

Why We Believe the Bible - Lesson 3

by John Piper

In this sermon, John Piper explores the credibility of the Bible's authority through Paul's testimony and the necessity of divine illumination for understanding Scripture.

Duration: 1:26:29

Scripture: 1 John 5:7

Topics: "Biblical Authority", "Trustworthiness Of Scripture"

Description

In this sermon, the pastor discusses the trustworthiness of the Bible and how it can be seen as reliable. He begins by using his own personal testimony as evidence, highlighting his former life as a persecutor of the church and his zealousness for his ancestral traditions. He acknowledges that this may be a problem for some, but it serves as a basis for his argument. The pastor then mentions two more sections he will cover: a historical argument and a theological/spiritual approach to trusting the Bible. He concludes by praying for guidance and offering to answer any further questions.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at www.desiringgod.org. We turn now to step five. How can we justify the claim that the Bible makes for itself and credit the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of all the books of the Bible? Oh, let me go back to Glenn's question about the reference in Jude 14 and 15.

Two possibilities came out in our discussion between the sessions. One is that God could have confirmed by inspiration in his own mind that something that was true, by virtue of some oral tradition about Enoch, happened to be recorded in that book that God approved. Though he approved that, and it sounds like special pleading, a second possibility would be that even though you know this book does not, by virtue of its being inspired in the period of inspiration in the Old Testament, have authority, nevertheless, and you see its claim to have either been written by or about Enoch, you cite it, without making those distinctions, simply for what Enoch, who in that context was the seventh from Adam, said about what you're saying about these immoral people in the church, which is true, without saying, even though it looks like you're treating Enoch like a historical figure, all you're doing is alluding to the Enoch of that writing.

So those are two possibilities, anyway. But it's a problem, and I admit that, and that's where I'll leave it. Step five.

I'm going to talk first about Paul's testimony, and how we credit Paul. So there are two more sections I want to move through, this one, and the Westminster explanation of how we come to trust the Bible. So this is kind of a historical argument, and the other one will be a more theological, spiritual kind of approach.

This one, I think, strengthens and encourages our ability to help people in an apologetic way get over some humps, but in the end, probably, does not provide the kind of solidity that you need for the hour of your greatest trial and crisis of death. There has to be a kind of conviction about the Scriptures and about God and about Christ and about His salvation and His plan and purpose for your life and for the world and for heaven and for hell that you arrive at that has a more solid footing under it than your capacity to draw historical inferences from data. Even if those historical inferences are exactly legitimate and valid and compelling, which I think they are, but a little voice will always say, but maybe you left out a few facts, maybe you drew a few wrong inferences.

This is why assurance, ultimately, is a gift. You can always call into question your conclusion. But, God ordains, we're talking about this a little bit between the times, God ordains that we use minds, use our capacities to read grammar and syntax, use our capacities to peel away historical arguments that are valid or invalid, and in and through that horizontal, human, rational approach, which is the only approach, He can do a suprarational thing, which I'm going to argue, in the end, is necessary, if we're going to have the confidence in God and His Word that we're going to need.

We were just talking that some belittle the rational dimension of this, and I just said it sounds inconsistent to me to do that, since they're using that very faculty to do the criticism. They use the very faculty they debunk to debunk it. Something's wrong when that happens.

God ordains that the gospel be preached for the miracle of regeneration and illumination to happen. The gospel being preached is coming through language. Language to be learned has to do what my little girl Talitha is doing in kindergarten, in homeschool, right now, every day.

Matt sat on the cat. On preposition. Sat.

Verb. Past tense. Cat.

Position. Subject. Object.

That's all rational. That's all human. Nobody gets saved who doesn't engage in that, except maybe little babies and imbeciles.

God has ordained, not that that be the bridge across the chasm of hell, and I made it across the bridge because I learned grammar, and I learned logic, and I know how to construe sentences. No, no, no, no, no. You learn grammar.

You learn syntax. You may learn Greek, in fact. And then you expose yourself.

You struggle. You construe. And you get meaning.

You defend. And God, in and through that, miraculously, supernaturally, illumines the mind to have a sense of the spiritual reality and beauty of what it says, which now rises above the merely rational to the spiritual apprehension of divine things. Many historic, wise, deep theologians over the centuries have

written about the mystery of Scripture in relationship to the mystery of the Incarnation.

Is this man God, or is he not? He looks like me, just like a preposition. Looks like a preposition, not a divine declaration that would explode my brain if it were really from God. He looks human.

He eats. He sleeps. He walks.

And he calls himself God. And here's this book. It's got grammar.

It's got syntax. It's got historical argument. It's got flows of thought.

And we call it God's Word. What language does he speak? So there's mystery in both there. But you don't arrive at the divine Son of God by getting rid of the man Jesus.

And you don't arrive at the Word of God by getting rid of grammar and syntax and the rational capacities it takes to construe them. In fact, you lose both if you try to abandon either. Why do we want to credit Paul's testimony? So here we are trying to find historical warrant for crediting Paul's testimony.

Why? Why should we care? Well, he claimed to write with words taught by the Spirit. We saw this last night, 1 Corinthians 2.12. We receive not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words, or interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God.

We'll say more about that in a minute in another place. But he teaches in words taught by the Spirit. That's true.

We want to know it. So how do we credit whether it's true? He said that the Old Testament Scriptures were inspired and profitable. We saw that in 2 Timothy 3.16. So we want to know if that's true, because that will undergird our confidence in the Old Testament.

He made stunning claims about the universal authority of Jesus. Although he existed in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. Equality with God, this Jesus, before he was born, but emptied himself taking the form of a bondservant.

Therefore also God highly exalted him, bestowed on him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. So if these things are true, I want to know, because my whole history and life hangs on whether that's true about Jesus. Every knee is going to bow to him, either willingly or unwillingly.

He was in the form of God before he came to earth. He came to earth, he became obedient, he died a death. God exalted him.

Those are spectacular claims that this man is making. Does he speak the truth? Colossians 1.16-18 For by him all things were created. So he's creator.

He's your creator, he made you. Would you want to know that's true or not? If somebody made you, and you're not a collection of energy and chemical plus time, but a person made you the way you make a pie, only more amazing because he did it with less to work with, like nothing. When he created your soul, that's an important thing to find out.

Visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, he made all that. He made Bin Laden, he made everybody. All things have been created by him and for him.

For him. Wouldn't you want to know what everything is for? Everything is for. Boy, I would give some unity to your life.

I'd give some direction to your labors in life if you know what everything is for. What's milk for, and pizza for, and air conditioners for, and cars are for, and business is for, and media is for, and TV is for, and sex is for, and money is for. What's it for? Answer, if he's right, Jesus.

Everything is for Jesus. If that's true, it changes everything. We've got to know if this is true or not.

I mean, I've staked my whole life. What a fool I've been. Get up here in this pulpit, week after week, declaring with all my might that these things are so.

If they're not so, he is before all things. In him, all things hold together. Wouldn't you, if you were a physicist, wouldn't you want to know that? Molecules hold together.

Weather systems hold together. Galaxies hold together. Solar systems hold together.

The sea stays in its place and the mountains stay in their place because of Jesus. He is also the head of the body, the church. If you're a Christian, you belong to the church, you'd want to know that.

Colossians 2, 9, in him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. Now, so that's why it's important. I mean, it just didn't get any more important.

That's important to know whether Paul tells the truth or not. Is there a way to know he's speaking the truth? That's the issue. This is what the seminar is about.

Well, how does Paul argue for his credibility as a spokesman for the living God? Paul is not oblivious to the problem. And in Galatians 1, he undertakes to say something which sounds like he's trying to help the Galatians credit his testimony. So put yourself now in the Galatians shoes and say, we want to know, can this man be trusted? I mean, he's a killer.

He's a murderer. And now he's starting to preach some pretty amazing things. So here's the way he argues.

We have to decide if this is true or not. For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. These are not just human words and message you're getting here.

For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. So his claim is that these amazing things he says about Christ and the gospels was not learned by ordinary human means, but that he received it from Jesus Christ as a revelation. And then comes this word for, which shows you that he cares about giving a ground.

If you draw for you say, I say this for I say this, and this is the foundation of that. You use that kind of language all the time. The four introduces the basis of the foundation for I received it as a revelation of Jesus.

All right. So what's his argument? For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

Stop right there. So what he does with his first premise in this argument is to say, you have access to knowledge here that you know is true. Namely, I was one amazing Pharisee.

I was ahead of everybody. I was a persecutor. I was advancing.

You knew I didn't believe this. Jesus was an absolute hoax as far as what I was concerned. I was on my way to Damascus to put people in jail.

I didn't anymore. Believe this. And the man in the moon, my conscience was clear.

I was doing for God what he wanted done, namely to keep these pretenders from sweeping Jews into hell by their false Messiah ship. Just another one of those crazy rebellious pretenders that gets the Romans crashed down on us, make life hard. That's the way I was.

You know, that's the way I was. That's premise number one. Now here comes verse 15.

But when he who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me that I might preach him among the Gentiles. I did not consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. I went to Arabia, and then I returned to Damascus.

Then, three years later, I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas. And I stayed with him 15 days. But I did not see any of the other apostles, except James, the Lord's brother.

Then he takes an oath. Now in what I'm writing to you, I assure you before God that I'm not lying. Because he sees some possibility there that they'd say, oh, you're just making that up, even though that's credible.

Again, 15 days, he said, Cephas, you can go check this out. Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea, which are in Christ. But only they kept hearing, he who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy, and they were glorifying God because of me.

That's his argument. I was once utterly out and out, moving towards the destruction of Christianity and advancing in Judaism. And now, 180 degrees, I'm preaching Jesus Christ, who appeared to me on the Damascus Road.

And I want you to know, I didn't get all this by running to flesh and blood, or going up to Jerusalem, or talking to the apostles. I went away. And only three years later did I get together and have a talk with Peter and the others.

Now, the point there is to say, I'm not dependent on them. Even though they have the apostolic tradition, I'm not dependent on them for my authority. I got, through a revelation of Jesus Christ, my gospel.

Now, he will say later that he faithfully handles the tradition of the apostles. But he does not say, I do it the way other people do it. I am one of the apostles.

I had direct access to Jesus Christ. He called me. He set me apart even before I was born.

Made me his apostle. And I lay out my life here in the change that you see as the primary evidence of it. And I add that I didn't consult with them early on in my Christian walk.

But went to Arabia and came to my own God-given convictions about this. Now, let's ponder this argument. Let's see whether it has any warrant or any validity.

Is there some historical control here that shows Paul is not free to fabricate? Well, there are several. Everybody agrees that he wrote Galatians. There's not a single liberal radical scholar who denies to Paul Galatians.

We'll start there. They deny to him 1st and 2nd Timothy. They deny Ephesians, Colossians, Thessalonian correspondence.

A lot of arguments about certain letters that Paul wrote, whether he wrote them. Nobody denies Galatians. Too many traits of his own personal way.

Number two, the description of his pre-Christian days includes his passionate persecution of the Church of Christ. You have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism. I used to persecute the Church of God beyond measure.

Luke confirms this in Acts 9. And, of course, they would have known it. In Galatia, they knew all this. And they could have easily falsified this had they wanted to or been able to.

Now, Saul quotes Acts 9. This would be public knowledge, especially among those who oppose Christianity. They'd want to know very much about that. Third observation or historical control.

The description of his pre-Christian days includes his passionate devotion to the Jewish law and traditions. This, too, would be public, verifiable knowledge. It's extremely unlikely that he could be fabricating this in a time and setting where falsification would be so easy.

Four. Now, after his Damascus Road experience, he's 180 degrees opposed to what he gave his life to before and is claiming Jesus to be the Son of God and the Christian gospel to be the truth. They kept hearing, he who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith.

This change in Paul was also public among those who had known him on both sides of his conversion. Now, Paul is making claims for Jesus that are so universal, so demanding on the allegiance of everyone that he seems to have, and here seem to be the options that I could think of. He's lost his mind.

And almost all these have been developed in scholarly ways to reject Paul's legitimacy. He's lost his mind. He's got a serious psychosis.

Something happened in Damascus. Or he's a con man. He's become a great trickster.

Become an Elmer Gentry type. Or he's making an honest mistake as a sober and reasonable man. Or he's speaking truth as a reasonable and honest man.

Those are the possibilities that seem to me we would have to entertain for Paul to write all the crazy things he writes about Jesus Christ if he's not true. So let's think about each of those. The historical likelihood or

evidences for them.

This is just putting into formalized thought, I think, the way you intuitively go about crediting somebody's testimony. Somebody comes along and says, I saw such and such. And you weren't there? And you don't know if that happened? So you can either try to find it on TV or try to find somebody else to corroborate or whatever.

But you also immediately do a checklist in your head. Is this person crazy? Well, he hasn't always been crazy. Does he look like he's having an illusion? Are there some traits here of some psychosis? No, it seems to be normal.

You run through this mental checklist. And to the degree that you have some experience with this person, his credibility rises and falls. And that's what we're trying to do with Paul.

The writings of Paul do not fit the way lunatics or psychotics speak. His writings, like Romans, are reasoned in an extended and coherent way. His writings bear the marks of many warm personal relationships.

His writings bear the mark of much interest and concern with others. Now, if you say, would you come up with this list? Why are you mentioning those things? These are the things, I know a lot of schizophrenics. And there's a lot in this neighborhood.

And you talk with people who have mental problems over the years long enough. You learn certain traits that, and you try to figure out, why is this person so weird? What is it about this person that's not normal? I can't quite figure out why it is. And then you start to realize, this person never has any thought about anybody but himself.

Things like that. And there are certain traits of people who are mentally ill. And these are the ones that I'm saying Paul doesn't manifest.

His writings bear the marks of many warm personal relationships. Mentally ill people don't have warm personal relationships. I'm talking about serious mental psychosis here now.

I don't mean depression and things like that. His writings bear the mark of much interest and concern with others. Psychotic people are just unbelievably wrapped up in their own world.

His writings evidence a wide range of normal emotions. In general, no one would get the impression from these 13 letters, this man's insane. So I'm not inclined to think that that's a very good solution to what he says, that he's insane.

So here's my second response. The price Paul was paying to be a Christian and an apostle ruled out the idea that he was using it as a platform to con others. He proved repeatedly that he was not being driven by money.

He was a tent maker. He didn't take offerings for himself. He had others handle offerings when he was trying to collect the money for the saints in Jerusalem.

This man was not driven by greed, not driven by money. He wasn't using this message as a platform to con others. He accepted suffering constantly and documented it in a way that was publicly verifiable.

I don't think I'll take the time to read these accounts of his suffering, but he documents them in a way that people can say, That isn't true. You've never even been on the sea, or you've never even been in the country, or you never had trouble with false brethren. They could document whether that was so or not.

To say that Paul is making an honest mistake as a reasonable man is to miss the point. The problem is not just that he might have made an honest mistake in his conversion, which would be inexplicable enough. The problem is that he goes on year after year making the most outrageous claims about his own revelatory experiences and the reality of Christ and the Holy Spirit and the nature of reality.

This is not an honest mistake. This is a lifetime of sustained delusion or deceit if he's not telling the truth. You can't say of the poor Paul, he's an honest and good man and he made a few honest mistakes.

He is not making a few honest mistakes. He's making many dishonest mistakes or he's crazy. The evidence is strong that Paul is speaking as a reasonable, honest man who knows what he is saying and why.

His explanation is that Christ appeared to him and that he receives revelation. With such revelation he credits the Old Testament and speaks a full message about the person and work of Jesus Christ as God's truth. We must decide if we believe he is a credible witness.

There is good reason to believe that he is. Now, I didn't used to argue this way. I didn't used to develop it like this.

But I've been preaching now for 21 years and before that I taught for 6 years. And before that I was a Christian for all my life since I was 6 years old. And so I've lived with Paul and Matthew and Mark and Luke and John for a long, long time.

And I have had my faith threatened and challenged by almost every conceivable side. There may be new challenges that emerge that I haven't thought of. And over time I've begun to think of these writers, not in some magical way, but rather as people like you that I know.

I know them, in fact, better than most of you. I've lived with them longer. I've seen more about what they think than what you think.

And I have imposed repeatedly in down times and up times and hard times and good times. Are these guys reliable? And Paul is special to me because Paul has 13 letters. And they are letters.

They're not like the Gospels, like Matthew. Matthew is hidden. Matthew never says, I felt this or I felt that.

Paul, he's talking about himself all the time. You really get to know Paul when you read the letters of Paul. He talks about his angers.

He talks about his anxieties. He talks about his failures. He talks about his successes.

He talks about his conflicts. There's Paul all over the place. Whereas you read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and you read Jesus.

And Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they're kind of hidden back here. The genre of a Gospel was not to intrude themselves in there, but to tell the story. And yet, you can see the way they go about it.

And you have to decide, is the Jesus they're presenting, are they reliable? But with Paul, it's special. It's different. He's got so many letters.

And you can kind of get to know this man. And he can become a friend. And he can either be a fool to you, or he can be a wise counselor to you.

So I have felt like it's almost like a thing with my wife. I can either trust her or distrust her. I can have this notion she's really always cheating on me.

She's got to figure out how to do it without me finding out. And she's not reliable. This is possible.

I could be totally deluded. I mean, wildlife is away from home hours every day. We don't see each other.

That's possible. So am I going to live that way? And subjectively, you know what? I don't lose any sleep over that. There is this profound, deep sense which I don't feel is naive at all.

She's not doing that. I trust her. Big time.

And that's sort of the way I've grown to be with Paul. I just have lived with this man so long. I've struggled with what appear to be inconsistencies so long and found such deep and wonderful consistency.

I've seen the way he handles conflict, and I've seen the way he talks about God that I just can't reject Paul as a friend and counselor and a wise knower of Jesus who had an encounter with him that I never had and had a unique call on his life. So just personally, that's the way I relate to the Apostle Paul. That's why I developed that kind of argument.

So that's the end of my treatment of Paul. Do you want to ask any question about that or make a comment about it? Don't assume that I'm claiming more than I am here. I'm not claiming.

Therefore, now, Piper says, with historical control and Paul's argument, you now have a bridge across Lessing's ugly ditch. Lessing was a philosopher who created the problem for Christianity. And that you can walk blithely across with absolute total confidence based purely on rational historical argumentation that is infallible.

That's just not the way I was thinking as I developed that argument. I'm looking for evidences of pretty high probability so that I can distance myself from other arguments that would say, no, it's pretty highly probable that Jesus is not the Son of God and that the Bible is unreliable and so on. And I know right now perfectly well that with that kind of historical argument which gives me some sense of this man is not a fool, this man is not making honest mistakes, and this man is not a deceiver, and therefore, I believe what he's saying is true.

That conclusion could be torpedoed easily some late night with some high-powered intellectual skeptic who might point out something that I hadn't thought of yet. Was there a hand? Yeah. Joe, help me here.

I don't think Josephus mentions Paul. I could be wrong there. Josephus and Philo are your two New Testament contemporary extant writers.

Soon after Paul, you've got writers, Irenaeus and others, and they're referring to Paul's writings right away. So, I think the answer to your question is no, that contemporary writers don't talk about Paul. Now, I just wonder.

Anybody want to contradict me there? Because I'm not claiming that my memory is completely accurate here. Josephus is writing at the same time. Philo is writing roughly at the same time.

Josephus does mention Christ, but I don't know that he mentions Paul. What? The New Testament. Yeah, 2 Peter refers to Paul.

Very, very good. So, inside the New Testament, we have at least one testimony to another person writing about Paul. I think it's the only one in the New Testament, isn't it? 2 Peter 3. Any other comment? Yeah.

If it says in Galatians 1 that Paul received a revelation of Jesus Christ, meaning he's the content of it and it came to him not from Jesus Christ, meaning Jesus delivers a message, is that the distinction you're making? Might that pattern be seen throughout authentic revelatory experiences throughout the Bible? I don't think those prepositions will hold out in a consistent way. In fact, I think the preposition there is dia. Anybody got their Greek text open to see that? Through.

I think it's through. Dia. The revelation.

I received a revelation dia Jesus Christ, which almost undercuts, I think, what you're observing here. So, I don't want to build too much on what you're saying. I think what you're saying is true theologically that the revelation that Paul got, for example, in 2 Corinthians 12 is of Jesus Christ.

He saw the living Jesus Christ. He was the content and substance and reality of the revelation. It wasn't that he just got a message that came from Jesus Christ.

But I think it's not unbiblical to talk about as him having received inspiration from Jesus Christ. So, I think both are true. When cultic leaders claim to have gotten revelations from God or whatever, I doubt that we will persuade anybody as to the inauthenticity of those by their claiming it was from rather than of.

I think other factors are going to have to figure in there as to whether Joseph Smith and Muhammad and Mary Baker Eddy and whoever it was behind the Jehovah's Witnesses are authentic or not. I'm not an authority on all the cults and religions of the world by a long shot. And when you look at your life that you've got to live, which is very finite, very short and very limited in what you can read and study, you do have to make some choices.

I am so thankful that there are people like Ron Carlson and others who have given their lives to understanding the cults and writing on them. I was just over at Northwestern Bookstore on Thursday, on my day off, poking around. And there's a new one out published, I think, last year.

I wrote it down, but I didn't bring my little thing with me. On the cults. And I just looked at it and said, this is valuable.

This is so helpful to have in a space of 12 to 15 pages. A good, well-documented explanation of the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventists and right on down the line. But the point I'm making is, to have credibility, do we have to be authorities on all those religions and all those cults? This seminar is designed, in a sense, to say, we can't be.

There must be a way to credibly land with truth without becoming a world expert on Zoroastrianism or Islam or Buddhism or Hinduism or its various subcultures. And I think that's true. If you can discern a credible way to say that the Bible and only the Bible is God's Word, then you measure all the other things

by the Bible.

So all they need to do is say, Jesus is not God. And I'm finished with the Jehovah's Witnesses. I'm just finished.

I'm not going to spend any more time with the system. He's a great angel, Michael. Period.

Or if I find enough in the Mormonism that God has a body and that we're all going to be gods and just enough to show that it's dramatically out of sync with the Bible, I'm not going to take all the time to read the Book of Mormon in order to find out what all its claims are. But you see what I'm doing? I'm hanging everything on my conclusion that the Bible is so, so that it becomes the cannon, the measuring rod, so that as soon as something is far enough out of sync with it, I'm finished with it. I've got only one life to live.

So I'm staking my whole life on what I'm about to show you right now in the last hour. This is the most important part, and I'm doing what I should never do, and that is shove it into the last 40 minutes. So here's my approach.

I only have one section to do, but it's got a lot of overheads here. And I'm going to take my starting point from the Westminster Catechism, and I'm going to take it apart piece by piece to see whether its argument for the validity of the Scriptures as a whole is true. This is not building upon what we just saw from Paul.

That was one approach. Now I'm taking another approach. The Westminster Catechism, set in 1646, roughly, was developed as a summary of the Scriptures, and it's written for the church.

It's written for lay people. It's written by people with way more experience than me, experienced things like me, about God's truth and authority in the Word and in experience, and wanted to develop a warrant for the Scriptures that laymen would have access to. See, I know perfectly well that if I developed the most sophisticated, historically controlled, scholarly reasoning for the resurrection and the authentication of the ministry of the Apostle Paul, and I developed a 10-week seminar on it, and I got everybody in the church to come, and I did it, and I wowed them with my ability to reason, and know, a year later, they wouldn't have it.

They would just remember, that was good, but they wouldn't have enough memory of the facts to reconstruct the argument so that in a moment of conflict or threat or death or torment or torture, it would work. I tried for years to live mainly on historical arguments. I never, in all my German experience, in all my Fuller experience, in all my subsequent dealing with people at Bethel, as I was teaching, I never found myself close to doubting or close to jettisoning the historical reliability of the Bible.

The arguments, once I gave myself to them, were always good enough. But you know what? I had to rebuild them every time I taught it. I had to go back and relearn them every time.

So to prepare this seminar, I couldn't do this off the cuff. I had to go back and reread all these things, rethink, look up a few texts, reconstruct the arguments in my head so that I would remind myself how compelling they were. Well, existentially, I can't live that way.

I simply can't live that way. Reconstructing compelling arguments that I forget won't work in the World Trade Tower with about five minutes to go when I'm either going to burn or fall out. So as a pastor, the more I've come close into people's lives, the more I deal with real people, the more I deal with various kinds of people at all ages of life.

I say, if the Bible is going to be trusted and God wants us to trust it, he must have made a way to see its trustworthiness different than that. And that's what I want to talk about. Question four in the larger catechism.

How does it appear that the scriptures are the word of God? Answer. The scriptures manifest themselves, themselves, to be the word of God by their majesty and purity. By the consent, that means agreement, of all the parts.

And the scope of the whole, which is to give glory to God, by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation. But, so that's all the kinds of traits that the scripture has that would compel you to yield. But, the spirit of God bearing witness by and with.

That's very crucial. I'm going to talk about the testimony of the Holy Spirit almost the rest of our time here. Please don't understand me or the Westminster Divines or John Calvin to mean a voice telling you the Bible is true.

So many people when they think internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, they look at the Bible and then they look away and say, Okay, Holy Spirit, is it true? Tell me. That's not the way He does it. It is by and with.

The spirit of God bearing witness by and with. By and with. It's as you keep looking.

As you keep looking, you see. So, we'll talk about that in a minute. In the heart of man is alone able fully to persuade it in heart that they are the very word of God.

Now, I think that is a true answer to the question. And, I want to spend the rest of my time talking about each of those pieces starting right here with Madison. So, let's just go through it.

We'll take it a piece at a time. By the way, if you're trying to write that down, that's online everywhere. Just go type in Westminster Catechism.

You'll find a hundred places where it's on the web. So, don't worry if you didn't get it written down. Those are available real easy.

Or you go to the library or back of some Presbyterian hymnal. The scriptures manifest themselves to be the word of God. First, he says, by their majesty.

Just going to have to pick and choose here. Here's Paul in 1 Corinthians 2, 6-9 saying, we'll just take verse 9. As it is written, I have not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man. The things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

I think what the majesty of the scriptures refers to is the consistently exalted subject matter with which it deals. Now, none of these quite by themselves says, oh, clearly it's in the word of God. Well, it's not like that.

It's each piece building on the other piece. Is there another book anywhere like it in calling us up and out of our human, low, trivial, worldly concerns and presenting us over and over again with unspeakable glories and a worldview that just blows the mind away over and over again. I think that's the gist of what it means by majesty.

It's unique. It seems to set itself apart. And then the next word is, by its purity.

And frankly, I said, boy, that is an interesting word to describe the scriptures. Psalm 12, 6, the words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace in the earth, purified seven times. Or Psalm 19, verse 8, the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

The commandment of the Lord is pure and lightening the eyes. Pure means undefiled, clean, no contamination. And it seems to me that what they're getting at here is this.

I'm dirty. I'm dirty. I'm contaminated as a human being.

I'm born with dirt. I pick up dirt like a magnet. I generate dirt.

I'm unclean. I go to this book and it just over and over again exposes me. It's so clean.

It's so right. It's so high. It's so pure.

It exposes me. There's something about the Bible that's not quite like any other book in its effective convicting cleanness. I think that's what they're getting at.

Thirdly, they refer, these Westminster divines, they refer to the consent of all its parts. Now, of course, the skeptic we read last night in the Tribune said innumerable contradictions. And here the Westminster divine is arguing that the consent of all its parts is an evidence of its divinity.

Somebody's missing something, you know. You just got to settle that one yourself. You got to read this book through enough times.

I hope you read it through once a year. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be like Mueller? I think he came, he was in his 70s or something, and he wrote in his diary, I have this morning completed reading the Bible through for the 40th time. Once a year for the last 40 years.

You do that enough, you will be confronted, yes, with problems. We've all got problems. How to figure things out.

But there will start to fit together so many things, a unity and a harmony and a depth of agreement. Oh, it's wonderful to walk with the Bible long enough to experience that. I specialize in spotting problems in the Bible.

Not for you, but for me, mainly. For this reason. I'm wired that way, for one thing, so I have to live with it.

But I exploit it in this way. I find something written here that seems out of sync that something's here. I'm watching for him.

I'm not trying to avoid him. I'm looking for him. Because my 55 years has taught me that when you take the apparent dislodgement or contradiction and start pushing down, down, down, down, down.

You find a route where they're not at odds anymore. I see. The things about love and hate in the Bible.

Are you supposed to hate your enemies? Why do these psalmists seem to hate their enemies? I hate them with pure hatred. Psalm 19. Love your enemies.

So we can do that. Oh, I've spent years working on those things. And every time I bump into them again in the Bible, I start all over again.

And I go back and I get out my journals and I think to them again of how hatred and love work in the Bible. And what I usually wind up with is roots and depths of unity and the relationships of hatred and love that I've never seen before. And they have never pushed me away from the Bible but only drawn me deeper into a profound respect for the consent of what Paul calls in Acts 20.27. The whole counsel of God.

As if there's a unity to it. A wholeness to it. I'm going to run through these as fast as I can and then we'll see if you can ask some questions.

Here's a major one. This is really major. It may consume a lot of our time.

Let us see. The next thing the Westminster divines say that compels us to give credit to the Bible as God's word is. The scope of the whole which is to give all glory to God.

The scope of the whole which is to give all glory to God. What does that mean? It means that when you read this Bible as a whole and you say, what's the whole point? What's the large scope? I think scope here means what's it aiming at? What is it all oriented on and focused on? Focus might be another word for scope there. And the answer is to give God all the glory.

Now, why should that compel us to believe it? The JP here is my text. These texts are the ones that come straight out of the Westminster Confession. Some of them I look at and say, I don't think I understand yet why they quoted that.

But I put them there anyway for you to look at and for me to look at. But I chose some others that I think are just as or more compelling of this point. Jesus therefore, this is John 7, 16.

Jesus therefore answered them and said, my teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If any man is willing to do his will, he shall know. Oh, there's a profound statement.

That's worth about a year's worth of meditation. If you're willing, you'll know. If you're willing, you'll know.

The will and the intellect, how do they relate? How does the corruption and insubordination and rebellion of the human will prevent knowing? And if the Holy Spirit were to break the will, such that it would be yielded to what is truly true and authoritative, knowing could happen. Oh, that's worth a lot of thinking. Whether it is of God, you'll know.

Or whether I speak for myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory. This is how it relates up here, to give all glory to God.

Seeks his own glory. But he who is seeking the glory of the one who sent him, he is true. I wonder if, I'm just surprised they didn't include this text in the footnotes at the bottom in the Westminster Catechism.

Because, in my mind, this is exactly what they're saying. There's no unrighteousness in him. How do you credit Jesus as true? Is the scope of his life the glory of God? Or, how do you credit the Bible as true? Is the scope of the whole to give glory to God? Another text on this issue.

Same point. John 5, 41. I do not receive glory from men.

But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. I have come in my Father's name. And you do not receive me.

If another comes in his own name, you'll receive him. Why? Why won't you receive one who comes in God's name? But you will welcome somebody who comes in his own name. And answer, because the person who comes in his own name has the same mindset you do.

And it fits. Fits your worldview. Whereas a person who's living utterly for the glory of God, indicts you, makes you feel guilty.

You don't want him around. Exposes your own self-exaltation. Which is why he says now in verse 44, How can you believe when you receive glory from one another? And do not seek the glory that's from the one and only God.

That's a rhetorical question. The answer is clear. You can't.

You can't believe. What's holding you back from believing me? From believing my word is the words of God. What's holding you back? Answer, you love human praise.

You love human praise. That's why you can't believe the gospel. You see how deep is the issue of apologetics? What's keeping these students? I mean, here comes a strong apologist or evangelist.

Preach the gospel compelling historical reasons, evidences. They don't want that. Why? The reasons are all there.

It's not an intellectual thing. I love praise. And Jesus is going to destroy the possibility of my living for me.

I ain't giving it up. I am not giving it up. Of course we don't articulate it like that.

We don't even know that's happening to us. We suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Cannot believe.

Now, you notice that little note that I had there? See note on natural revelation. That's where I'm going to go now. So we're still on this point of the scope of the whole is to give glory to God.

And somehow that will get your confidence that this is the word of God. The glory of God is the centerpiece of my theology. So I want to figure out how this works.

And I think this is part of the way it works. The immediate knowledge of God that comes with human consciousness in the world. In other words, I think written on every one of your hearts is the knowledge of God that He is all glorious.

And that you should submit yourself to Him and give Him all praise, all credit, all honor, all glory, all thanks for all things. That is known by you and by every person in the universe. Now, where do I get the presumption to say that? Because if that really is known by you, then when you find a book, and you open that book and start reading that book, and that book is driven by the same scope that is written by God on your heart, suddenly there will be this click.

And you say, this book is the book of that God that I know intuitively. So now, do I have a warrant for saying, you all know that that's the scope of the universe. You know the universe is about God.

And I get it from Romans 1. This Paul, whom I trust so much, he was very, very profound. That which is known about God is evident within them. For God made it evident to them.

Speaking of just humans in general. For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, is known about God, is evident to them, evident within them, clearly seen, understood through what has been made.

Even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, which is what all that revelation was about. The scope of the whole is honor God, the word here is glorify, as God, or give Him thanks. Here's my own words.

What I think this is saying is this. You, let's just stay with you right now, because you're the ones who care about whether the Bible is the word. Leave everybody else aside for a minute.

This text says, you know God. You knew God before you ever knew a Bible. You knew God before you ever went to church.

You know God. You know Him in nature, and you know Him in your heart. And you know, what you know about Him, is that He is to be honored, and that He is to be given thanks.

Now, the verse I didn't include here, the verse just before is, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness and ungodliness to men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. That's verse 18, 19.

The reason you think you don't know God, and some of you could be agnostics or atheists, is because Paul says, in your wickedness, that is your love of the praise of men and other things, it is suppressed, held down. The Greek word, katecho, held down. But Paul, as he goes throughout the whole world preaching, knows everybody knows God.

It's written on their hearts. And they can see it written in the sky. My own experience is such that I would say, I walk over to this church on that bridge, in the fall I see the leaves falling, in the spring I see the leaves coming, in the winter I look at those dead trees and say, they've got to be dead.

They've got to be dead. It's 40 below zero. It's been 40 below zero for weeks.

They've got to be dead. And in the spring, they're not only not dead, there's juices, somehow, against gravity, rising up through those trunks, into those branches, and out of those little things are formed buds with billions of molecules, dictating that these leaves be shaped like this, with little teeny veins that go this way, that carry chemicals that when the sun falls on them, make certain kinds of things that release oxygen that I breathe, and I cannot not believe in God. I mean, I'm stuck with it.

I'm sorry. I cannot not believe. You may say, well, that's an unwarranted inference, and evolution can do that.

Well, you can talk till you're blue in the face. But frankly, I think, when we all stand before the judgment seat of God, and He shows a few videos of spiders, and webs, and leaves, and birds, and eyeballs, and He says, you didn't think that required any intelligent design from me? I think we're going to feel like absolute fools at that moment. Absolute fools.

I think that's what Paul's talking about here. You know God. You know Him.

The only reason you would be tempted to deny Him is because of the wickedness of your heart that suppresses the obvious. If that's true, then I think what the Westminster divines meant when they said that we see the Bible to be the Word of God because the scope of the whole is to give glory to God is simply that the scope of the whole, by the grace of God and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, suddenly clicks with what we know must be the scope of the whole of reality and His glory. And the Bible's exaltation and sinful treatment of the glory of God throughout is one of the most powerful testimonies to our own souls that this book is from God.

Now they come to the end. Near the end. By their light and power, still reading in the answer to the Westminster Confession, by their light and power, they are able to convince and convert sinners to comfort and build up the believers unto salvation.

And then they give verses where the Bible has that kind of power. I quoted Hebrews 4.12 at the beginning, so I think I'll just say the Bible, in the experience of the church for 2,000 years, has not been a powerless book. It has been a powerful book to do wonders in people's lives and to create churches throughout the world.

The last sentence, which is the one that Calvin is known for dealing with, is the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. This is the last sentence in the answer to the fourth question of the Westminster Catechism. But the Spirit of God, bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is the alone, or the soul is alone able fully to persuade it, the heart, that they are the very Word of God.

Now, what does this mean? The Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures. So I put, go to JC, John Calvin, internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. So that's where we're going to spend the last nine minutes.

Let's see if I can do this. This is worth about five days in a systematic theology class, so sorry that we'll do it in nine minutes. Jot that text down, 1 John 2, 20-27.

We have an unction, or a chrism, or an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things. We will talk about what that means. The anointing which you receive from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you.

We won't spend a lot of time on this one. I'm shooting for one main text, and then some words from Calvin. This one would be significant.

Get it translated right this time, 1 Corinthians 2.13. Which things we also speak in words taught by human wisdom, not by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people. That's crucial to see spiritual people there because of the contrast with natural people. But a natural man does not accept, does not credit, does not receive or welcome the things of the Spirit of God.

He suppresses them. He will not acknowledge them, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised.

But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised, I added properly to explain, by no man. So here Paul says, the words that I speak are inspired by God. As I speak them, they are spiritual words about spiritual things.

The natural man simply regards them as foolishness. Which means that only spiritual people can receive them. What's a spiritual person? It's not a new age person who deals in crystals.

A spiritual person is a person who has the Holy Spirit. That's what it means. That the Spirit of God is at work in us, freeing us from our love for the praise of man.

Freeing us from our bondage to sins that blind us. Blind us from seeing the truth because the truth will have such an implication for that sin. And so the sin, before our brains ever get a chance to process, the data is suppressing the truth for fear that the sin would be jeopardized.

That's the way we work. That's why we're so fragile. That's why we have to have a miracle to save us and get us to believe the Gospel and believe the Bible.

No. But he who is spiritual appraises all things. So, that text points to the fact that a work of the Holy Spirit is necessary for the accrediting of the Gospel or the spiritual words with which Paul speaks.

Jesus' way of saying it here in John 10 is, My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. Something happens in your receiver. The analogy of a receiver.

It's got a dial. And sin is always dialing to a frequency where God is not speaking. Just keeps the static up high.

Keeps you tuned in to the devil and yourself and the world. Makes sure he can get in as clear as possible on lust frequency and greed frequency and pride frequency. And keep those messages clear and compelling.

And the work of the Holy Spirit is God's always sending His signals. He's sending through nature, Romans 1. He's sending through radio and literature and preaching and teaching and friends. He's sending it through your own conscience.

The Holy Spirit comes in, and He dials back to the God frequency and suddenly, this thing that you've known all along is tuned in as true. But you don't get convinced because the Holy Spirit whispered to you wrong frequency. That's a good frequency.

The Holy Spirit's work is quiet. And the first thing you hear is not the Holy Spirit. The first thing you hear is the Bible is true.

It's true. What I've read all these years, it looked like foolishness. The cross is foolishness, it says.

Suddenly, I'm looking at the cross and tears are coming down my eyes and that's my Savior. And it's totally sufficient to cover all my sins. And it's warranted by credible spokesmen.

And it presents a world view that makes sense out of my whole life. And everything just goes wham! And you cannot not be a Christian. There may be many struggles up to that point.

I'm going to pick a text. Instead of talking Calvin, I'm going to talk 1 John. I can just get my hands on it.

It's not important that you hear John Calvin on this so much as that you hear the Apostle John. 1 John 5. I've already said it. I've said everything already in essence.

That the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is not a voice telling you the Bible is true. It is an illuminating work of the Holy Spirit that enables you to see the Bible for what it really is with all of its compelling majesty and divine beauty and authority. Now let's just close with 1 John 5.7-11. And I really will hand this stuff over to Justin and ask that we get the things into a booklet or at least into something that you could get in the coming weeks, if not a refined booklet so that you have what I didn't give you and what I did.

1 John 5.7-11. We'll close with this. It is the Spirit who bears witness. So there's warrant for the terminology.

Witness of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who bears witness because the Spirit is the truth. I'm not sure that I know all that John means right there.

John is the most deceptively simple writer. I don't mean he deceives. I mean the simplicity deceives as something that veils profundity like no other writer.

And I just wonder whether the Spirit is the truth doesn't mean some kind of correlation between Spirit and truth such that you should never try to separate. Verse 8, For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Perhaps the baptism of Jesus, the beginning of His life, and the blood of Jesus shed at the end of His life.

And this is referring to the historical nitty-gritty witness of the incarnate Christ alongside the work of the Spirit. But we don't need to deal with that in detail. And the three are in agreement.

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. So I want to know what that is. God, are you witnessing? So I say, I need a witness here.

I need a witness as to what I can believe. Somebody see something happen? Come on, I want a witness to know what really happened. I wasn't there.

Give me a witness. And a man stepped forward and said, I saw it happen. I said, what happened? He says, this happened.

Is there another witness? I saw this happen. This happened. Well, they agree this is probably true.

Is there another witness? And they agree. Okay, we got enough going on here. We can believe this.

He says, if you receive that sort of thing, then the witness of God is greater. So I'm there. Oh, so God steps up and does some witnessing.

What's that? What's that? Where's that experience? God does some witnessing. And not just man. What's that? The witness of God is greater.

For the witness of God is this. And then you got this John-like, that he has borne witness concerning his son. The witness of God is this.

That he has borne witness concerning his son. Is the witness that he's borne witness? The witness is that he's borne witness? Probably not. Probably it's, this is the definition of the witness.

The witness that he's talking about of God is the witness concerning his son. So let's just say, the witness of God that we want is a witness about Jesus. If that's a fair handling of verse 9. Ten.

The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in him. The one who does not believe God has made him a liar. So if you don't believe what God said about the Son, you're a liar.

You make him a liar. Because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning his Son. Now here comes the key.

And the witness is this. God has given us eternal life in his Son. Now that's really heavy and very strange.

But here's my read of verse 11. If you say, okay, what is the witness of God that's different from the witness of man or in and through the witness of man? I think he says, it is this. God gives life in his Son.

That's his witness. What do you mean? That's his witness. God gives life.

I think he means when you read the Gospel or hear the Gospel preached, God's witness is your life. Which happens under the preaching of the Word so that as a living spiritual being now and not a natural being, you see light and truth in the Gospel. The witness of God is the creation of seeing faith.

It's what happens in 2 Corinthians 4 where it says, the God of this age 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. The God of this age has blinded your minds to keep you from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God. So what is the witness? What's the witness of God that's compelling, that's greater than the witness of man? The witness of man is coming, preaching, the Gospel is being preached, and you're not seeing anything.

It's foolishness. You're not believing it, you're not seeing it. The light is not landing on any retina that has any sensitivity to it at all.

The spiritual light. And he says, the testimony of God to the Gospel is this. He gives us life.

In that moment, as the Gospel is shining through your natural eyes, into your natural brain, processed by reasoning, grammatical, syntactical, logical faculties, nothing is happening. And suddenly, God witnesses to it. Not meaning He whispers a voice, but that He gives you life.

And the life is the life of the eye, the life of the heart, the life of the ear, seeing they do not see, hearing they do not hear, and suddenly they are hearing, and they are seeing, and it is glory, it is the glory of Christ, and it is self-evidencing, and when you go to preach this to your friends the next day, you don't say, God told me it's true, God told me it's true. I wouldn't believe you in a minute if you said that. What you'll say is, Do you see it? Do you see it? And of course they'll say, No.

And then you'll realize you've got to pray like crazy to do your evangelism as well. And you'll find some say, Do you see it? It's glorious, it's beautiful, He's God, look. And then you'll spend the rest of your life unpacking the glory, the rest of your life unpacking the self-evidencing beauty of the gospel, that from time to time might win people.

It happens in this church all the time. People are drawn to the beauty and the glory of God, because God comes down and He witnesses, in and through, in and by. This is what the Westminster Divines meant by with and by the scriptures the Holy Spirit testifies.

I will do my best to prepare this stuff so it's available in the bookstore, through DGM in the coming weeks. I realize I've left scads of questions unanswered. I hope I've given you direction that you can move and

further study.

But let me pray, and then I'll hang out here for a while, and if you have burning questions you can come ask them for a bit. Father in Heaven, even though I'm never quite sure whether I've paced myself right in this five hours, I do ask that you would be the witness. If you give the life, and the eyes of the heart are given life, and the ears of the heart are given life, and the spirit is wakened from the dead, so that we're not just flesh, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit, then the eyes of the heart, and the ears of the heart, and the spirit will apprehend the glory of God in the face of Christ, and in the face of your majestic word.

So Lord I pray, though we've come at it from numerous angles, that the upshot would be tremendous growing confidence in your word, among the young people, and the others of us who are here. Oh Christ be pleased, I pray, to get our confidence for yourself, and your word, so that in these days when America is dying to hear the truth, we'll be able to speak. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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