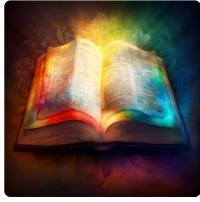


OpenTheo

Testing The Bible's Truth Claims



Authority of Scriptures - Steve Gregg

In "Testing The Bible's Truth Claims," Steve Gregg discusses the need for a reliable authority when seeking the truth, and acknowledges the possibility of Christians being wrong in their beliefs. While possessing the Holy Spirit is a great resource for attaining knowledge, Gregg emphasizes the importance of effort and critical thinking. He asserts that the Bible is the best authority for matters of faith and practice, and encourages testing its claims to determine their authenticity and accuracy. Gregg also discusses the limitations of subjective experiences and places importance on objective evidence, both natural and supernatural.

Transcript

Start using the handout. There's a 10-page handout in the packet that was given to you. The title of it is Evidences of the Inspiration of Scripture, and the pages are numbered up in the top right corner, so that should be an easy thing to identify.

Yesterday, what we were talking about in the classes we had there was the fact that knowing the truth requires that we have reliable authority. And everything we know or believe, we believe on the basis of some authority that we trust. Some authorities are trustworthy, and some are not so much trustworthy, but when it comes to the things that matter most for us to know the truth about, like how did we get here, why are we here, what are we here for, how should we conduct ourselves, is there a God? If so, what kind of a God is he? And if we have to answer to him, what's going to matter to him on the day that we reckon with him? I mean, those are the kind of issues that really matter to know the truth about.

If there is no God, that would be a very important thing to know. If there is one, that would be equally important to know. And if there is one, it would be very important to know what kind of God he is, what matters to him, what he wants us to do, what he fitted us to do, what he made us for, and so forth.

I mean, to not know these things would be a terrible handicap. And, of course, we have to acknowledge that the vast majority of people live their entire lives without knowing

the answers to these questions. Or, worse yet, they have answers that they think are right but are wrong.

And this is because of flawed authorities in which they place their trust. Now, Christians should not think themselves exempt from this possibility. We can make mistakes too.

The fact that we have acknowledged God and been born again even, even the fact that we have the Holy Spirit who is said to lead us into all truth, is not in itself a guarantee that we will not have wrong ideas. Now, you might think that that's discounting the work of the Holy Spirit. If he is to lead us into all truth, how can it possibly be that we would have wrong ideas? Well, the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth as we walk in the Spirit.

It is not automatic that everybody who gets saved automatically comes to a full knowledge of truth. It is as the Holy Spirit and we relate with one another responsibly in the way that he intends for us to relate with him. That part of the process of walking with God in the Spirit is that he teaches us things.

If we don't walk with him, he doesn't teach us as many things. You simply don't, you don't derive all the benefits of the Holy Spirit without walking in the Spirit. There is something called the fruit of the Spirit.

These things don't just automatically happen. They happen as you walk in the Spirit. If you neglect to walk in the Spirit, all the promises available, all the resources available through the Holy Spirit can be missed, can be forfeited.

When it comes to being led into all truth by the Holy Spirit, we need to understand that this doesn't just happen by waking up in the morning. Suddenly I know more truth than I did yesterday because the Holy Spirit is in me. Rather, as I walk in the Spirit, as I respond to the Spirit, as I listen to the Spirit, as I seek the truth as the Spirit inspires me to do from the right sources, and the Spirit bears witness to my spirit about things that are true, this is the way in which the Spirit teaches me.

But it's not a process that takes place in a vacuum. It's a process that takes place as I apply myself to know. Like we read in Proverbs chapter 2 last time, that if you will incline your heart after wisdom, if you'll cry out for understanding, if you'll seek for her as for hidden treasures, then you will find the fear of the Lord and you'll understand the knowledge of God.

Or vice versa. The point is, the Bible, though it tells us quite plainly that the possession of the Holy Spirit is the greatest resource we have in terms of being able to come to the knowledge of the truth, there is effort on our part required. There is thinking.

There is pursuit that is required. And this is why, you know, people say, why are there so many different opinions among Christians? And by the way, very godly Christians. You can't just assume that the people who all hold one set of theological opinions are godly,

and those who hold the opposite theological opinions are not very godly.

It just isn't the case. You'll find people equally godly, equally intelligent. In various theological camps you think, well, what's going on? I thought the Holy Spirit was supposed to lead us into all truth.

Why are there so many differences of opinion? Well, the Holy Spirit leads us, but not without our involvement. Now, I'm not saying that people who reach different conclusions, for example, than I do, that they are led by the Spirit less than I am. They may in fact be led by the Spirit more than I am.

I make no special claims to having the most perfect walk with God or the most perfect perception of the truth. But I do have confidence in God that he has given me all things necessary for life and godliness, all things necessary for understanding and growing in the truth. And as I acknowledge them, I believe that even if I have some ideas today that aren't exactly true, I will not stay in this deception forever.

That as I pursue the truth in the way that God has ordained for me to do, through the Word of God, through wisdom, through the various resources God has given me, and including the Holy Spirit's working within me and teaching me and so forth, that I will reach at least as much truth as God wants me to have in this lifetime. The rest of it I'll get afterwards. But I really believe that the Christian ought to be pursuing the truth all the time.

And also, in saying that, it means that we never really reach the point where we're convinced that we have all the truth. Anybody who thinks that his views are all correct is arrogant beyond description. That person simply is out of touch.

You should always be prepared for the Word of God to correct any notion that you have, or for truth coming from some sector to correct any notion you have. Of course, my contention is the Bible is the truth. But in saying that, I'm jumping ahead a little bit, and we need to back up a little bit.

And that's the point that we're going to set in today, is how do we know the Bible is the truth? I mean, if we say the knowledge of the truth is best ascertained through the implementation and the use of the best authorities on any subject. And then we say, well, the Bible is the best authority on all matters of faith and practice. It's the authority on matters of who God is, what he wants from me, what I should do.

And then we start from there and start reading the Bible to see what we're supposed to do. That may not bother anyone. In fact, that's what most Christians have done.

Most Christians have made that leap. Okay, I'm now a Christian. I believe in Jesus.

Since I believe in Jesus, I believe in the Bible. Let's go on from there. Let's study the

Bible.

There's nothing really wrong with that. In fact, that might be a very nice thing to do. I think people can live a godly life and so forth that way.

But my concern is, I've always been a little more analytical than I suppose the average person is, a little more critical, even including self-critical. And critical of my own views, always eager to change. And I've changed them many times on different issues.

As I've found it necessary to do, I'm confronted by scriptural evidence that's contrary to what I once thought. And I consider that that will probably be going on in my life for the rest of my life. Because until I know everything, there's always part of what I think I know, or what I know I don't know, that remains to be filled in.

And hopefully, as I go along in life, some of those things will be filled in. I expect to keep learning and getting more and more awareness of what really is true. But because I am a little bit more critical and analytical in my thinking than maybe some people prefer to be, I'm not content just to say, OK, for generations, Christian people have said this is the word of God.

So I'll just put aside all other authorities and just take this as the final authority. I was raised with that attitude. And I have that attitude now.

But between the time I was raised with that attitude and where I stand now, there were some processes that took place I'd like to tell you about. I have had occasion on many, many times to debate either formally in front of an audience or simply one-on-one in a witnessing situation. People who don't hold Christian views, who hold views contrary to scripture.

And it's been many times that they have ignorantly accused me of believing the Bible simply because I'm a Christian or believing the Bible simply because I was raised a Christian. I've always believed the Bible. There's never been a time in my life where I didn't believe the Bible.

And it's easy for a skeptic who doesn't know any better to say, oh, you just believe it because that's the view you were raised with. Well, that could be true of many Christians. In fact, it could be true of me.

It just doesn't happen to be. As a matter of fact, I was raised believing in the Bible as the word of God. I almost had an almost magical view of the Bible.

Really, magic would not be the word I would have used to describe my view in those days. But looking back, it was a little bit that way. I knew it wasn't really so, but I acted as if it was so that the Bible kind of fell down from heaven between bound covers and everything about it was magically supernatural.

And, you know, the whole collection of which books are included and which books are not included and the exact wording and everything is all just a supernatural product came from the pen of an angel almost. Now, I knew that there were human authors, but my impression was more or less that these people probably were not in their own minds when they wrote these things. It's almost like, I mean, I wouldn't have said it quite like this, but looking back, I remember this was sort of how I felt, that the people who wrote the Bible were almost like some of these new age people who write through automatic writing.

You know, they're kind of in a trance almost. And what's being written, they may not even be aware of it. It doesn't involve their thought processes.

It's just something directly channeled, you know, from God. Now, actually, no knowledgeable evangelical believes that. And I just used a word that I better define because I use it a lot and I don't want you, every time I use it, scratching your head, what's that mean? An evangelical, I'll just quickly do this aside here.

An evangelical, generally speaking, is a term that is used in contrast with the word theological liberal. In Christendom, there are, of course, many, many camps, but one major dividing line between different kinds of people who profess Christianity is that between the evangelical and the liberal. And the principal difference between the two is that the evangelical believes the Bible is the word of God.

OK, that's basically what an evangelical, what makes an evangelical an evangelical, is the conviction that the Bible is the word of God. A liberal, on the other hand, does not have that conviction. I have a friend who's a liberal who calls me on the air almost twice, three times a week to engage me in dialogue from his liberal viewpoint.

And anyone who listens can tell there's a significant fundamental difference in where I'm coming from and where he's coming from. Namely, I think that quoting Scripture is to quote authority. You know, I believe the Scripture's correct.

I think it's biblical. I believe it's inspired. I believe it's from God.

And I figure God's the highest authority on every subject. And if God has spoken, that's all I need is his word. My liberal friend doesn't believe that.

He doesn't accept that. Now, what I want to say to you is that I am an evangelical. I expect to die an evangelical.

And I do believe the Bible is the word of God. And I think a lot of evangelicals approach the Bible the way I did growing up. Just with the basic, well, my parents believed it was the word of God.

And their ancestors believed it was the word of God. And Christians have always thought

it's the word of God. And I guess since I'm a Christian and not a Buddhist, I'll say it's the word of God.

And that's good enough for me. And frankly, it was good enough for me for a long time until I began to hear challenges. People who didn't believe it's the word of God and who presented what they thought was evidence that it is not.

What they found to be flaws in the Bible. And if flawed, if the Bible actually contains flaws, it makes it much more difficult to argue that it is the word of God, since God presumably would produce a book lacking in flaws. I heard, of course, when I got out of my parents' home and I was out on the streets, I began to preach when I was in junior high.

And I continued to do so into high school and so forth. And so I began to engage my belief system against that of my unsaved peers in school early on. And I became aware that there are people who think they have good reason to reject the claim that the Bible is the word of God.

And I became aware of what the evidences were that they had. And I thought, well, if I'm going to be a truthful person, I can't just be an ostrich and put my head in the sand and pretend like there's no objections. I can't just be some kind of... I can't just blindly put on these blinders and say, I will not see, you know, see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.

I will not see these objections because I believe the Bible is the word of God. As a person who has always been a little more concerned than that, to be honest, and realizing that many people are as sincere believers as I am, only they believe in something else as much as I believe in the Bible, and wishing not to be so egocentric as to say, well, what I believe is true because I believe it, and what they believe is wrong because they're not me and they're someone else, and because I'm me, I'm right. I mean, people do typically think that way more than they will acknowledge.

But I wanted to know, you know, is there any better reason for me to believe the Bible is the word of God than there is for this person over here to believe the opposite? And do these objections that they present really present challenges? Or does this really prove that my view is naive? I mean, to believe the Bible is the word of God and yet to have to say, well, science has proven X, and X happens to violate what the scripture says, and therefore if science has proven this is true, then the scripture must be wrong, and therefore it can't be the word of God. Or for people to say similar things about what archaeologists have found or what historians have found or whatever. To find alleged flaws in the Bible challenges, of course, the affirmation that the Bible is the word of God.

So when I was in my teenage years, while I never came to a place where I didn't believe the Bible, I certainly came to a place where I was willing to look objectively and see whether I was on the wrong track. You know, I wanted to see if people had objections

that could not be overcome. Now, I will say this in deference to any critic, liberal or unbeliever that would say, well, you've always believed the Bible, so you've always been kind of prejudiced in its favor.

I won't deny it. I won't deny that I'm prejudiced in its favor. And I believe there's good reasons for that prejudice.

But to be prejudiced doesn't mean that you cannot change and that you can't see things clearly if you're making every attempt to be objective. And that, I will say, I have been. I have attempted to be objective.

And I have made it very clear to every student group I've spoken to and basically everyone I know when I've talked about this that I believe that if the Bible was not the word of God, if I could find conclusive evidence that the Bible is not the word of God, that I would stop teaching it immediately. I would not wish for a moment to believe the Bible if it's not the word of God because God wouldn't want me to believe it if it's not the word of God. There are false books out there that claim to be the word of God.

If the Bible is just another of them, certainly God wouldn't want me to believe this one any more than he wants me to believe any of the other false ones. The only reason I believe that I should believe this is the word of God is because I believe it is, and therefore God wants me to know that. And he wants me to act according to that realization.

So, that is where I stand. And I also want to put this in perspective. I have a friend who is an agnostic.

His wife is a Christian, and whenever I'm in Santa Cruz, California, they invite me over to dinner. She invites me over to dinner so I can talk to her husband. We have some very long and stimulating conversations.

He's a likable guy, and he likes me, and I like him, and we argue all night long sometimes. And, you know, when he gets to a place where he has to resort to irrationality, that's what he'll do. But he never really wants to admit that he's wrong, and so it's probably getting to be a waste of time arguing with him, though I still enjoy it.

He asked me last time I was down, which was a few weeks ago, but the time before that when I was in his home, he said to me, Well, do I have to believe that the Bible is inspired to be a Christian? And I believe he was surprised when I said, No, you don't. You don't have to believe the Bible is inspired to be a Christian. You do have to believe it to be correct.

That is to say, in order to be correct, you have to believe it's inspired because it is. You can have a different opinion, and your opinion can be out of touch with the truth. I mean, Christians can be wrong about many things without ceasing to be Christians.

I mean, a Christian can be wrong on the subject of predestination and still be a Christian. A person can be wrong about the question of when the rapture occurs and still be a Christian. And it seems to me a Christian can be wrong about certain theories of inspiration of the Scripture and still be a Christian.

But they can't be wrong about these things and still be right. They can't be wrong and right at the same time. And therefore, while I believe that I could be saved without believing the Bible is inspired, I would be a saved person who's wrong in my opinion about it.

And I just as soon have the right opinions. If I can have an opinion about anything, I might as well have the right one. If it's available to me, if I can find it.

And the reason I told him, you don't have to believe that the Bible is the Word of God in order to be saved, and that might even surprise you to hear that. I mean, just think it through. Nowhere in the Bible does it say, believe that the Bible is inspired and thou shalt be saved.

What does the Bible say? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. It's not belief in some theory of the inspiration of Scripture that saves people. It's belief in Jesus.

Jesus really didn't preach the gospel of the inspiration of Scripture. He preached the gospel of his own atonement, of his own providing himself a ransom for many, and him being appointed to be the Lord of all and so forth. That's the gospel.

Some people might say, well, how could we ever believe the gospel, though, if we didn't believe this was inspired? After all, we get the information about Jesus from the Bible. So, obviously, we must have a starting point that the Bible is inspired so that we can believe what it says about Jesus, and then we can believe in him. Well, not necessarily.

Even if the Bible were not inspired, that would not mean it's untrue. Many true books exist with true statements in them that aren't inspired. Most of the books you've read about history were probably full of true things, but probably none of them were inspired, unless they happen to be biblical books in the Bible.

I mean, if you've read about the history of the rise and fall of the Third Reich, or the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, or the founding of this country, or some other historical information, there's a good chance that what you read is true, but you probably didn't read it in the Bible. In other words, the book you read wasn't inspired, but a book doesn't have to be inspired by God to be correct. If a historian records information that he knows to be true, either because he's done tremendous research, or better yet, if he was there, and saw it, and recorded it, journaled it, that man doesn't have to be inspired in order to convey to you true information about what happened.

And what I told my friend there is that, no, you don't have to have the assumption that the Bible is the word of God to be saved, but when you read the Gospels, you pretty much have to take them at face value. By the way, none of the Gospels mention whether or not they're inspired. There's not one Gospel writer who said, I am writing under inspiration.

All they do is begin to tell a story from beginning to end, and obviously they affirm that it's true. If they're inspired, all the better. If they're not inspired, they could still be historically accurate.

And there's no reason to reject the historical accuracy of their statements. If a person was doubtful that the Bible was inspired, they could still look at the Gospels as an open-minded person, say, here's an ancient historical document written by someone who saw these events that he's recording, Matthew, one of the disciples, John, one of the disciples, they were there, and they're saying they saw this and this happened and this happened, why should I doubt it? I don't doubt every newspaper story I read about events that happened. I don't read every autobiography I read.

Why should I doubt these ones? Now, it's quite obvious that if a person doubts the Gospels, but does not doubt everything else they read, that they are bringing an undue and unjustified degree of skepticism to their reading of the Gospels that they do not bring to other historical documents. Why? Well, it certainly isn't because the Gospels have been shown to be historically inaccurate. Far from it.

Archaeology, as we shall see, has confirmed the Gospels as often as anything can be confirmed from ancient history. There is nothing at all that has ever appeared to make the Gospel records seem inaccurate. No discovery has ever disproven the Gospels, and as I will show you later on, a great wealth of discoveries have confirmed many of the details of the Gospel records.

So, there's really nothing that an objective, unbiased reader could bring to his reading of the Gospels that would tell him these cannot be true, or that I should be skeptical about these more than I'm skeptical about history books that I read, you know, if I read a biography of Eisenhower, you know, I don't bring a great deal of skepticism to what the author is saying. I assume, well, the guy probably did his homework, he probably knows what he's talking about. I don't assume that such a biography would be inspired, but it doesn't matter to me whether it's inspired.

The only thing that matters is, is it telling the truth? And when I come to the Gospels, with or without an opinion about the inspiration of the documents, I can read what purports to be an accurate historical account of a man, some guy named Jesus, who allegedly did a great number of remarkable things, said a great number of remarkable things, and if he really did these things, said these things, then I need to sit up and take notice. This man is worth knowing about. I could even come to a total faith in him as my

Savior, my Lord, simply from believing these are historically accurate without any opinion about whether they're inspired.

Now, of course, once I have come to believe in him, if he is the Son of God, if he is the final, you know, ultimate revelation of God and so forth to man, then whatever his opinions are about the rest of Scripture would be wise for me to adopt. I mean, how could he be the Son of God and yet him be wrong about things like whether the Bible is inspired? Therefore, once I have read the Gospels, accepted their general testimony, that there was this guy named Jesus and he did these things, he proved himself to be from God by these miracles he did in rising from the dead and all that stuff, none of which can be disproven and none of it should be necessarily doubted. Once I conclude that this is historically true and I embrace this man as my Savior and my Lord, then, of course, the next thing in coming on me is to bring my thoughts into conformity with what he said generally because he's right.

Whatever he said is true. He is the truth, he said. And therefore, if he believed in the inspiration of Scripture, then it follows that, you know, I can't very long follow him and believe in him without also adopting his opinion about the Scripture.

So it would be, I mean, let's face it, there are people who believe in Jesus, follow Jesus, and don't believe everything he did because they either don't understand what he said or they're not sure what he meant or whatever, but this is my position about the inspiration of Scripture. I believe in the inspiration of Scripture. I intend to show you very good reasons to believe in it.

But as a starting point, I don't want to convey to you the notion that a conviction that this is the Word of God, somehow that that notion is a prerequisite for knowing Jesus himself. The disciples had never read the New Testament. Do you know why? It hadn't been written yet when they were following Jesus.

They had no theory about the inspiration of Paul's writings because the whole time Jesus was with them, during which time they were his followers, they were his disciples, they were saved by their belief in him, Paul had not even been converted yet, much less written any of his writings. Therefore, they were capable of being saved by a relationship with Jesus without having an opinion about whether Paul was inspired or not, or for that matter, whether Peter was inspired or not, or whether the Gospels were inspired or not. These books had not been written yet.

Therefore, although I believe that these books are inspired, and I believe the evidence will support this contention, I'm coming at this subject without elevating it to the point of the indispensable belief that all Christians must hold. That's why when my liberal friend calls me on the air, I'm not willing to decide for certain that he can't be saved. I mean, he doesn't strike me as a person who knows the truth very well, but at the same time, he says he loves Jesus, and I've got to take a man's word for it, if he's living according to

what he professes to love Jesus, he just has a misinformed opinion about the Bible, generally.

And frankly, I don't think that with his opinion of the Bible, he could very well consistently believe in the Jesus of the Bible, because he doesn't even believe the historical accuracy of the Gospels. But that's typical of liberals. But evangelicals do believe in the inspiration of Scripture.

And I'm an evangelical, and I believe in it, and I want to present to you reasons for believing in it. You might say, well, if I don't need to believe in it to be saved, what's the point of even going to the trouble of convincing myself of it, if it's not necessary to be saved? Well, a lot of things are not necessary to know to be saved. I mean, you could be blind and not know whether the sun was up today, because you can't see it.

You could still be saved, but it would certainly be a handicap, because your vision would be greatly impaired. Your ability to navigate through the world successfully would be greatly hindered. To say a bit of knowledge is not necessary for salvation is not the same thing as saying it's not necessary.

It may be very necessary for your walk. It may be very necessary for your ability to conduct yourself in the world according to the principles that God has said work, and are good, and please him, and are right. And that is why I feel it's so important for us to have the correct view of the Scripture.

Now, where would we start? Suppose I was from a Muslim country, never heard of Christianity. I came over here on a business trip, stayed in a motel. On the bed stand next to my bed, there was this book Gideon left for me to read.

It's called The Holy Bible. Let's say I'm totally unfamiliar with it. I don't have a clue what it's about.

And I pick it up, and I begin to read it. It would not be very long before I would discover certain things. Now, try to put yourself in the position of someone who doesn't already believe the Bible's word of God.

Let's say you don't have an opinion for or against it. You don't have any opinion about it. You're just an objective person being confronted with this book for the first time and reading it.

Reading it out of curiosity, and not with a high degree of skepticism, nor a high degree of gullibility. Just reading it like you'd read any other book you'd find out of curiosity. One thing that you would find immediately is that it's very, very different than all other books.

First of all, it purports to tell us things that no man could ever really know, like what

happened before humans were here, how the earth was made, in what order, what process, and so forth. I mean, no one is here to see that. How could anyone tell you a thing like that? How could anyone profess to know such things? I mean, it seems to talk about the nature of the invisible world, which no one has ever seen.

What happens to people after they die? Where they go and what it's like there, and things like that. I mean, what a peculiar book that is. How many people could write a book, credibly, you know, answering those kinds of issues? But another thing you would find, and you wouldn't have to read far to find it, is that the book professes to be quoting God a great deal.

It assumes that God exists right from the opening verse, but as you read through, you have continually quotations from God. And God said, let there be light. You don't have to read two verses into it to begin seeing it's quoting somebody called God, who made everything.

And as you go through, book after book, chapter after chapter, you find again and again the expression, Thus saith the Lord. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. And these kinds of expressions, you see, this is very peculiar.

The writer of this book, or the writers of this book, are professing, at least they're making some kind of an outlandish claim, that this God who made the universe began to speak, and spoke to them, and spoke through them, and gave his mind, expressed his opinions and his thoughts, and his truth in these pages. Now the next question would be, is this true, or is this a big hoax? I mean, this is really remarkable. Not many books make similar claims.

By the way, some do. The Bible is not the only book that makes such claims. Don't ever in your conversation with a non-Christian say, Well, the Bible's the only book that claims to be from God.

Far from it. The Koran, which is, of course, the basis of the Muslim faith, it makes every bit the same kind of claim. According to Islamic faith, the Koran was delivered to Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel.

And it was of divine origin. It is the word of God. I mean, that's not very much different than, say, the book of Revelation, the book of Daniel, which professed to be revelations that Daniel received, in many cases, from angels, visitors, and messengers, and so forth.

I mean, the Koran makes a very similar claim to that of the Bible. The book of Mormon makes similar claims. Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, taught that he received what he discovered, some gold plates with etchings on them that were unreadable to him.

But he found, along with them, a miraculous set of interpretive devices called the Urm

and the Thummim, and that through these he managed to, as it were, supernaturally interpret or translate these documents into what's now the book of Mormon. And this, they are convinced, is the word of God, and they claim it for it. So we know that there are other books, lots of other books.

You've got all kinds of weird books out there, New Age books, A Course in Miracles, for example. Several volumes that claim to be channeled from Jesus. You know, Jesus telling people how to do miracles in several volumes.

And it's supposed to be actually Jesus himself speaking. So it's not as if we're going to read in the Bible, and say, wow, this is not anything found anywhere else in all of literature. Well, there are similar claims found in all of literature.

The only problem is they can't all be true. And the reason they can't all be true is because they don't all agree with each other. The book of Mormon presents a different picture of God than the Bible does.

The Koran, likewise, does the same. So does the Course in Miracles, and so do many, many other books that claim inspiration. So a thinking person aware of these facts, reading the Bible, saying, well, these people claim to be inspired by God, would not immediately say, okay, well, they must be from God.

I mean, they said so. They can't be wrong, can they? Well, maybe they could be. I've been in many charismatic meetings where people said, thus saith the Lord, and then rattled off something or another that turned out to be wrong.

It's not inevitable that the person who says, thus saith the Lord, is really giving a word from the Lord. And the people who wrote the book saying, thus saith the Lord, or the Lord said, or the word of the Lord, et cetera, I mean, just because they said so, doesn't make it true. Any more than today, if someone says, thus saith the Lord.

These were human beings living in ancient times. They believed they were giving the word of the Lord. Though I've met people who believe they were giving me the word of the Lord, and they were wrong.

I've had people give me personal prophecies that they believed were from God, about my life, that were not true, and were not from God. So, I'm not a gullible person. I really am not.

When I see a book, a writer saying, thus saith the Lord, I think, oh yeah? How do I know that's from the Lord? And it's legitimate. You might think, well, that's irreverent to look at the Bible that way. How could you dare question God? I don't question God.

I'm questioning a book. In fact, questioning God is exactly what I'm not doing. If I could ascertain that the book is telling the truth when it says, thus saith the Lord, I will stop

questioning the contents.

If it really is God, I don't question Him. But I should question everybody who claims to be speaking from God. And the Bible itself tells me to do so.

Now, there are many times when the Bible claims to be the Word of God. Over 4,000 times, expressions like, thus saith the Lord, God said, the Word of the Lord came, these kinds of expressions are just peppered through the whole book, through all the books. And obviously, they're making a claim that's kind of, you can't just do nothing with that claim.

If the Bible never claimed to be the Word of God, if no one ever said, thus saith the Lord, if it was just a bunch of stories and a bunch of ethical teachings, we would never have to raise the question, is this really inspired? Because it never claimed to be. If it doesn't claim it, you don't have to test the claim. But when the claim appears so blatantly, it should be tested.

I'm willing to test the claims of the Book of Mormon and the Koran and the Course in Miracles and any of the other books. I'm willing to test it. The Bible says I should test it.

But it would be folly to see somebody making such an emphatic claim that they are giving me a word and a revelation from God and for me to do nothing with it, to think no more about it, to give no consideration of whether it really is or really isn't. I mean, how could anyone take God so casually? Some can, but I don't think I could. Now, there are some sweeping general statements in Scripture that are sort of, you know, about the whole of Scripture.

Principally, the Scriptures I have in mind here are about the Old Testament. In 2 Timothy 3, verses 16 and 17, very well-known Scriptures, one thing that should be kept in mind is that when Paul says, all Scripture in this place, he's referring to all the Old Testament Scripture. When he wrote this, there was not a body of literature called the New Testament yet.

When Paul wrote 2 Timothy, most of the books of the New Testament had been written, but they were never collected in some body of writings that the Church was calling Scripture or the New Testament. I mean, they might have recognized that this particular letter from Paul or this one from Peter or this one from James was Scripture, but they didn't have a collection. When Paul speaks of all Scripture in verse 16 of 2 Timothy, he means the Old Testament.

And that's further, I mean, clear from the previous verse where he uses the same expression. In 1 Timothy 3, verse 15, he says that from childhood, Timothy, you have known the Holy Scriptures. Well, Timothy hadn't known the New Testament from his childhood.

He had known the Holy Scriptures, meaning the Old Testament Scriptures. That's the only Scriptures that God had given up to that point. And therefore, when Paul says, all Scripture, he means the Old Testament.

But it does not mean that the same statement cannot further apply to the New Testament Scriptures once they've come along. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. And is profitable for doctrine, that means teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

What a sweeping statement that is. I mean, not just the first statement, but every statement in that passage. First of all, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.

You might have a translation that's more literal on this verse. Some of the versions that are more literal on this verse are less literal on many others. But most modern translations, probably NIV, New American Standards, some of those, prefer to render this verse a little more literally than the King James and the New King James.

The King James and the New King James both say, all Scripture is given by inspiration. The literal Greek says, all Scripture is God-breathed. As if God exhaled it, you know, it came out from the mouth of God.

It is God's Word. And then he goes on to say, it is profitable, you would expect it to be, if it's breathed out from God, it must have some benefit. What is the purpose of it? What's the profit? Well, several things.

For teaching. And by the way, when it comes to teaching, we have many teachers, some more and some less accurate, but none as accurate as God. If this Scripture is God's Word, then no teaching can carry as much authority as that of the Scripture itself.

But it teaches. And it is profitable for teaching, for reproof and correction. That means that when you're doing the wrong thing, it tells you what you're wrong and what you've got to do instead.

It means, of course, that when you are confronted by the teaching of Scripture, and it challenges something you thought or something you're doing, and it says, that's wrong. That's what it's there for. It's there to tell you when you're wrong, so that you can get right.

It means that God has not left us without correction. Fortunately, because we make a lot of mistakes without guidance. And it says, and it's profitable for instruction in righteousness.

People don't intuitively know what all things are righteous. What things please God, what don't please God. But the Scriptures tell us that, and they're profitable for that purpose.

That's a wonderful set of things the Scriptures are good for. And it says, continue on the same vein, namely that God gave us an inspired Scripture so that the man of God, and we know that the word man is generic for human. There's a lot of efforts these days to come out with, in fact they have come out with a number of what they call inclusive language versions of the Bible.

Where instead of using man, they say person, because feminists are offended that human beings have historically been called men, whenever it's not been distinguishing what gender. I think that's been way too touchy. I think we can live with the fact that English language, and all language, has always, when speaking generically of the human race, is typically, instead of saying man and woman, which is burdensome, they just say man, and they mean to include women.

So the man of God, the woman of God, the person of God, because God has given us an inspired Scripture, that person can be completely equipped. Makes it sound like there's not too much other equipment needed. You have the word of God, what else do you need? That's enough to be completely equipped, thoroughly equipped, for every good work.

That's a tremendous statement. If true, of course, saying it doesn't make it true. I could say that about my commentary.

Every word in here I wrote is the word of God. Ideal for correcting all your wrong beliefs. Well, I could say it, but that wouldn't make it true, and as a matter of fact, it wouldn't be true.

But, is this true? If it is, it makes a great deal of difference. If it isn't, we can pretty well ignore it, and should. The question is, is it? Do we have reason to believe it? Another Scripture of a similar sort is in 2 Peter.

It is likewise talking about Old Testament Scripture, but insofar as God gave additional books of Scripture after the Old Testament, there's no reason to put them in a different light than this. 2 Peter chapter 1, beginning with verse 19, it says, As in, we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Interesting phrase we don't tend to look at right now.

I've taught on it elsewhere. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for the prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Now, this is something some people misunderstand.

It says that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. This statement of Scripture was used for centuries by the Roman Catholic Church to discourage people

from thinking for themselves when it comes to reading the Bible. In fact, the Catholic Church discouraged people from reading the Bible.

For centuries, of course, there were no printing presses. Not until the 16th century were there printing presses, so Bibles were in short supply like all books were. Usually people couldn't get their hands on one, because every Bible that existed had to be handwritten, and whoever had time or money to do that usually was in a monastery, or the churches might have a Bible chained to the pulpit through most of the Dark Ages, but it was probably in Latin, and most people didn't read Latin anyway.

The priests would read from the Bible every service, but they read in Latin too, so, I mean, ignorance of the Bible was commonplace. And as far as the Roman Catholic Church was concerned, advantageous, because, of course, knowledge of the Bible, once it began to be released, once the printing press was invented and the Bible was translated into vernacular languages and people began to read it all over the continent of Europe, it spelled the death of Roman Catholic dominance of European thought, because Catholic thought wasn't the same as the biblical thought. But for centuries, that was not recognized, because there was widespread biblical literacy.

There's, by the way, we live in a decade or so of widespread biblical illiteracy, such as there is no excuse for, but I'm amazed to see the extent of it. And where there is biblical illiteracy, there is susceptibility to error. Now, the Catholic Church, when people began reading the Bible and saying, hey, this is different than what the Catholic Church has been teaching us, the priest would say, now, the scriptures are not for any private interpretation.

If you go trying to figure out what they mean yourself, then you're going to get all messed up. Leave this to the trained theologians. Leave this to the College of Bishops and the Pope and so forth to figure this out.

They have their councils, and they sort all these things out, and they decide what's right and what the scripture says. And just believe what they say, because the Bible itself says it's not for any private interpretation. And they think that that means the Bible should not be interpreted by you as an individual.

You leave it to the ecclesiastical authorities to do that for you. Now, that was a very good ploy to keep people from trusting their own hearts and trusting their own knowledge as they read the Bible. I mean, when the Reformation came along, one of the distinctives of the Reformation that is not as well known as some others, I mean, you probably, if you know anything about the Reformation, you know that Luther taught sola scriptura, scripture alone as the authority in religious matters.

He taught sola fide, faith alone as a matter of salvation, and several other distinctives that we hear quite a bit about and we remember Luther for. But many people are not

aware that he also taught a doctrine of what's called the perspicuity of scripture, which means, perspicuity is a word we probably never use in any other context, and you probably don't know what it means. But what it really means is the plainness of scripture, the understandableness of scripture.

The Catholic Church taught that you simply can't understand the scripture correctly without special theological training. Luther said, no, that's not true, it's written for common people. It wasn't written for theologians, it wasn't written for scholars, it was written for common Christians to read and understand.

That's what the Reformation taught, and it's clearly true. But what do we do with Peter's statement here? No prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation. Protestants have sometimes not understood that statement much better than the Catholics have.

If you reach your own conclusion that's different than your denomination, you're likely to have someone in the denomination say, well, scripture's not for your private interpretation. And there's the same kind of spirit of intellectual tyranny in many Protestant churches that there was in the Catholic Church. Trust the pastor, trust the theologians, don't rock the boat.

Don't think for yourself. If you're thinking something different than the smart guys are thinking, then you're really off the track, don't you know? You're not supposed to do your own private interpretation. And another approach that Protestants sometimes take, since they're trying to make sense of this verse and they're trying not to sound too Catholic, is they'll say, well, private interpretation means taking a passage in isolation.

And they'll say, what Peter is saying here is that you shouldn't take any statement of scripture in isolation, separate from the rest. You have to take the whole of scripture to understand any individual text. Well, of course, I believe that statement is correct.

You do have to do that. I don't think any scripture can be very well understood in isolation from the rest of the Bible, but that's not what the scripture is saying. All of these views, all these attempts to explain the meaning of the scripture, fail at the same point.

They all assume that Peter is telling us what we are and are not to do with the scripture, whether we are to interpret it a certain way or not. He is not making a statement about that at all. He's not telling us what your response or your reaction or your interpretation of scripture should be, or should not be.

He's telling us where the scripture came from. Did you notice the preposition of? That no prophecy of scripture is of. That means from.

Originating from. He is simply telling us that those who wrote the scripture did not give us their own opinions, their own private opinions and interpretations. I mean, the

prophets would see the Babylonians coming, and Jeremiah wouldn't just say, well, you know, in my opinion, this is God's judgment.

That's my interpretation of this event in history. So he wrote down, Thus saith the Lord, I'm going to judge you through the Babylonians. And, you know, his own personal interpretation of the events.

That's what Peter is saying the scriptures are not for. They're not of. That means they didn't originate from anyone's private interpretation, and that this is his meaning is clear from how he finishes the sentence.

For the prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. He's not talking about what you should do or should not do with the scriptures. He's telling how they came to us, where they originated from, where they did not originate from.

They did not originate from the will of man. They didn't originate from anyone's private interpretation of events. They came to us by the event of human beings who are holy men of God being moved by the Holy Spirit and writing down or speaking what they said, what the Holy Spirit said to them.

Now, I would point this out too, because many people say, Well, the Bible, why trust it? It was just written by men. I remember a friend of mine, an author, when he was in college, he had some atheist or agnostic professor who liked to tear down Christianity, even though it was not a religious class, it was typical professors of English and history and psychology and a whole bunch of other anthropology. They don't want to talk about their subject that you're paying them to teach about.

They want to talk about how bad the Bible is and how stupid Christianity is and so forth. And they end up making themselves look stupid since they don't know what they're talking about. But anyway, he had one of those professors.

And in one of the classes, his professor said, You know, the Bible, the teachings of Jesus, that's just the opinion of one man. And my friend raised his hand and said, Excuse me, whose opinions are you giving us? You know, are they from an angel or something? Why should we accept your skepticism rather than accept the opinions of what you say are the opinions of a man? Aren't you a man? Why should we believe you instead of the man Jesus? Now, there's a related thought to that. When someone says the scriptures, the Bible, that was just written by men.

Well, is this a criticism of the fact that no women wrote scriptures or what? No, that's not what they're saying. They're saying that mere human intellect and opinion and flawed at that from a very ancient pre-scientific age, poor intellect at that, human flaws are to be found in the scripture. And why would anyone think of them as divinely inerrant and

infallible when they were just written by human beings? That's what they're saying.

Now, is it true that the scriptures were just written by men? Well, partly true. If you leave out the word just, it is true that the scriptures were written by human hands. They were written by men.

But Peter didn't say they were just written by men. He did say they were written by men. But he added some qualifiers.

Holy men. Holy men of God, he said. Holy men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Now, that adds some dimensions to the origin of scriptures that are kind of neglected. If someone simply says, well, the Bible is just written by men. Well, if someone's writing about God, one thing I'm going to want to know is, is he a man of God? I mean, if he's an atheist, but he's trying to tell me what God is like, I'm not going to have very much confidence in his opinion.

There is an atheist like that. Stephen Jay Gould. I don't know if anyone's read his material.

He's a famous evolutionary biologist. He teaches at Harvard. Professor of biology and geology.

And he's an atheist. Confirmed and adamant atheist. But I remember he wrote a book some time ago called The Panda's Thumb.

And it was about what he considered the imperfections in the natural world. The panda, he said, a panda eats almost exclusively bamboo. Nothing else.

But to get to the part of the bamboo that's soft, it has to break the hull, the shell of the bamboo tube, see? And it has a sharp spike, as it were, protruding out of its wrist that it uses to split the bamboo with to get into the soft inner part that it lives off of. Now, he said this spike on the panda's wrist resembles somewhat the thumb of, say, a human or a monkey or other creatures that have thumbs. But it isn't technically a thumb.

He calls it the panda's thumb, but basically he's saying, you know, a thumb is part of the hand. But this panda's thumb is not. It actually protrudes from the wrist bone.

He said it's a very sloppy arrangement. This is a very awkward arrangement. And he went on to say, certainly if the panda had been created by an all-wise God, God would have made it a neater arrangement.

He would have made it a better design. Now, you'll hear this kind of thing from time to time. An argument against God.

And in that argument, someone's telling us what God would do. If God would make a

panda, he wouldn't make it that way. You know, when I read that, I think, excuse me? I'm supposed to form my opinions about God and what he would do and what he's like from a person who denies that he even exists? That's not exactly an authority on the subject of God.

I mean, he may know a few things about biology, but he doesn't know very much about God. He doesn't even know enough to know that God exists, much less can he tell me what God would do if there is a God. I mean, the man doesn't even... He's stupid.

In some ways, he's brilliant. In other ways, he's stupid. He doesn't realize that he's stating an incongruity.

He's professing to teach us what God is like, but that there really isn't a God. Now, if I'm going to have someone tell me what God is like and what God would do and what God wants me to do and so forth, I'm not going to turn to a man who doesn't know anything about God. I'd prefer to hear from a holy man of God.

This man probably knows more about God than the average person. And when you add to that the fact that this man is a holy man of God and he was moved by the Holy Spirit, that adds a great deal more confidence that he might have something to say that's reliable about God. And by the way, many people may claim to be moved by the Holy Spirit, but I'm much more... Generally speaking, I pay a lot more attention to people who claim to be moved by the Holy Spirit if in their whole life they are known to be holy men of God.

I've been in charismatic meetings where people speak thus saith the Lord and give a word from the Lord, but I know them from their life. They're careless in their walk with God. When they get to the meeting, they sound all spiritual by the measurements of spirituality that charismatics generally are impressed by.

But when it comes to daily living, many times these people don't have a very impressive testimony. If a man is a holy man of God and he says, the Holy Spirit has spoken to me, I'm more likely to believe him. Now, at the same time, none of these things prove that the Bible is inspired.

A man could pretend to be a holy man of God and lie and say the Holy Spirit spoke to him, or he might even be a holy man of God and be mistaken in thinking that the Holy Spirit spoke to him. None of these claims in themselves prove to me that the Bible is the Word of God, but they certainly tell me one thing. It makes claims of a sort that I would be very interested in knowing if they're true or not.

It would make a great deal of difference in my life if these claims are true. And it doesn't mean I have to believe they're true, but it means it would repay study. It would repay investigation.

It would do me some good to know if these claims are true. And fortunately, I'm not left with a total inability to test them. Now, the first thing to realize, of course, is that God wants us to test them.

God is not offended if we test them. If a person, like I said, a Muslim from another country finds a Gideon Bible and doesn't know a thing about it, he says, these people are continually saying that God spoke to them. They're quoting God.

If he said, how do I know this is true? I mean, the Koran I have back home in Iraq, it tells me that God spoke to Muhammad. Now, the teachings are different in these two books, so how do I know this is true? Why should I believe this one? That's a very good question to ask. God encourages us to ask those questions.

Because if the claims are false, then the Bible is no more to be believed than the Book of Mormon or the Koran is to be believed. God doesn't want you to believe what's false. Don't think it's irreverent to say, God, I want to know your word, but I want to make sure it's your word before I believe it.

I don't want to be deceived by man. So to test the claims are no insult to God. In fact, if anything, to fail to test them may be more of an insult to God.

It may mean that you don't take God seriously enough to really search and find out whether he's spoken or not. Now, the Bible itself commands us to test them. In 1 John 4.1, it says, Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

That's a very important bit of instruction, which many Christians would do well to pay more heed to than a lot of them do. Just because someone says, Thus saith the Lord, doesn't mean you're supposed to believe it. Test the spirits.

See if they are from God or not. Because, why? John says, not all of them are. There's many false prophets gone out into the world.

How do you know which ones are true and which ones are false? Well, you test them. That's what he says. You test them.

That's 1 John 4.1. There's two other times in Scripture where, in this case, Paul requires that we test all prophecies. In 1 Corinthians 14, verse 29, 1 Corinthians 14.29, Paul says, Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. Now, of course, there he's not talking about written prophecies.

He's talking about prophecies given in the church meeting. But what's the difference? If someone says, Thus saith the Lord, or if someone writes down, Thus saith the Lord, they're both making the same kind of claim. And both might be correct or might be incorrect.

As a matter of fact, many of the books of the Old Testament were simply uttered and someone wrote them down. Jeremiah uttered his prophecies. He didn't write any of them down.

His friend Baruch wrote them all down. But he was just like a prophet in the charismatic church today saying, Thus saith the Lord. And his words should be tested just like a modern prophet or person claiming a prophet.

There are many false prophets. You don't believe them all. So Paul says, Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge what's being said.

There's no irreverence in that. In fact, the more you revere God, the more you want to be particular, not to accept every charlatan as a spokesman for God. You want to make sure you've got the real stuff from the real God.

Over in 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 19-21, 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 19-21 says, Do not quench the Spirit. You don't want to preclude the Spirit speaking. You don't want to discourage people from prophesying.

Not at all. And he says, Do not despise prophecies. In all likelihood, he means prophecies given in the church in this connection.

Don't quench the Spirit's movement in the church. There will be prophecies given. Don't despise them.

But notice what he does say about them. Test all things, and hold fast that which is good. Now, Paul assumes that when prophecies come, they should be tested.

Some of them will be good. Hold fast to that part that's good. Some of them won't be good.

Don't hold fast to that. Be discerning. Don't be gullible.

If you think out of reverence for God, you have to take as genuine everything that professes to be from God. You're really not trusting God. You're trusting man.

You're trusting the person to be telling the truth. And you can't always trust people because they might be dishonest, or they might be plenty honest, but plenty mixed up. They might be wrong.

So, the Bible itself frequently tells us to test the prophets. There were two times in the Old Testament that basically Moses encouraged the Jews to test prophets that came to them. Now, he made it clear there will be prophets who will come who are genuine.

But he said there will also be prophets who come who are not genuine. You shouldn't listen to them. Well, how do you know the difference? Well, look at Deuteronomy 18.

I know you don't say Deuteronomy 13. We'll look there later, but look at Deuteronomy 18 first. 18, beginning at verse 18.

Moses, or God, speaking through the prophet Moses, says, I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren and will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him. That sounds like good. There's going to be prophets who will speak directly things, reliable things from God.

And it shall be that whoever will not hear my words, which he speaks in my name, I will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, so this is immediately recognized as a possibility also. Someone speaking a word in God's name, but they're not really sent from God.

Or who speaks in the name of other gods, another possibility. That prophet shall die. Now, it's not hard to recognize a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods.

He says, thus saith Baal. You know he's not a prophet of Jehovah. But what if he says, thus saith Jehovah, but he happens to be one of those ones that Moses remembers to hear God didn't command him, he doesn't have the word Jehovah, but he claims to.

How do you know? Well, Moses anticipates that difficulty. Verse 21, or God does. And if you say in your heart, how shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken? He answers, verse 22.

When a prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You shall not be afraid of him.

Essentially, he says if he predicts something it doesn't happen, he's not a prophet of God. He's a presumptuous person speaking in the name of the Lord, not true. Doesn't this essentially mean you test the prophet? You don't just assume he's telling the truth.

You see whether what he says comes to pass or not. If it does, then that's good. He's still at least in the running.

Although if what he says doesn't come to pass, he's not in the running. He's known to be a false prophet. Now, in Deuteronomy 13, verses 1 through 4, we find that even if the thing the prophet predicts comes to pass, there may be other things that show he's a false prophet.

Now see, what Moses said in chapter 18 was that if what he says doesn't come to pass, he's clearly a false prophet. But in chapter 13, we'll find that even if what he says does come to pass, he might still be a false prophet. Deuteronomy 13, 1 through 4, if there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, then he gives you a sign or a wonder.

And the sign or the wonder comes to pass. Now, there you go. He says this is going to happen, and sure enough, it does.

He's right. Very impressive. But go on.

Of which he spake to you, saying, Let us go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them. Whoa. Here's a guy.

He gives a sign or a wonder. He predicts something will happen. It does happen.

Just like a real prophet. But when you hear what he has to say, he's saying, let's go worship Moab. Let's go worship Baal.

You've got something else going on here. It's not God. There's supernatural stuff happening, but it's not the spirit of God.

Apparently, it's some kind of a spiritual counterfeit. Probably demonic. Go on.

He says, You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you. You're supposed to test prophets. They are testing you.

God is testing you. When he allows a false prophet to speak in his name, he's testing you to see whether you will test him. Test the prophet.

He's given you a chance to do so. The Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Obviously, loving the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul doesn't mean believing everyone who comes along and speaks a prophecy.

It means that you test them, and if they are wrong, you don't listen to them. If they're leading you astray, then you regard them as a false prophet. Now, this is both the Old Testament and the New Testament encourages us along these lines.

When someone prophesies, test it. Don't believe everything. Prove all things and hold fast that which is good.

Now, with those instructions, it should be obvious that there's no irreverence shown to God if we look at the book of Isaiah who says, Thus saith the Lord, and say, How do I know that's the Lord? If I look at Ezekiel, he says, Thus saith the Lord. I say, Well, how do I know Ezekiel is speaking from God? After all, in their own day, Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel, they were just men saying, Thus saith the Lord, just like a man might arise right today and say that. And I have to test that.

The fact that they lived thousands of years ago doesn't change the fact that they were still men making a claim. The question is, Why do I believe their claim? Now, most Christians say, Well, I believe their claim because they're in the Bible. But you have to

realize that when Jeremiah wrote, he didn't submit his document to some divinely inspired publisher for inclusion in this anthology that would later be called the Bible.

He just prophesied. Someone wrote down what he said. And at some time later, people recognized this is the word of the Lord and they put it in the Bible.

But maybe those people were gullible. Maybe they were mistaken. How do I know that the people who decided that Jeremiah told the truth and he was speaking from God, how do I know they're right? Well, I don't mean to raise doubts in your mind, except that to discover and to inquire and to research requires that we start with some knowledge of what kind of doubts ought to be considered.

Otherwise, we're gullible. Faith is not gullibility. Being gullible means you'll just accept anything without criticism.

That's not what God calls us to. That's not faith. That's just being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.

The very thing the Bible says that mature Christians are not. In Ephesians chapter 4, verse 15. So, when we look at the Bible, we have every right, in fact, every obligation before deciding this is the word of God because it says so, we need to say, well, how do I know it's the word of God just because it says so? Well, as you know my opinion, so you know that some process I at least personally have gone through has convinced me that it is the word of God, notwithstanding the fact that I believe we have to test it.

And I want to share with you the ways that I have become convinced of this. As I said, if after you've looked at all these ways, you say, ah, the evidence is not adequate, I don't believe it's the word of God. I mean, that's your business.

That's between you and God, and I won't even say that you can't be a Christian and go to heaven. I mean, if you feel the evidence is inadequate, certainly God would not wish you to be gullible and to believe that for which you don't have adequate reason to believe. But I believe we have more than adequate reason to believe it, and this is what I'd like to share with you in the next several lectures.

In order to test something, you need to have data. You need to have evidence of some kind. You need to have some method of cross-examination.

You need to have some kind of supporting data. And when we say, well, I believe the Bible is the word of God, I'd better have some kind of reason for believing that, some kind of evidence. Or else I'm just being like a Mormon who believes the Mormon's the word of God even though there's no evidence of it.

And my belief in the Bible might not be any more valid than his belief in the book of Mormon. Because we might have exactly the same reasons for believing whatever we

believe. I would like to think that I have better reasons for believing the Bible's the word of God than the Mormon has for believing the book of Mormon's the word of God.

In fact, I do. There are two general categories of evidence I want you to be aware of. We're going to narrow down for closer inspection.

Not all of these. But the first kind of evidence that I want to talk about briefly and then move along to something I consider to be more important is what I would call subjective evidence that the Bible is the word of God. This would be the personal witness of the Holy Spirit in your heart.

Now, I just suggested that's not as important as some other kind of evidence. You might say, oh, irreverent. What could be more sacred? What could be more convincing? What could be more important than the witness of the Holy Spirit about this matter? I mean, many people would say, I don't need to hear any of that evidence about the Bible.

I know it's the word of God. I read the Bible and I just know it because the Holy Spirit bears witness that that's the word of God. You know what I want to say? I believe you.

I have the same experience myself. I really believe that. And frankly, in the final analysis, that may be the most important evidence for me.

It may be that when God reveals to me that it is the word of God, that that is the sweetest, the most sacred evidence I have to go on. You remember when Jesus said to Peter, who do you think I am? He said, well, you're the Christ. You're the son of the living God.

And Jesus said, blessed are you, son of Barjona. Flesh and blood is not revealed to you but my Father has revealed this to you. Man, getting a personal revelation from God, what could be sweeter than that? I would hope every Christian would know this phenomenon.

If you don't know the phenomenon of God bearing witness to your heart about the Scripture, keep searching because there's nothing more wonderful. I mean, I study the Scripture with books and lexicons and things like that. It might seem all very dry and so forth to some people.

Actually, I find it invigorating. But where I really learn the most is when I'm just driving the street meditating on the Scripture and God speaks something from it and it's alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. This is a tremendous thing.

I've had that experience hundreds of times. I don't have it every day. But I mean, I have it occasionally and it's enough to really thrill me.

There are times when I'm reading the Scripture and a text, maybe I've read the same

text 50 times before and it never had a particular effect on me. But this time it is a word of seasoning. God speaks through His Spirit to my soul and it just comes to life.

It burns. Like the man on the road to Emmaus said about Jesus speaking to him, did not our hearts burn within us when He expounded the Scriptures to us? I'll tell you, there's times when I read the Scriptures and God expounds them to me and it burns within me. I hope you know that phenomenon.

That's what I'm talking about by a subjective, personal witness to the Holy Spirit. I don't want you to think that subjective is a bad word. Subjective is, of course, the opposite of objective.

And the difference between the two is that something is a subjective experience if it is entirely confined to what's internal, in you. You are experiencing it. But it is not external to yourself.

It's not happening out here. It's happening inside here. You know it's true.

You experience it. But all the people standing around you might not be touched by it because it's not something happening outside of you. It's happening inside your awareness and your consciousness.

And that does happen. I mean, God is a person. We have a relationship with Him.

You'd better have communion with Him. You'd better know His Spirit speaking into your heart. I mean, if you don't, you're really missing out on what I think the Bible portrays as a normal thing, to have the subjective witness.

I've had it many times. But what I want to say about this is this. While a subjective witness is a wonderful and convincing thing, and there are times when I've read the Scriptures and God has spoken, I thought, how could I ever, ever, ever doubt that this is the Word of God? God has just spoken so dynamically.

I'll never doubt it again. But you want to know something? I might. Because the subjective experience isn't continuous and constant.

It can be that that Scripture that gave me such comfort and through which God spoke so dynamically to me yesterday in my next crisis, I look at the same Scripture for the same comfort and it's not there. God doesn't use it the same way. He doesn't convict me the same way from it as He did yesterday.

That was what He was saying to me then from that passage. He's got some new thing He wants to emphasize now. But it's not constant.

Subjective experiences like these simply are not always there. Now that doesn't mean that when they are there they're not valid. They are valid.

Or at least they can be valid. They can be phony too. But they certainly can be valid.

But it's in the nature of the thing that it's not always there. And if I'm dependent wholly my belief in Scripture rests entirely, let's say, on the fact that I get a burning in my bosom when I read the Scriptures. Well, I'm not in any better shape than the Mormons are.

They get a burning in their bosom when they read the Book of Mormon. And I might have the conviction that what they're feeling is nothing better than heartburn than what I'm getting as a witness of the Holy Spirit. But they have no reason to think the same thing about me.

They say, you're the one with heartburn. We're the ones hearing from God. I think, well, who's right? Well, I've got this subjective witness.

They think they have a subjective witness. We can't both be hearing from God. There must be something additional to this.

Not to exclude this, but something additional to this. Some way by which I even test this witness to know whether it's of God or whether it's just another Mormon delusion. Now, one of the serious limitations, I'm not going to call this a defect, I'll just call it a limitation in a subjective witness as a means of knowing the truth about the Scripture being the Word of God.

One limitation is, as I said, that it's by definition subjective as in internal. I may be getting a great buzz off this passage, but I can't make anyone else get that buzz off it. It's inside of me and it's nowhere else.

At the moment. I can be witnessing to a non-Christian and I say, you know, God requires you to repent of your immorality and turn to Christ and follow Him. And they'll say, how do I know you're right about that? I say, well, it says so right in the Bible.

And they say, well, how do I know? Why should I believe the Bible? Well, everyone should believe the Bible. That's the Word of God. Well, how do I know it's the Word of God? How do you know? I know it's the Word of God.

You should know that it's the Word of God. I know it too because I feel this when I read it. They say, well, give me an example.

Okay, well, here, read this passage right here. He reads it. He says, well, I don't feel anything.

Oh. Well, I thought it was the Word of God. When I read it, I get something out of it.

Maybe it's the Word of God to me and not to you. You know? No, that doesn't make sense. It's either the Word of God or it's not the Word of God.

The problem is those things that I feel subjectively cannot be transmitted to another person. They are the personal things that God is doing in my life. In the personal ways that He confirms to me His Word, they're wonderful and they're real and they are desirable.

But there are limits to their value in terms of persuading others that they should believe in the Word of God. And, see, there's really two limitations. One is what I just said.

You can't present it to someone else and hope that they feel it, too, because they may not. Secondly, you can't even count on always feeling it yourself. It's not constant and it's not external to yourself.

So, if your whole reason for believing the Bible's Word of God is because you read this passage and it just burned in your bosom, what happens the next day you read it and it doesn't burn in your bosom? Is it not the Word of God anymore? Do you have reason to doubt it now? Hmm, you know, the days it burns are the days it's the Word of God. And the days it doesn't burn, I guess, maybe it's not the Word of God. We need something better than this.

In some ways, better. Okay, I mean, subjective witness and witnessment is better than anything else in some respects. But when it comes to having a constant conviction that cannot be shaken on bad days as well as good days, the wrong time of the month or on the days I get out of the bed on the wrong side of the bed and I'm feeling grumpy, the times I'm not feeling very spiritual, I need to have a way of knowing, is this still the Word of God? I mean, I felt like it was the other day, but I'm not so sure.

I don't feel like it right now. Is it going to be based on my feelings? If so, it's going to be an inconstant conviction. And it's going to be a conviction that I cannot use in any way to convince anyone else that the Bible is the Word of God.

And yet, both things are important to me. I want to have something that doesn't go away when I'm in a bad mood. I need to have something that I can say, it's still true, and I still know it's true for good reason, even though I don't feel it today.

And even though I can't show somebody what I feel. Well, this gets us to the other category of evidence. And that is, obviously, objective.

If it's not subjective, it's objective. And the word objective refers to things that are exclusively external. Just as subjective things are what is exclusively internal, what I'm feeling inside, that's my subjective experience, an objective reality is entirely external.

It doesn't depend in any way on what I think, feel, or believe. It's there. When we talk about something having objective reality, we mean that it is as real whether anyone believes it's real, feels like it's real, or ever existed to know that it's real, or not.

God, for example, is objectively real. He is not a product of human imagination. He's not more real when more people believe in Him, and less real when few people believe in Him.

He's not more present when I feel like He's present, and less present when I don't feel like He's present. His reality, His presence, His existence, is objectively true. If I never became aware that He's right here, that in Him we live, move, and have our being, if no one ever told me I never learned it, that wouldn't make it any less true.

I would live my whole life in the presence of an objectively real God that I would never subjectively know it. And even before God created people to know that He existed, He existed. That's what objective reality means.

It means totally independent of anyone's opinions, feelings, thoughts about it. This reality is real. Now, when it comes to objective evidence that the Bible is true, this is the best kind for constant conviction.

You see, if there is something that objectively can be pointed to every time, it always proves, you know, every time I look at it, the evidence is still there. It doesn't matter what my mood is. It doesn't matter how many people are voting against it.

Regardless of human opinion or human feeling, every time I look at it, the evidence is still standing there staring me in the face. It's objective. It doesn't depend on anything inside of me.

I can even deny it. I can even reject it. But it's still there.

It's still there pestering me. And this is something that you need to be aware of. There is that kind of evidence of the Word of God.

There will always be people who prefer to suppress the truth in their unrighteousness, but it's much more convicting to them to do so when there's objective evidence staring them in the face every time they look that direction. You know, they don't want to look there. They don't want to see it.

They want to suppress it. But every time they look there, it's still there. And there is a vast abundance of just that kind of evidence for the inspiration of Scripture.

And this, I think, we need to appreciate. We need to be aware of. Because there will be days, there may be weeks or months, where you're going through low spots spiritually, and you're going to need to believe the Scripture of the Word of God, not just by being gullible and saying, well, I choose to believe it.

That might seem like a nice thing to do, but Mormons do that on their bad days too, probably with their book. But you need to be able to say, I know it's the Word of God, not

because I feel like it is, but because I cannot ignore the facts. The facts are there.

There is evidence that is overwhelming. Now, I have often said to unbelievers, although I don't say this often, I used to just because they get so offended, but I still believe it's true, that everybody in the world who is not a Christian falls into one of two categories. They're either ignorant of the facts, or they're bigots.

I don't know why unbelievers would feel objections to that statement, but they do. They don't like to be told that they're either ignorant or bigots. But there's no other way of looking at it.

Once the evidence is seen, now, I frankly believe the vast majority of unbelievers are in the first category. They don't know. They don't know what the evidence is.

They've never looked at it. They've never heard it. It might not even be their fault.

They might live in some country where they've never had a chance to hear the gospel, but they still fall in the category of they don't know. They don't know what the evidence is. Once a person becomes aware of the evidence, the evidence points unmistakably at a certain conclusion.

I can say this with certainty, and we'll spend several days here, or several sessions here, pointing to what evidence I'm referring to. Once you see the evidence, it all points in one direction. And the vast majority of people who are not Christians simply have never seen the evidence.

And they can't always be blamed for that. It's not always that easily accessible. Sometimes you have to do specialized study and research.

But once the evidence is seen, an honest person, without bigotry, will embrace it. But you will find some people who you can present all the evidence to them, and they'll still say no. Not because they have better arguments for unbelief, but because they have preferences to the contrary.

They prefer to live in sin, and if they acknowledge the truthfulness of the Bible, they're going to have to give up a great deal of pleasure in sin and unrighteousness. So, that's bigotry. That is saying, I don't care what the evidence says, I still choose to be an unbeliever.

That's bigotry. That means prejudice. So, in my opinion, every person who is not a Christian, and I like to say this to unbelievers because it gets them riled up and they want to argue, and I always like that.

But everyone who is not a Christian is either ignorant of the facts, or else they're bigoted. They're not honest. They're not assessing the facts with an open mind.

And you will see in the lectures that are coming up, although we're winding this one down here, that this is certainly the case. I'm not making an irresponsible statement at all. Now, since I don't choose to be a bigot, and I don't have to be ignorant of the evidence, I can reach the conclusion that the Bible is the Word of God and never have any occasion to seriously doubt it.

Because I can always look at that objective evidence. Now, the objective evidence falls into two subcategories, in my opinion. There is objective evidence for the inspiration of Scripture that is supernatural in nature, and there is objective evidence that is merely natural.

The natural evidences have to do with the way in which natural evidences confirm that the Bible is correct. When you find archaeological support, when scientists discover something that happens to support something the Bible said, when you find historical verification from somewhere else, when you look at certain phenomena of Scripture and say, well, this is certainly a remarkable case of accuracy here. Those are what we call natural evidences.

They are objective because they're not what you think about it, it's what exists. You can look at it any time you want to look at it and it will still be there. It doesn't change.

It's there. It's real. It's objective.

It's got independent reality and validity. Now, I call those natural evidences because although they do tend to confirm that the Bible is reliable, they are not in themselves any kind of supernatural proof of the inspiration of Scripture. For example, if you could prove from appeals of science and archaeology and historiography and so forth and all these disciplines, if you could prove that the Bible is 100% accurate on every point, you would not necessarily have proven that it's the Word of God because a book can be accurate without being inspired.

Depending on the expertise of the writer, a man can write a book that is true without having the inspiration of God. So, the natural evidences are not really in the final analysis a proof that the Bible is inspired. They certainly encourage belief that the Bible is reliable in its statement.

And that goes a long way toward making it useful to us. If it's reliably true, then that's great. Even if we didn't know it was inspired, these evidences that tell us it is reliable are very, very helpful.

But we don't have to depend on them alone. There is another category of objective evidence that's out there. It's not what I feel, but it's supernatural.

An example of what I would be talking about would be if Micaiah the prophet in 1 Kings 22 tells Ahaz, you're going to die when you go to battle at Ramothlion. And Ahaz doesn't

like that prophecy and he has Micaiah put in jail. He says, keep this man in jail until I come home safely.

And Micaiah says, if you come home safely, God has not spoken by me. And the man goes out to war and he's covered with armor and he's in the thick of the battle. And by chance, the Bible says, some archer on the other side just shoots an arrow.

He doesn't even know who he's going at. It's random. And it happens to hit a joint of the armor between two pieces of armor and it kills Ahaz.

Now, the man, the prophet Micaiah said, God has not spoken by me if you come home alive. He didn't come home alive. Now, the prophet was correct.

And in a sense, supernaturally, because the man could not possibly know whether Ahaz would come home alive or not without having some kind of insight from someone other than what humans ordinarily would know, namely God. Likewise, if Elijah, the prophet, says, you've got me saying I'm speaking from God and you've got these prophets of Baal claiming that they've got some kind of divine inspiration, let's build two altars and let's put out a sacrifice in the altars but put no fire in it and let's just see which God answers by fire. And sure enough, the prophets of Baal get no response from their God.

Elijah calls on God and fire comes down and consumes the altar and the sacrifice and so forth. There is a supernatural evidence that this man was a prophet of God. They spoke from God.

God gave supernatural confirmation. Now, this is, in some ways, far superior to the natural because while natural evidences may increase our confidence that the Bible is a reliable book and that it's agreeable with what is known to be true elsewhere, supernatural confirmation proves it to be God's book. Not just a true book, but a book that God has inspired and that he's pleased to confirm that he inspired by giving supernatural evidence of it.

Now, there are evidence like that and I won't go into detail right now of the most important and convincing of these supernatural objective evidences but we will before the series is done. We are going to, in the next few lectures, look at these ten pages of notes that you have. We've gotten almost to the bottom of the first page.

It won't take quite so long for a page once we get started. The reason there are so many pages is because there are extensive quotations from various sources to confirm it. And once we get to the point where we're reading quotations, we can get through pages a lot faster than what we've been doing.

But all of these ten pages have to do with only that category of natural evidences. We will use up all these pages and their information talking about the natural objective evidences. But it will be useful.

It will be very helpful. And when we're done with that, we'll have to have another handout and some other things to talk about supernatural evidences and some other considerations. But at this point, we come to a break in our studies and we will come back and talk about the natural evidences for the inspiration of Scripture in our next class.