

Is the Word of God Reliable?

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The title for the sermon today is this: “Is the Word of God Reliable?” Secondary to that, or sort of as a subset of that question is this: Is the witness of each individual writer, such as the apostles and the prophets, reliable? You're sitting there thinking, why would you ask a silly question like that? Everybody knows that the word of God is reliable. Everybody knows that the people who wrote the scripture are reliable and their witness is useful to us. You think about it, of the various ones we might quote, is the witness of Jesus, for example, reliable? One would certainly think so. Then there's Peter, Paul and John, and others who wrote scripture. If we quote them, can we trust what they say as being accurate and useful information?

Curiously enough, the answer to the second question—is the witness of the individual writers reliable?—gives you a true view of the commitment a person has to God's word or not. Sometimes people will make the statement that, yes, God's word is reliable, but when you quote a particular portion of it to them, by a particular individual who has written that scripture, then suddenly you realize that they don't agree with that particular statement, so how reliable is that scripture really? We're going to take a look, and how we approach the study of God's word is of course important. It's important for us to set our hearts and minds proper or we don't get it right. The attitude of mind is one of the most important things in terms of our attitude toward and our relationship to God and to Jesus Christ.

So what is a proper attitude for studying the scripture? I think we all realize that we are told, and that this is a process, that we have to grow in grace and knowledge. Peter specifically stated that in the last couple of verses of his second epistle—grow in the grace and knowledge and, specifically in this case, of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Of course, as we get to know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ better, we also come to understand the proper relationship that He has with His Father, and of the relationship we would have with the two of Them. It's important then that we recognize that there's a growth process.

Jesus told His disciples before He was arrested and crucified—we read these passages at Passover every year—that the Holy Spirit would teach you all things. He said to them, I have many things to say but you can't receive them yet. He had been with them for over three years so he'd told them a considerable amount already. The point is, if we're to grow in grace and knowledge, if indeed we're to be led by the Holy Spirit, God, through the Holy Spirit, is going to teach us all things, then consider, at any given moment, the best we can claim is that our current level of knowledge and understanding is incomplete. Does that make sense? If we're going to be led into all things, we will have to grow in grace and knowledge, so if we take the attitude, that, alright, as I begin the study of the scripture—whatever your routine might be—I sit down and think I have

a particular understanding at this moment in time, where might God lead me, what might need my attention at this moment?—and we view it that way. What happens sometimes, or oftentimes happens—and we've had to deal with some of these things—is an improper approach, which would be, I have a particular understanding and I'm going to defend it; or, that's my understanding, this is truth, I'm going to defend it against whatever comes out, and in so doing we then build a fence around it, we circle the wagons, this is the approach we're going to take, this is our understanding, and we're going to stick by it, and anybody who questions it is labeled a heretic. I've been labeled worse than that, believe it or not. These things happen.

If we harden our position and insist that what we have is indeed true—we don't need to go into a particular subject anymore, it's fine just the way it is—then what happens to us? We harden our position, dig in our heels, and that leads to what?—command and control. Anybody who brings up something contrary to the standard approach is suspect and so on. There is a time to defend the truth—not a problem. But it has been a problem that we have oftentimes found ourselves defending that which is not true.

Frankly, brethren, in recent years, I think we can safely say that the church of God as we understand it is coming to a place or is going through an adjustment. There are things that have come to light that need some new understanding—a new depth of understanding, if you will. Sometimes it's a little disconcerting to have to come to grips with the fact that maybe we've misunderstood certain things and so now we have to make some adjustments. We don't always want to do that, sometimes it's uncomfortable to do that, especially if you've made a big deal out of having the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and suddenly you find yourself in a situation of having to say that it wasn't right, and we have to eat a good slice of humble pie. A little humble pie will solve a lot of ills—it really will—and avoid a lot of problems.

I'm going to share some concepts that I've accumulated over the years and the first one I want to share with you is from Paul Johnson's work, [A History of Christianity](#). Paul Johnson is a Christian scholar—Roman Catholic actually. In the prologue to his history, as he's talking about Christianity, he says this: *It is, then, a work of history. You may ask, is it possible to write of Christianity with the requisite degree of historical detachment? Can a Christian then examine the truth of these facts with the same objectivity he would display towards any other phenomenon? Can he be expected to dig the grave of his own faith if that is the way his investigations seem to point?*

Think about it; if you examine the facts and find that you have been incorrect, or your investigation is leading you to believe that indeed you are wrong, what are you going to do? Are you going to embrace it and accept the fact that some adjustment needs to be made, or do you ignore it and go on to the next point? *Can he be expected to dig the grave of his own faith if that is the way his investigations seem to point? In the past [he says] very few Christian scholars have had the courage or the confidence to place the unhampered pursuit of truth before any other consideration.*

The unhampered pursuit of truth—put that in front of any other consideration. We may have all had an opportunity to have faced just that kind of situation, where that is what we had to do, and to embrace the truth wholeheartedly was going to be costly. He goes on to say: *For Christianity, by identifying truth with faith, must teach—and, properly understood, does teach—that any interference with the truth is immoral.*

Wow, that's a mouthful: *any interference with the truth is immoral*, from a Christian perspective; I think we can agree with that. *A Christian with faith has nothing to fear from the facts.* Nothing to fear from the facts; what if your facts are wrong? There is a general remedy that you could take, it's almost like a tonic—you mix it up, and you run across those situations where you're in arrears, and the facts that you thought were in order maybe aren't quite as accurate as you thought. The tonic is called repentance; all you have to do is acknowledge to God that you've been wrong and ask for guidance. Sometimes that seems like a difficult thing to do.

Going on, *A Christian with faith has nothing to fear from the facts; a Christian historian who draws the line, limiting the field of inquiry at any point whatsoever, is admitting the limits of his faith.* As in, I'm not going to examine the whole picture because I might uncover things that are uncomfortable—things I would have to admit that were inappropriate; now what? *And of course he's also destroying the nature of his religion, which is a progressive revelation of truth.*

In the case of Paul Johnson, he tells the story—the history of what we would call Orthodox Christianity—and it's primarily the story of the development and influence of the Roman Catholic Church, for 1,500 years. Then Protestantism starts to sprout up all over the place, and then you've got Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and Knox, and the rest of them, and you've got 500 years of interaction between Catholics and Protestants, and, quite frankly, the church of God as we know it.

He doesn't tell the history of our situation. So why do I bring up Paul Johnson? His comments are appropriate because there are occasions where we have to face the facts of our own history—what we have done and not done, what we have accomplished or not. Some of the things that we may have declared such wonderful works turned out maybe to be not so wonderful. In the same way, we, ourselves, have to realize that if indeed our investigation leads us—let's put it this way—if indeed the Holy Spirit is leading us to additional understanding, and we are coming to a deeper commitment and understanding of just what God is doing, then that might reveal that we have some weaknesses along the line and those things need to be adjusted. I think we begin to see that that is the case.

It was interesting, after the Feast I procured a copy of Dr. Ernest Martin's book, [The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot](#); Glen White stirred me to do that—to get that book and study it, and get a better picture of what's going on relative to the temple. On the dedication page at the very beginning of his book he quotes an ancient prayer that I think is noteworthy: *From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, Oh God*

of Truth, deliver us. I think you could gather up a collection of Christians—the slightest profession of Christianity—get them all together in a room, and they would all agree that cowardice, laziness and arrogance are all to be avoided, right? Are we willing to admit that we, as individuals, or perhaps as a church, have come to grips with the fact that we've got some new truth to face? God may certainly have new things to reveal to us; for the most part, though, I think our experience is a deeper understanding. When we say new truth, what we're talking about is God has given us a deeper understanding of what's going on. In the church of God, numerous people of faith are having to face this very prospect. Do you have the courage to see the new understanding and put it into practice? Does it take courage to be a Christian? Yes, and more besides—a great deal more.

Some are being faced with the fact, as the ancient prayer says, of laziness, because they are content with half-truths: Don't upset the apple cart, just leave us in peace—everything is fine just the way it is; we are happy with half-truths, we don't want to go any further. The other extreme is those who quite frankly have to avoid the prospect of becoming arrogant—we think we know it all. Does anybody know it all? Probably not—certainly not. So God deliver us from those things.

It's interesting because when you're studying scripture—I remember way back in the beginning, I got my Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, that was the first Bible study tool that I procured. It goes back to 1964, when I was a student at Cal Poly and I'm studying a Bible study correspondence course, and realizing, if this is serious business, I'm going to have to have more tools than just the Revised Standard Version from my Sunday school days that I got when I graduated from the sixth grade (or whatever it was). That's what I cut my teeth on with my initial studies. You get the concordance and maybe along the way you get a Bible dictionary, then you get an interlinear (Greek-English) New Testament and those things are useful. You get all these tools together so that you can make a better effort in your study. I think I've mentioned this before; I have an Interlinear Greek-English New Testament by Jay P. Green, Sr., and he's got a couple of interesting comments that I think are worth sharing with you at this point because there's a lot of explanatory information leading up to the actual interlinear. He's sharing with us how it came to be and how to use it.

There's a section on interpretations. Just a couple of sentences here. He says: *There are many interpretative decisions that must be made in any translation of the Bible. It has been our determination to let the text say what it says [that's laudable—just let it say what it says], so no particular set of beliefs has been inserted into the text by these translations.* So on the one hand, we're just going to read the text, translate it, and make it available to assist you in your Bible study.

The next little section is called "Presuppositions". Do you know what a presupposition is? There are certain things that are standard, truth—the gold standard. And they don't have to be explained, you just need to know that it's presupposed that such and such is the case. Here's what he has to say. The section begins with this statement: *Being a willing slave of our God and Savior Jesus Christ,*—and he presents dogmatically, as

God and Savior—our God and Savior Jesus Christ. If that's your approach and the central part of your reason for studying, etc., then I would submit that that's a short definition of a Christ-centered church or religion. *Being a slave of our God and Savior Jesus Christ* [he goes on to say], *we have presupposed that Jesus Christ is not only our personal Savior and Lord but that the scriptures clearly reveal Him as equal with God the Father and with God the Holy Spirit, that He is in fact one of the three persons of the Godhead.* In the previous section he said we won't impose any beliefs on the translations, and then in the next section—Presuppositions—clearly we have a trinitarian presupposition. That's something you want to understand, with any of the Bible tools you have—whether it's an interlinear, a concordance, a commentary or others—the chances are very good that trinitarian believers are the ones who put those things together, and you need to take that into consideration as you're doing your study.

Do we have presuppositions? This is not a sermon about the trinity. I'm not going to complain about Jay P. Green's presuppositions and I'm not going to worry about Paul Johnson's approach to church history, or anything else, but we need to understand that we've had to come to grips with our own church-of-God presuppositions. It wasn't very comfortable, either, to come to grips with the fact that we haven't been as straightforward with this information and understanding as we might like to think. I'm going to deal with some of our presuppositions. Much of this will be review, and at the risk of being redundant, for those who have been around, and have been going step-by-step through some of the adjustments that we've been making, this is for the benefit of others who may be very new in coming to grips with some of these things, and it will be useful for them.

What follows then is not new, but indeed I think it will serve to illustrate the point. Within the first supposition I decided we would examine, there's the idea or the notion that the Father doesn't speak to us. No one has heard His voice. The Word—the “Spokesman”—is the one who does the speaking and God doesn't actually speak; ever heard that? That was a presupposition and it's still promulgated in various circles and something we need to be concerned about. Before we answer the question—before we deal with that—let me ask you this: Do you trust the testimony of Jesus? It's not a trick question; the answer is, yes, you do. It's important that we ask the second question, because, remember, the overall question is, is the word of God reliable? Do we have certain presuppositions that we bring to the Bible, to the study of the Bible? Do we trust the testimony of Jesus? Matthew 4—again, this is not new material but it's significant material. I can remember, once upon a time, going back a decade or so; I was reading through this material, and let's just read the first four verses to begin with.

Matthew 4:1 *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (NKJV)*

So here is Jesus, one on one, in spiritual battle with the devil himself.

2) *And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.*

3) *Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."* (NKJV)

If Moses had manna, surely Jesus can turn stone to bread, no big deal—do us a trick, show us your stuff. He perfectly had the ability to do just that, but what was His answer? His answer is revealing:

4) *But He answered and said, "It is written ..."* (NKJV)

Oh, there's a written source, quoted immediately, without delay. Where is it written? As it turns out it's in the book of Deuteronomy. Here is what it says:

4 continued) *... 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'* (NKJV)

I thought, isn't that interesting. I remember reading this once and it just struck me—as I've read it, how many times? (This goes back about ten years.) I read this and I thought, I have a red letter Bible; all the words of Jesus are red and we're here at the Sermon on the Mount, so practically all the words are in red. Then Jesus, by His own account, says we are to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Back during my childhood, when maybe there was a little trouble at home—we lived on the farm so our father was never far away—if my brother and I got to sassing our mother or having difficulty with her, our father would look us in the eye, and say, look, when your mother speaks, you'd better pay attention. When my mother called me, using my middle name, I knew I was in trouble—do I face the consequences of my actions or do I run for cover? So it's not a question, is it, of whether or not this is audible. If somebody says a word proceeds from someone's mouth, would we not hear it? Do we trust the testimony of Jesus or not?

It's interesting, three times the devil confronted Jesus and He answered all three times from the book of Deuteronomy. He didn't have to conjure up some New Testament concept to confront and defeat the devil. He quoted the Torah. He quoted the book of Deuteronomy. I'm going to come back to that point in a bit. I think it's interesting that we understand that. If you believe the scripture is reliable and you believe in the testimony of Jesus Christ, and you believe that God the Father never spoke to human beings, then you have a problem, wouldn't you say? Either you don't trust the testimony of Jesus or maybe we'd better rethink our position on the subject.

Back in 2010, I dragged the notes out. I was assigned a sermon at the Feast in Branson, Missouri, and the title of the sermon was "The Red Letter Torah". So here it is, I have a red letter Bible and all the words of Jesus are in red, and Jesus in verse 4 says we are to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, so where are the words that God spoke? Jesus said He spoke, so let's go back and find them.

I went back and went through the entire first five books of the Bible looking for areas where God might have spoken. Wherever it was I marked it red; in some cases there was a whole column of material so I put a red line down the whole column. Here it is, by the way; my Bible is in rather sad shape. It's been around a while—it wasn't a particularly high quality volume in the first place, but this is my red letter Torah. It's all in red, the first five books, so I know where God spoke. It's interesting when I think back on it. Nobody ran up onto the stage waving a red flag, saying, you can't teach that—nobody. Ten years ago it was okay to say God spoke. I know of a couple of fellows who were taken off the speaking list because they said God speaks to us. Clearly there is a presupposition that's not being dealt with—that's my point. We need to address the issues and make sure we are aware of what's going on. Let's turn to Genesis 1 and take note of something here. This is the creation story.

Genesis 1:1 *In the beginning God [Elohim] created the heavens and the earth.
2) The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.
3) Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. (NKJV)*

Who is speaking here? It's not immediately obvious, is it, because the word for God is Elohim. God the Father is Elohim, God the Son is Elohim, so we aren't altogether sure. Is there a place we can go that would shed light, if you will—no pun intended—on who is speaking? Before we go there, let me ask you, can you trust Paul's testimony? Because if you can't, end of sermon. We are going to assume we can trust Paul's testimony, so let's turn to 2 Corinthians 4:6. Paul is going to make a distinction between God the Father and God the Son—not in just those words but you'll see it as we go. Let's just start in verse 1; go back to the paragraph break.

2 Corinthians 4:1 *Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.
2) But we have renounced the hidden things of shame [this is the New King James version], not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully [so it's extremely important that we not handle the word of God deceitfully], but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.
3) But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,
4) whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.
5) For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.
6) For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (NKJV)*

Who said let there be light? Paul makes a clear distinction between God, who commanded light out of darkness, and Jesus Christ, through whose face the glory of

God comes. So there it is. Again, do you trust the testimony of Paul? Some might say, maybe God the Father did say it, but there weren't any human beings there, so it doesn't count. Really? Okay, let's be fair and turn to Matthew 22 and get an indication. What I'm hoping to do is simply stir people to think—think about what you read, think about what you believe. Don't be afraid to take a look at the facts. As Paul Johnson says, Christians needn't be afraid of the facts. Matthew 22:36.

Matthew 22:36 *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”* (NKJV)

We see in verse 35, a lawyer comes testing Him. He's trying to get one over on Jesus; they never were very successful at it.

37) *Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*

38) *This is the first and great commandment.* (NKJV)

Who is He talking about? You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart—He didn't say you should love Me with all your heart, mind, and soul. Of course you love Jesus, too; that goes without saying, doesn't it? But the statement is clear, Jesus is pointing to His Father, not to Himself. With that in mind, let's go to Exodus 20. We've come out of Egypt, in bondage, we're at Mount Sinai, we're free—chapter 19:6. God intends to make a kingdom of priests out of this group of ex-slaves. We've come to the mountain, we're all prepared and ready to go, and God spoke all these words, saying—what did He say?

Exodus 20:2 *“I am the LORD your God [Yehovah your Elohim], who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*

3) *“You shall have no other gods before Me.* (NKJV)

Now the Jesus who said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul, would never make a statement like this: You shall have no other gods before Me. This is the Father speaking. He's the only one who can make that statement. God is the Most High. Jesus Christ is the Son of the Most High. Do you believe the testimony or not?

Then we have the issue, or the argument that is made, that God is so upright and pure that He can't be in the presence of sin, so it was surely Jesus who dealt with human beings because God the Father couldn't be where there was any sin going on—He wouldn't be bothered with human beings. We had a sermon on this recently but I'll just touch on it briefly. Is it true that God the Father won't associate with us because we're sinners? Some people believe that. In Isaiah 59, the first couple of verses, it says,

Isaiah 59:1 *Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.* (NKJV)

So if His hand is not shortened and His ear is not heavy, then perhaps people are calling out to Him for intervention.

2) But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. (NKJV)

So if our life is one of sin, and there is no attempt to turn it around or make a change, then, yes, God is not going to be in your presence—He certainly will not and that's something to bear in mind. Again, this was covered in a sermon before; I won't spend a lot of time on it, but in Job, chapter 1—you remember the story—in verse 6 in particular, it points out that there was a little discussion in heaven on one occasion.

Job 1:6 *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD [before Yehovah], and Satan also came among them. (NKJV)*

The premier sinner—Satan himself. I guess he who originated sin is in the presence of God, and God asks him, have you considered My servant Job? God is in the presence of Job, Job has his issues, but here's the point: Yes, if you're going to be a sinner and practice a life of rebellion against God, don't expect Him to be around. Let's turn now to Romans 8. Not only does God want to deal with us, work with us, Romans tells us God lives in us. When a person comes to repentance and yields to God in baptism, and is baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and receives the Holy Spirit, there's a special relationship that is established. Baptism doesn't take away the proclivity for sin (I wish it did; it seems since being baptized, I still have the occasional battle with this business of sin), but in Romans 8, we're told in verse 7—a very familiar verse:

Romans 8:7 *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. (NKJV)*

Doesn't want to have anything to do with God, so fine; if you don't want to have anything to do with God, God won't have anything to do with you, that's pretty straightforward. Verse 8.

8) So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (NKJV)

Oh dear, that's kind of troublesome. When was the last time you looked in the mirror? We're flesh—how is it then that we please God, if we are in the flesh and flesh cannot please God?

9) But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. (NKJV)

So both Spirit of God and Spirit of Christ are involved here. They come, in the Spirit, to abide, to live with us. It isn't just like God is in the room next door, or in the apartment next door, He lives in us; He takes up residence, if you will, if you allow Him to, and if we will provide the proper environment for Him. So once again we have that issue where

it's presupposed by some that God won't mess with us because we're sinners, or because flesh is evil, and that goes back to dualism and Gnosticism, and it has no place in the church of God.

One of the big issues of late (and over the course of the last several years) is the basic record of God and Christ in scripture, and from that comes the question, is Jesus the God of the Old Testament? We've been through this numerous times so I won't spend a great deal of time on it but let me ask you—do you trust the testimony of someone like Peter? If you have presupposed—and yes, I remember I believed it and taught it at one point in time, but I taught error—then let's go to Acts 3, and, once again, we've been here numerous times, but for anyone who is relatively new to the subject, do we believe the testimony, in this case, of the Apostle Peter? The story is, a man crippled from his mother's womb was healed, dramatically—this is immediately; this is Pentecost, when the church gets established and the Holy Spirit is active, and people are speaking in tongues—great manifestations of God's power. We'll pick up the story in verse 11.

Acts 3:11 *Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. (NKJV)*

You would be greatly amazed if someone crippled from birth was suddenly healed.

12) *So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"*

Great things were being done to underscore the fact that this is special; God is at work here. So what does Peter say next? To whom does he give credit?

13) *The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.*

14) *But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,*

15) *and killed the Prince of life ... (NKJV)*

That's interesting; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the One who healed you, is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers. He glorified His Servant, Jesus, and it's through that power, in the name of Jesus Christ, that this individual was healed. So there again, is the scripture reliable? Yes, of course; we believe that. Do you believe in the testimony of the individual writers? I had to come to grips with the fact that in this case, I didn't. What am I going to do about that? We could go on and on, and there have been many sermons given on this subject, but again, we have to recognize that we have our own presuppositions that we have had to deal with over time, and hopefully we are making appropriate changes.

Speaking of Paul, let's go to Galatians 1. I did a little project with what I call my red letter Torah (I'll tell you about that as we get into Galatians). Notice Galatians 1, verses 11 and 12. This is probably the first of Paul's epistles, by most accounts.

Galatians 1:11 *But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.*

12) *For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. (NKJV)*

You could go back to the book of Acts and you can see how Jesus Christ specifically intervened in Paul's life. He's on his way with instructions to do damage to the church of God in Damascus and suddenly he's on his back—who are You, Lord? He's foaming out threats and venom on the one hand, and the next thing, he's asking, who are You, Lord? Jesus Christ intervened directly in his life. We go down a little ways to verse 17.

17) *nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.*

18) *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. (NKJV)*

So Paul is making the claim, I got the gospel directly from Jesus Christ. Who did Peter get it from? Who did James, or John, or the other apostles get it from? They got it from Jesus Christ as well. This particular Bible that I have has what is called a center reference. Between the two columns of text there's a narrow column in the middle, and any time there is a reference to scriptures in other parts of the Bible, there will be a little letter to refer you to the reference in the center column, and you look up the scripture and where it is, and you can go check on that as well. So what I did was, I went through all of Paul's epistles and went down the center reference and circled the times that there was a reference or a direct quote out of the Old Testament. In the book of Galatians, which has six chapters, there are forty different places where Paul quotes the Old Testament—forty of them. I'll just mention them, the ones that he did quote: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, 1 Samuel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Habakuk, Joshua, Psalms and Proverbs. So in his presentation he quotes forty times—forty times!—from the Old Testament.

Now let's go to Romans. Romans is particularly interesting. I did the same thing in Romans, and there were 168 references, in the book of Romans, to the Old Testament. Really? Yes, there are—168 references. Why am I telling you this? Hang on and I'll share that with you in just a moment. Then I thought, well, they aren't direct quotes, surely. I went through every last one of them—there are sixty-eight direct quotes in the book of Romans from the Old Testament, and an additional hundred references that are not direct quotes. It's interesting, we have a red letter Bible and the words of Jesus are in red. Paul gets the gospel from Jesus Christ, writes epistles—in this case, two examples—one to Galatians, where he quotes the Old Testament forty times, one to the Romans, where he quotes the Old Testament 168 times, and there isn't a single red letter. Think about that. He got the gospel directly from Jesus Christ, he said, and yet

he does not quote directly, Jesus Christ, one time. What sense do you make out of that? Does that diminish the stature of Jesus Christ or does that indeed underscore the fact that Jesus spoke nothing but what the Father gave Him to speak.

Back in August of a year ago, I gave a sermon, “Was Jesus Christ-Centered?” I went through these principles and I would like to review a couple of those points. Let’s turn to John 3. In that sermon I talked about how Jesus made the emphasis on what He was there for, forty times or more. Jesus refers to being sent by the Father, and He describes the conditions and the circumstances of being sent, and what He was there to do. Once again, there must be some reason that Jesus didn’t bring anything noteworthy beyond what was already there. Jesus is the Son of God, He’s the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and here He is, He makes His appearance, He teaches Paul directly, and Paul didn’t see fit or see the need to quote Him specifically or directly. Paul just quoted the Old Testament because that’s what Jesus taught him was the scripture—the law, the prophets and the writings.

This happens to be the testimony of John the Baptist, John 3:31.

John 3:31 *He who comes from above is above all [that would be Jesus Christ]; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.*

32) *And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.*

33) *He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.*

34) *For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. (NKJV)*

Jesus Christ was sent by His Father. Jesus Christ spoke the words of His Father.

35) *The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.*

36) *He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; (NKJV)*

Chapter 7 of John. I took the whole sermon to go through this and I’ll just touch on a couple of things to point out, once again, the significance of the fact that Jesus brought what His Father gave Him to bring. He spoke what His Father gave Him to speak. He taught what His Father gave Him to teach. Do we understand that? That’s the record of scripture and it’s important in our understanding of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ, His firstborn Son. John 7:16.

John 7:16 *Jesus answered them and said, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.*

17) *If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.*

18) *He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him. (NKJV)*

Jesus Christ came seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, as per His own testimony.

19) *Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?*” (NKJV)

Chapter 8; let's notice, in verse 27,

John 8:27 *They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father.* (NKJV)

So they are having difficulty understanding Him, and He's having trouble getting it across to them just who the Father is.

28) *Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.*

29) *And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.*" (NKJV)

Once again, Jesus evidently didn't find it necessary to go out of His way to come up with some special, New Testament rendering, to explain the gospel to Paul. Paul simply later quoted in his epistles, over and over again, from the instruction he no doubt got from Jesus Christ, because He's the one who taught him.

Once again, there will be those occasions when we come to grips, face to face, with our own presuppositions—things that we believe are true, regardless of anything else. We've had things come up, haven't we, and we have had to come to grips with some things and make some adjustments, and there are more adjustments to come, I'm sure. I know at this very time, there are people you know and love, who have been disfellowshipped over the years, who are facing some very difficult decisions.

Go back to the ancient prayer momentarily. We've all had to face it, some time or another; whether you want to go all the way back to the time you were first baptized and God was first drawing you out of the world. If you were a coward and you came to grips with the truth and you ran from it, what's to be said? There is a place for cowards; we don't want to be cowards. It takes courage to pursue the truth of God, it really does. From the laziness that is content with half-truths—okay, the ancient prayer said, you are lazy if you are content with just half-truths, and are not willing to go on and take in the whole package. Is that what we were baptized into? You have to take the whole package—you can't pick and choose. But then, of course, we must avoid the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth.

I believe, going forward, God is in the process of shaking some things up and making it clear that there are some adjustments that have to be made, and hopefully we have the mind and Spirit to make those adjustments, because if we are going to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and of His Father—that's what Jesus Himself said

was the key to eternal life, to know You, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom You've sent. It's extremely important.

So again, what was the question? Is the word of God reliable? Yes. Is the testimony of the apostles and the prophets reliable? Yes, if you believe what they say. Isn't it a shame that we wake up and have to admit the fact that, yes, we claim the word of God is true and faultless, and yet there will be occasions that the testimony of those who wrote the words is not believed, is not practiced?

Brethren, obviously I can't cover the entire subject in one sermon, but the idea here is to generate some interest in thinking, in reading it and studying it, and applying it from the point of view of, all right, here is our current understanding. We're not here to defend the past or whatever we understood in the past, we are here to be led to additional truths, to be led to eternal life. Is that clear enough? Does that sound reasonable? I'll let you decide what's reasonable or not. We don't want to be found to be cowardly or lazy or arrogant. We are to be found seeking the truth of God, being about our Father's work as Jesus Christ said He was. Let us continue the process of studying the word of God and becoming perfected and guided by it, as we move ahead.