayed it for me, that as I'm talking, that would be happening. That God would shine in my heart, and as I'm talking, shine in your heart in a supernatural way to give the light of the gospel of the knowledge of the glory of God in the radiance of the scripture-revealing glory of Christ. That's a miracle in and through all your studies that you should pray for every day.

So the light in verse four, the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, is the same as the gospel or the glory in verse six, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. So put it in a sentence, Paul is saying that the way we come to know that the Christian gospel as recorded in scripture is God's truth is by a sight of its glory. I think that is clearly taught in verses four through six of 2 Corinthians chapter four.

The glory of God in the face of Christ, the glory of Christ who is the image of God. I call it a peculiar glory in the book because it participates in that peculiar way God has chosen to manifest himself in the scriptures throughout and especially in the gospel, namely God's majesty expressed through meekness. God reveals his lion-like majesty and his lamb-like meekness and Isaiah cries out the utter uniqueness of this in the universe, from of old who has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you.

That's what I mean by utter uniqueness. No God has seen an eye, a God besides you. No eye has seen a God besides you who works for those who wait for him, Isaiah 64, four.

God magnifies his greatness in condescending to help us, save us. He magnifies his greatness by making himself the supreme treasure of our hearts. Even at great cost to himself, Romans 8, 32.

And in that way, satisfying us, serving us in the very act of exalting himself. This is the peculiar brightness that shines through the whole Bible and comes to its most beautiful manifestation in the person and work of Jesus. So here's my conclusion.

Just as God confirms that the world is his by revealing his glory through it and that Jesus is the son of God by revealing his glory through him and that the gospel is God's gospel by revealing his glory through it. In the same way, the whole Bible authenticates itself by the shining of the glory of God in and through it. Which means that we know that the scriptures are the word of God because in their true meaning, we see the self-authenticating glory of God.

Or to use Edward's sentence, the mind ascends to the truth of the gospel and the scriptures by analogy, but by one step, its divine glory. And of course, the problem is that by nature, we are blind to that glory. We suppress it.

We love the darkness, Jesus said. We're not just victims, we're lovers. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2.14, the natural person does not accept the things of the spirit of God, for they are folly to him.

He's not able to understand them because they're spiritually discerned. We have eyes but do not see, ears but do not hear. And the only hope for us is that God would grant us a well-grounded confidence by performing the miracle of taking away our deadness and our blindness, taking out the heart of stone, putting in the heart of flesh, awakening, or as he says, enlightening the eyes of our heart.

Paul says God does this, in fact. He comes to us and creates a new creation according to 2 Corinthians 4.6. God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, shines in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. You know Christ is real.

You know the gospel is real and you know the scriptures are true because God says, let there be light. You see the peculiar glory and you know this is not a work of man, this is of God. This is not clarification.

This is not God telling us that the scriptures are true. He doesn't. This is God enabling us to see what is really there.

Divine glory is really shining through the galaxies. Divine glory is really shining in Jesus Christ. The divine glory is really shining through the gospel.

Divine glory is really shining in and through the true God-intended meaning of the God-inspired scriptures. Which means for the Evangelical Theological Society that we will bend every effort to find that meaning and see that glory. We will not presume to see the glory of God in scripture where we have not seen the meaning of scripture.

And we will not be satisfied that we have seen the meaning of scripture as we ought until we have seen the glory of God in it. If we go about our work this way, our confidence in the scriptures in this society will be well-grounded. And our joy in the glory of God will be great.

And the devil will be out. Let's pray. So Father, we are utterly dependent upon you for the gift of the kind of purity that can see God.

And we live in a culture whose videos, movies, advertising, and whole system is working to make us impure and blind so that what I'm saying sounds like an utterly foreign language. So God, I pray for the miracle for myself in an ongoing way. And I pray for these brothers and sisters that they would have the wisdom from above.

Which is first pure and then see and feel absolutely confident this is your word. And I'm ready to die for it. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

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