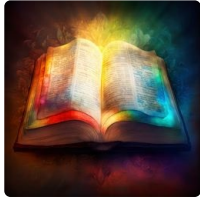


# OpenTheo

## The Word of God and its Rivals (Part 1)



### Authority of Scriptures - Steve Gregg

In "The Word of God and its Rivals," Steve Gregg asserts that the ultimate authority for believers is the Word of God, and all human authorities and traditions can become a rival authority if they contradict scripture. He emphasizes that Christians should not be intimidated by expert opinions or opposing beliefs, but rather examine them in light of scripture. The lecture also touches on the dangers of putting loyalty to country or church leaders above loyalty to God and the importance of examining religious traditions in the context of biblical teachings.

### Transcript

The notes I've given you have as their title The Word of God and its Rivals. By rivals I'm not referring to other religious books like the Koran, but I'm talking about rather rival authorities in the life of a believer that challenge the authority of scripture when it comes down to where the rubber meets the road, where we're actually making the decisions of our lives. Remember, everything you think and everything you do is based on some submission to some authority, whether you're aware of it at the time or not.

You're either submitting to the authority of impulse or preference or some more worthy authority than that. So whatever we do is subject to some authority that we are obeying. And since the Word of God is the ultimate authority, if we always submitted to that authority, we'd never do anything wrong or think anything wrong.

But it's quite evident that we do things wrong and we do think things wrong. The worst part of it is that we do that without knowing we're doing that. I mean, everyone here has done things wrong and realized immediately after that was stupid, that was wrong, shouldn't have done that, that was evil, and repented.

But the sad thing is that many Christians who desire to please God and live obediently do things that are wrong without knowing they're wrong, for the simple reason that they have never recognized what the actual authority is that they are submitting to. Whereas submitting to the Word of God is always the right thing to do, there are other usurpers, other authorities, or at least which claim authority, which often give us impressions and

instructions different than those in the Word of God, and we sometimes obey those. Not usually out of rebellion, I hope, not because we're consciously rejecting the Word of God, but because we're not aware of what authority we're listening to.

And this lecture will have a number of examples of what I'm talking about. Based on all that we've studied in the earlier lectures, we can justly conclude several things. One, that God, because He's the Creator, possesses innately, intrinsically He possesses absolute authority over everything He has created, and that would include ourselves.

We could also conclude, and I think we've seen evidence for this, that the Bible is the authentic revelation of God's will and His purpose, it is His Word, and therefore, of course, to submit to the authority of the Bible is nothing else but to submit to the authority of God Himself. Which is not to say that we idolize the Bible, and that we put the Bible in the place of God. Christianity calls us to have an authentic relationship with God Himself, not just with a book about God or a book from God.

We're not saying that if you have the Bible, you don't need God too. What we're saying is that if God has spoken in the Bible, it's as authoritative in our lives as if He had appeared to us personally and spoken to us the same words. A letter from God is as good as a verbally spoken word from God.

If I'm in Hawaii and I call home and I tell my son, I'd like you to wash the dishes for your mother on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday night, and I want Hannah to wash them on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. If I say that on the phone, then you've got a word from me. Or I might even say it before I leave, say it to him face to face, and therefore, because I'm the authority in the home, he is to do what I say.

On the other hand, if he receives a postcard from me, from Hawaii, and I've written down those same instructions, it carries the same weight. It's no less authoritative. He has to obey it just as much as if I'd said it to him face to face or in telephone conversation.

If he gets it in writing, that's just another way of me expressing my will. If God has given it to us in writing, that's as good as if we were caught up in the third heaven and saw and heard things that were unutterable and unrepeatable, but he gave us direct instructions in such a circumstance. That would be impressive, but it wouldn't be any more authoritative than if he wrote it down and gave it to us in writing.

So, submission to the Word of God is nothing else but the submission to God himself, but that doesn't mean the scriptures replace God in our lives. It certainly means that the scriptures are one way in which God has communicated his will infallibly to us so we can know what he wants. Therefore, the Bible should be given the full authority over our lives and serves as a final court of appeals in all matters of faith and practice.

Already several times in this series, we've appealed to 2 Timothy 3.16, that all the

scriptures are given by inspiration of God. It's profitable for teaching. It's profitable for correction, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness.

It covers all the bases. Isaiah 8.20 says, if they speak not according to this word, it is because they have no light in them. In 1 Thessalonians 5.21, Paul said, prove all things and hold fast to that which is good.

There must be a standard by which we test all things, since not everything we hear, not everything that comes to our mind, not everything we read is trustworthy. There are probably at least as many untrustworthy thoughts that come to our attention and present themselves as if true as there are trustworthy ones. And, of course, the only way you know the difference legitimately, is if there's some standard of truth that you can measure against and say, there's the standard, this thought, this claim, this teaching does not measure up with the standard, therefore it is not true, the standard is true.

And you've got to prove all things and hold fast only to those things that pass the test, which are good. It follows that no other authority can rightly supersede or preempt that of the scriptures in the decision making process of the Christian. Yet Christians routinely, by ingrained habit and unexamined conditioning, live and make decisions contrary to the actual teachings of scripture.

Since all thinking and behavior reflects submission to some authority, we must conclude that there are other authorities that continue to exert influence over our lives in conflict with the scriptures. Any such authorities must be recognized as the usurpers of God's rightful place in our lives and as strongholds of the enemy that must be cast down, along with every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10 verses 4 and 5. So we need to cast down everything that opposes the knowledge of God, every usurping authority that seeks to govern our lives contrary to what the word of God says. Submission to the scripture in all things will result in right opinions and right actions.

Any imperfection of our present opinions and actions must be traced to our submission to some faulty authority other than scripture. This must be recognized as the sin that it surely is and repented of, since the placing of any authority above God is the detestable sin of idolatry. I've read those directly from the notes, rather than say it off the top of my head, although I wrote the notes off the top of my head last night, because it's faster.

I want to get through this material fast, and most of what we want to look at is in the remaining portion of the notes I've given you. These opening paragraphs are simply to bring you up to speed with what we've already pretty much established in earlier lectures. And it's from this point we want to launch into some very serious, hopefully very objective, maybe brutally honest evaluations of some of the beliefs and practices that are common among us, which are not biblical, and to examine what authorities are bringing forth these practices.

What authorities are we listening to, if they're not from the Bible? Well, whatever authorities we submit to, or even whatever authorities present themselves for us to submit to, whether we do or not, may be rivals to the Word of God. If the Word of God is the absolute authority in the final court of appeals, and the standard by which everything else is measured, then for something else to say something contrary to the Word of God, and to assert itself as an influence in our thinking and our life, is to be a rival authority to the Word of God. That's why I've called this the Word of God and its rivals.

I have identified in my development of this study five rival authorities, rivals to the Word of God. Now, when I first made this lecture up, though, it was probably 15, 16 years ago, I first gave a lecture on this subject. I only had identified three, and for years I thought that there were three.

Since that time I've realized that there are at least five, and maybe some years from now I may realize there's more than that. But these five are particularly influential. In many cases, Christians as individuals or the church as a whole has followed policies and accepted doctrines and convictions based on these authorities rather than Scripture, and often contrary to Scripture.

So let me identify them. In each case I'm going to give you examples of how it is that I think these authorities have intruded themselves and exalted themselves above Scripture in the church, in many cases, and possibly in the individual lives of believers. I'm assuming going into this that we want to obey God, that we want to live right and think right.

There may be some doctrinal issues we're not that excited about, but we can hardly avoid having opinions about almost everything that we know about, and if we're going to have opinions at all, it's best to have the right ones as opposed to wrong ones, because the truth will make you free, error will not. And so on the assumption that you want and I want to submit to the ultimate authority of truth in the Word of God, it is to our advantage to look at our behavior and our beliefs and examine the actual authority that rests, that these things rest upon in some cases. So I'd like to in the remainder of this lecture talk about five, what we could call rival authorities to the Word of God in the lives of the believer.

The first of these, and I don't know that the order I've chosen is a logical order or a necessary order, but it's the order that just they present themselves to me, to my mind, to present them to you. The first is human authorities. Now by authorities, I mean persons of distinction, persons of rank.

There are people who tend to be deferred to because of their rank. Now this rank can be political rank, or it can be a more, it can be more non-tangible. It may be that we defer to them because they seem intelligent, or scholarly, or spiritual, or something like that.

They hold a degree of distinction in the church, or in society. They hold high university degrees, or perhaps even hold a high office in an organization or in a government. When that is the case, we're talking about a person who is an authority of sorts.

We know that if a governmental authority commands us to do something unbiblical, then we are obliged to do what the Bible says, not what that authority says to do. And yet, many times, Christians are intimidated by human authorities. We find throughout the Old Testament, there were times when the kings of Israel, or the kings of Judah, instituted idolatrous practices, and the populace who knew the Word of God, or at least should have, followed what the king's orders were.

They just submitted, sometimes for fear of punishment. Other times, just because people unthinkingly follow their leader, without any reference to punishment. But there were always some, there was always a remnant who would not submit.

Elijah was an example of one who would not submit to Jezebel, the queen, who insisted that no one prophesy in the name of Jehovah, and that everyone worship Baal. Elijah wouldn't do that. He thought he was the only one.

So God revealed to him that there were 7,000 who would not bow to the knee to Baal. But still, that's a pretty small remnant of the whole nation. The young men who were taken into captivity in Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and their friend Daniel, all of them faced situations where their king, an authority, a human authority, told them to do things that they could not in conscience, as believers do.

To bow down to a statue, or to pray to the king. These men, as Jews, knowing what the Word of God said about this, had to submit to God rather than to man, even though the man was a powerful authority. We know the apostles had the same reaction when they were commanded by the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of Israel.

They were commanded to not preach anymore in the name of Jesus. And Peter's answer was, well, his first answer, the first time he said it was, well, whether it's right on the side of God for us to submit to you instead of a God, you have to decide, but we know what we're going to do. We're going to continue preaching.

And when they were arrested the second time for it, and they said, didn't we tell you not to preach anymore in this name? He said, well, we have to obey God, not man. Now, these human authorities did have some legitimate authority in their sphere, because all authorities are ordained by God, Paul says, but they were operating outside their sphere. As soon as any authority begins to speak contrary to the Word of God, they have no authority, because God is the ultimate authority, and anyone who speaks contrary to him is not speaking in a way that God has authorized him to speak.

And therefore, it's important for Christians not to submit to human authorities on matters

where they're required to do things against God. Now, I don't know where you stand, because you're from different backgrounds here, on the subject of war. In some cases, I'm not sure where I stand on the subject of war.

It's quite a complex moral issue. To a large extent, I am a pacifist. I'm not sure that I would be, in all points, a pacifist in every situation.

I've been weighing the scriptural matters on that for many years, and there's some areas still that I would have to call gray areas. But for the most part, I personally think that in most wars that have been fought, the teachings of Christ and the apostles would basically discourage Christians, if not command them outright, to not fight in these wars. Many of them had only political objectives, and righteousness was not an issue.

In many cases, wars, even the good guys, did many atrocities. And for Christians to participate in such atrocities, I think, would go against Christian conscience, in many cases. There have, for a long time, at least since the Anabaptist movement arose in the 16th century, been a sector in the church who simply believed the Bible taught against Christians fighting in war.

Now, I'm not saying I agree with everything they said about this subject, but let me just say this as an illustration. There are people who believe that the Bible forbids Christians to fight in war. That would include Anabaptists, it would also include Quakers and some other Christians who aren't associated with these movements.

Without, at this moment, deciding whether their views are correct or not, let us assume, for the sake of argument, that they are correct. Let's just assume that these people had read the Scriptures correctly, and that it would be wrong for them, as Christians, to fight in wars. We know at least this, that if they believe it's unscriptural, then it is wrong for them, because Paul said, whatever is done without faith is sin.

It may not be, conceivably, it might be okay for some people to fight in wars, but if a person is convinced that the Bible teaches against it, then it would be wrong for them to do it. That's clearly timescription. But there are those who would dissuade those with this conviction by saying, but the Bible tells you to submit to the authorities, to the governmental authorities.

What if the governmental authorities command you to go to war? Well then, you must do so, we're told, because you're supposed to obey the government. Yes, up to a point, you're supposed to obey the government, but not to the point of disobeying the Scripture. Again, without, at this point, judging whether the Anabaptists are right or wrong as their interpretation of Scripture, as far as they're concerned, the Scripture teaches that they should not go to war.

And in my opinion, they should not, even if the authorities that be command them,

because God has never authorized any authority to override the authority of Scripture. There are many people who object to war and who really feel as Christians they shouldn't go, but when drafted, not wishing to have a confrontation, not wishing to go to jail for their views or whatever, they have gone ahead and gone. Now again, I'm not condemning people who do go to war.

It's possible that those who do have a more correct understanding of Scripture, but what I'm saying is that if the Scripture teaches against it, as some people believe it does, then it would be wrong to go even if the government required it, just like it was wrong for people in Germany under Hitler's rulership to participate in the Holocaust. Now, not every German did. In fact, not even every German soldier probably had anything to do with it.

I've met some men in Germany who were soldiers under Hitler. They were Christians, they were Baptists, and they didn't agree with Hitler. And I don't know, I didn't ask them whether they directly participated in the slaughtering of Jews, but there were some who did.

And when called to give account of it after the war was over, many of them said, well, we were just following orders. Anyone ever heard of the Nuremberg Trials? There were many Nazi war criminals who were put on trial for their war crimes. And in many cases, they said, well, we were just following orders.

We didn't, you know, we were not responsible. You are responsible. No human authority has the right to tell you to do something sinful.

And we can thank God that we were not in that position in Germany that, in that day. What if Hitler did draft you into his army and make you, put you in a position where you're supposed to mow down Jews with a machine gun or to send them into ovens? I mean, that'd be a hard place to be in, but it wouldn't be a hard decision for me to make. I mean, it'd be painful.

It'd be costly to make it, but it wouldn't be hard to know what the right decision is. It doesn't matter who the authority is. If he speaks against the word of God, he's got no authority in that command.

This is true also of religious leaders, the religious authorities. I think, I don't know if I mentioned, I think I did, that there used to be a movement called, yeah, I did, called the shepherding movement and the charismatic movement back in the 70s. In this movement, there was a strong emphasis on the authority of church leaders and that, you know, the Bible says obey those who have the rule over you, meaning the church leaders.

And it basically taught that you should do whatever they tell you. I think I brought this up

earlier in the series when I was mentioning the sphere of authority concept, that the elders do have some authority within a sphere, but outside of that, they don't. But in the shepherding movement, they didn't acknowledge any limits to the sphere of an elder's authority in every area of your life, who you marry, what job you get, where you live, what car you drive, what you wear, everything was under the authority of the elders.

And to violate their wishes as they expressed them was considered rebellion. And as the sin of witchcraft, this is a very oppressive, cultic kind of mentality. But I was once talking to an elder who was in a church and which taught shepherding, and he was, he was one of the leaders, and he believed in the shepherding concept.

And I said, well, I said, what if my elder tells me to do something I think is sinful? And he said, well, you should go to your elder and tell him that you think it's sinful. I said, and what if he doesn't release me from it? He said, well, then you'd go ahead and obey your elder. And the responsibility for your act will fall on him, not on you.

He actually believed this. In fact, that was the official teaching of the shepherding movement. Even if your elder tells you to do something that you consider to be sinful, go ahead and do it.

It'll be his responsibility, not yours. Sorry, you can't do that. You can't slough your responsibility.

If God has already given you instructions, no one, church authority or otherwise, no one can take that responsibility from you. You have to obey God. You've got to walk with God.

And if he's told you not to do something, you don't do it, even if some human intimidating authority tells you to. A man of distinction ceases to speak authoritatively exactly at the moment that he speaks in conflict with the word of God. His rank among men or even in the church carries no weight in itself.

We have scripture in favor of this. In Galatians chapter 2, Paul is talking about, oh, there's a lot of people perceive Paul to be in conflict with the other apostles. And he explained that wasn't the case, actually.

They endorsed him. They agreed with him. And yet he said it wouldn't matter to him if they did or not, because Jesus endorsed him.

And in talking about this, he said in Galatians 2, 14, But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter, before them all, this is where he rebuked Peter, if you being a Jew live in the manner of the Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? Now, he was rebuking Peter. Now, Peter was like the top authority in the church. If there was one, Peter would be him.



But Paul says, But I saw that he wasn't straightforward about the truth of the gospel. His behavior was not scriptural. Therefore, rather than saying, well, he's Peter, I'll submit to him.

He says, No, you're that's unscriptural, Peter. You're wrong. And he did not support Peter.

Then he actually rebuked him publicly. Now, also earlier in the chapter, it says in verse six, Galatians 2, 6, But from those who seem to be something, he means Peter, James and John in this case. Then he says, Whatever they were, it makes no difference to me.

God shows personal favor to no man. Then he continues, For those who seem to be something added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised been committed to me as the gospel of circumcised was for Peter, and he goes on that they endorsed him as an apostle to the Gentiles.

But notice he says, These men, I spoke to them about my ministry and they endorsed me. But he said it didn't matter if they did or not. I mean, I would prefer that they did.

He says their rank didn't impress me. God doesn't respect man. Whoever they were, it makes no difference to me.

He said, God's no respecter of persons. What he's saying is these men, well, they would have authority insofar as they're not speaking against scripture. God's the only authority ultimately that I have to submit to.

And even when Peter is wrong and unscriptural, he stands to be rebuked and Paul rebuked him. He did not kowtow to men of rank in the church or otherwise. In Acts chapter 17, there's a well-known case of Paul himself being cross-examined by his audience.

This is when he left Thessalonica and he went to another town called Berea. And it says of the Bereans in Acts 17 and 11, these were more fair-minded, actually literally more noble. The King James says noble.

I'm not sure why the New King James changed it since the margin says literally noble. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica in that they received the word with all readiness and searched the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Now, they heard Paul preach, but then they searched the scriptures to see if Paul was telling the truth.

And then it says, of course, therefore, many of them believed. After they checked him out, they said, oh, it is true what he's saying. Then they believed.

But they didn't believe just because he said so. They believed because they checked the

scriptures and he was agreeable with them. Now, you might say, well, Steve, I thought you said we're supposed to believe Paul because he's an apostle.

True, but these are unbelievers. They don't know he's an apostle. These are Jews.

The gospel hasn't come to them yet. Paul shows up. He's an apostle to the church, but the Jews don't know who he is.

They don't know if he's telling the truth. They don't know if they're supposed to accept his authority. So they check him out by scripture.

And when they find him to be scriptural, they can't resist it. Now, you will often find a personality cult-like thing happening in the church. Now, cults, we know, in many cases, are cults for the simple reason that there's one person or maybe a group of people, an organization, that usurps the ultimate authority in the lives of the participants.

In the case of the Christian science cult, there is a woman, Ellen G. White, not Ellen G. White, that's the Seventh-day Adventist, Mary Baker Eddy, I got the right, I gave you Ellen G. White. She's also the founder of a cult. I shouldn't say a cult.

They're a denomination, but they have cult-like elements. The Seventh-day Adventists, I don't believe they're non-Christians, I believe they're saved. But their organization has cult-like elements in that they believe that Ellen G. White was a prophetess.

And therefore, whatever she said about the meaning of scripture is authoritative with them. In the case of Christian science, it's Mary Baker Eddy, a different founder, another woman. And she wrote Science and the Key to Scripture.

And her interpretation of scripture are the final authority for the Christian scientists. They can read the scripture, but they have to understand it the way that she understood it. Similar to the Roman Catholic Church, in a way.

Catholics are allowed to read the Bible, but they're only allowed to believe it and understand it the way that the official doctrine of the church is, the organization. Joel's Witnesses are the same way. They claim that the scripture is their only authority, but they are not able to interpret it any differently than their organization does.

You've got a person or a group of persons who hold absolute authority in the movement. That's why we call them cults. Because the scripture is not allowed to speak for itself to the conscience of the individual and the person submits to the authority of scripture themselves.

It has to be filtered down and reinterpreted through a person. And that person is the real authority. Because if you think the scripture teaches something different than what they say, well, you're out.

You can't be in that group. And the fear of being excluded causes many people simply to submit to the authority of that leader. In many cases, one of the features of cults and one of the reasons people join cults is because a lot of times there are people who don't feel a sense of community or belonging in their lives otherwise.

And they find this sense of belonging in a cult and their security is there. And if they begin to read the Bible for themselves and see things differently than the leaders, it gets scary because they think, well, if I see things differently than the leader, I'm out. And this is where my security and my sense of belonging is with this group.

My significance is found in being in this group of people. And therefore they're intimidated by the authorities to believe whatever it is the organization or the leader requires them to believe. That's what cults are.

It's also possible for Christians to make the mistake of being intimidated by scholarly authorities, Christian or otherwise. For example, many people believe that the leading scientists are all evolutionists. And even though everyone knows that evolution isn't taught in the Bible and there's a serious conflict between what evolutionists claim or what the Bible claims to be true, there are Christians who will nonetheless defer to evolutionists.

When they talk about creation, they allow that evolution may have been what God used. They concede to it. Why? Because it's in the Bible? No, because they don't want to sound out of touch with what the authorities believe, the scientific authorities.

Christians don't want to sound like someone in the dark ages, someone with their head in the sand who's just blindly following the word of God in spite of the findings of great authorities. But as a matter of fact, if they speak not according to this word, there's no light in them. They're not authorities.

And when they speak against the word of God, they're not authorities. Same as truths of psychology. I was talking to a caller on the radio.

I called into my radio show the other day and a caller asked me about demon possession. So I gave him a short summary of what the Bible talked about demon possession. And I take demon possession seriously.

I take it at face value. The Bible teaches it. It's reality.

And another caller who frequently called in and took me to task, he said, Steve, I'm so embarrassed to hear an evangelical Christian presenting such superstition over the air. When we now know that these people are mentally ill, we now have a science of mental health where we can define schizophrenia and manic depression and all these different disorders. And to hear someone so superstitious as to say that they still believe in demon possession.

Now, this person is a professing Christian himself. And I've talked to him many times. I know him to be a professing Christian, but he's not a firm believer in scripture.

And it's a very good example of some being embarrassed by what the word of God says. Why? Because they are believing some other authorities. The psychological, the mental health community, the mental health community has come up with their own theories about these things.

And these people are the new gurus and priesthood of our society, the psychological society, the therapeutic society. And God forbid that we should be found to be in contrast with them in what we say. Rather, we set up Christian psychological clinics, Christian therapy centers that use psychological devices, you know, Christian psychiatrists.

And, you know, there's tons of books in the Christian bookstores written by Christians giving advice to other Christians about how to fix their problems. And you won't find that they're getting their solutions from the Bible, although the Bible addresses the same issues they're addressing. Instead, they're getting their ideas from the authorities, meaning the psychological mental health authorities.

They just accept it. Why? Because it's the recognized view of our culture now. And, you know, these are the, like I say, the new priesthood of the new psychological religion.

And Christians often are afraid to take a stand against the prevailing orthodoxies of these experts. If we say, I don't really believe that having a high self-image is all that important. I don't really believe that a person is just a bundle of needs and once his needs are met, he'll be a decent guy.

I don't believe that. That's the prevailing orthodoxy of our psychological society, but that's not biblical. Now, I don't mind saying so, but some people do mind saying so.

Some people are very intimidated by these authorities and therefore even Christian pastors and writers, they will talk as if those authorities were actual authorities. I remember reading a book by, I think it was Larry Crabb, who is a Christian psychologist. And he was saying, you know, there's a lot of problems people go to a counselor for that aren't addressed in the Bible.

And he gave a list of them. Every one of the things he mentioned is mentioned in the Bible. He apparently didn't know it.

And the Bible does give counsel, but he says, he says, in these cases, a person who only uses the Bible and doesn't use psychology is not going to be able to give adequate counseling to people. And he recommended certain authors that Christians ought to read to make them more effective in counseling, including Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and a bunch of other pagans. Interestingly, the Bible says

that the natural man and all those men listed are natural men.

They're not converted. But the natural man does not understand the things of the spirit of God. They don't receive the things of the spirit of God.

They're foolishness. And how could these men be authorities about the spiritual struggles people have when they're natural men and they don't know anything? The Bible says, blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. But that man who's not walking in the counsel of the ungodly, which is the counsel the ungodly give, which all those men I just mentioned are ungodly, except for a letter crab, he's probably godly, but he recommended them as authorities.

But the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly is the one who, what's it say he does? He meditates day and night on the law of the Lord. You know, it's the scriptures. They are his authority.

They are the ones. And what happens to him spiritually? What happens to him mentally, psychologically? Well, he's like a tree planted by rivers of water. He brings forth his fruit and sees his leaf never withers.

Whatever he does shall prosper. That man is the man who meditates daily on the word of God, not the one who goes to the psychological ungodly authorities for answers. Now, I know a lot of Christians who go to Christian psychologists and say, well, I'm not walking in the counsel of the ungodly because my psychiatrist is a Christian.

But the question is, where did he get his ideas? If he's got a degree in psychology or psychiatry, he didn't get it at a Christian college in all likelihood. And even if he did, his professors didn't get their degree at a Christian college. All those ideas come from ungodly men and their conjectures.

But those men hold sort of an unchallenged authority in our society because that's what they say and that's the prevailing mental health orthodoxy. Well, I don't mind saying I'm not intimidated and I will not defer to their unbiblical ideas. The Bible is the word of God, and I don't care how many authorities say otherwise.

I'm not intimidated by evolutionists. I'm not intimidated by psychologists. And these are two of the main undergirding streams of belief in our culture that form the worldview of our secular culture today.

And there are men who hold degrees in these areas and they speak with great swelling words as if they have great authority. But Christians ought, like Daniel standing against King Darius, Christians ought to be able to stand up against those authorities and say, but this is what the Lord says and God is right and you are apparently wrong since you don't agree with God. They don't speak according to this word.

There's no light in them. Isaiah said that, but he also said this, or God speaking through Isaiah said this, in Isaiah 2.22, he said, sever yourselves from such a man whose breath is in his nostrils, for of what account is he? In other words, God doesn't put much stock in this guy. His breath is in his nostrils.

In other words, his life is contingent on every breath. He doesn't have a whole storehouse of breaths to last him for the rest of his life. He has one breath at a time.

It's in his nostrils at the moment. Where does he get those breaths? Daniel said to King Belshazzar, you have honored the gods of gold and silver, but you have not honored the God in whose hand your breath is. God gives you every breath.

What is a man whose breath, the only breath he has is the one in his nostrils. Right now he doesn't have his next one yet. He may not ever have it if God doesn't give it to him.

This man is 100% vulnerable. He's mortal. Why would you wish to attach yourself to such and seek the approval of such people when you could otherwise seek the approval of God and follow his teaching? Human authorities also could include celebrity spokesmen.

There's a lot of political causes and also as far as that goes, products being advertised where they hire some celebrity, someone who's a movie star or a rock star or a football star or something and they have this person get up and tell you why we need to change political policies or something or another or why this product is a great product, even if it's not something they have any authority in that field. Just the fact that someone's a celebrity, that their name is a household word, sometimes is intimidating. My son was telling me last night that I'm very fortunate because he says I have probably met the most famous Christian musician that ever was.

I'm not sure who the most famous Christian musician that ever was is, but he was referring to Keith Green. It seems like everybody knows who Keith Green is, but I was acquainted with Keith Green and had many conversations with him, including some conflicts. By the way, he died on good terms with me and he repented of those conflicts late in our relationship, but I never held anything against him.

He was a young Christian. Even when he died, he was still a young Christian and I was an older Christian. I took into consideration his youth.

He got a little wild with me. He claimed to be a prophet. He claimed that God was telling me through him that I was supposed to join his community and I didn't feel like God was telling me to do that and called me a rebel and all those kinds of things.

But I just thought, well, it's okay for you to think that about me. I don't care. I'm not intimidated.

You may be a celebrity. By the way, I love the man. I respect the man.

He's to this day my favorite Christian musician. I have high regard for Keith. You might think because of my experiences I wouldn't, but I do.

I never had anything other than high regard for him, but I never had such a high regard for him that he could tell me God's will for my life instead of me following what I understood the Bible to be teaching me to do with my life. Celebrities, sometimes just the fact that everybody knows their name is enough to intimidate you, to defer to whatever it is they're saying you should believe or do. I mean, there's all kinds of TV stars, movie stars that are telling you what political agendas the government ought to follow.

Remember Princess Diana used to go around telling people about the need to eliminate landmines from all the countries of the world. Well, maybe removing landmines is a good idea. I mean, I don't know where they are and why they're there and whether they need to be removed or whether it's good that they stay there.

I don't know. All I know is that I'm not going to change my mind because she said so. I'm not aware that being ex-Princess of Wales makes her an authority on landmines worldwide.

I mean, I could read an article from somebody who was a nobody, but who knew something about it and I'd be more impressed, but people are impressed with celebrities. That's true of Christians too. Christians are impressed with celebrity preachers, celebrity authors and so forth.

Frank Peretti's book, *This Present Darkness*, which I read and I enjoyed. I don't have any serious problems with it, but it presented a picture of the spiritual world that the Bible doesn't fully present. Now, I'm not saying there was anything in Peretti's book that was contrary to scripture because the scripture simply doesn't give the kind of details that Peretti gives, but Peretti has become like the best-selling Christian author.

Everybody knows his name. He's written many other best-selling books besides *This Present Darkness*. That was his first and it made him famous, but a lot of people when they read it, they say, well, Frank Peretti said this about the demonic world and this is how he presented it.

Well, he's not a biblical writer. I mean, he's not a writer of scripture. A lot of what he says is conjecture.

I don't know any heresy in his book and I'm not saying you shouldn't read it. I enjoyed reading it, but it's amazing how many people will take someone like Peretti or C.S. Lewis and will quote him as if, even if what he's saying is unbiblical or can't be confirmed biblically, as if that settles it like it was in the scriptures themselves. And if you ever try to take on somebody like that, and you're nobody, you're likely to get a lot of criticism

for standing against the celebrity Christian leaders.

Many years ago, back in the 80s, a book was written by David Hunt. Dave Hunt, you might know his name. He's an author.

He's written a lot of books since that time and he'd written some before that, but he was still a relatively unknown author in those days. He became very recognized by writing the book, *The Seduction of Christianity*. It made a big splash.

Every Christian magazine critiqued it and everyone was talking about it. The large thing about, if you weren't around and weren't aware of it back in the 80s, is Dave Hunt basically said that a lot of the most best-selling Christian authors and the pastors of the largest churches and so forth were teaching things that weren't biblical. That was his position.

Now, while I don't agree with everything Dave Hunt said, because he holds some different views than I do, yet I agree with a lot of what he said. And basically, he was taking on the church leaders in some areas and authors because they were promoting psychology and they're promoting the Word of Faith and promoting some other issues that he thought were unbiblical. And he named names.

He quoted these men. You know, he quoted John Wimber, he quoted Paul Young-I-Cho, he quoted Richard Foster, and he quoted a lot of people who were best-sellers and pastors of big churches and things like that. And he kept saying, these people.

Now, he also said this, he says, I'm not calling any into question at all their sincerity or the fact that they're truly saved people. He says, all I'm saying is the things they're teaching don't line up with Scripture and therefore the church shouldn't follow these teachings. Boy, he sure caught a lot of flack for that.

Not necessarily from the men themselves, but from their loyal followers. And it wasn't so much that their followers came back and said, now wait a minute, you said that Paul Young-I-Cho is wrong because he said this and you say the Bible says that. They didn't say, now let me show you in the Bible how Paul Young-I-Cho is right on these issues.

No one came back to him that I'm aware of saying, let me refute you from the Scripture. That would have been a very responsible thing for the defenders of Paul Young-I-Cho to do. He now goes by the name David Cho, the pastor of the largest church in the world in Seoul, Korea.

If someone felt that Cho was more biblical than Dave Hunt, they should have come back to Dave Hunt and said, well, let me show you in the Scriptures why I think you're wrong, Mr. Hunt, and why I think Cho's right. But to my knowledge, no one did that. I have a stack of correspondence Dave Hunt gave me, which are letters he wrote back and forth between people who were critical of him.



And I've read this whole stack of letters, probably 200 pages in a big collection. And not once did any of his critics say, Dave Hunt, you're wrong in what you said about John Wimber. You're wrong in what you said about Richard Foster, because the Bible says this and this and this, and Dave, you're seeing it wrong.

Every one of them said, how dare you criticize this man of God? How dare you criticize the pastor of the largest church in the world? How dare you criticize Robert Shuler, who's written more best-selling books than you'll ever write? You know, I mean, who are you, was basically the tone of all these letters. Who are you, a relative nobody, to stand up and challenge these giants of the faith, these giants of the Christian publishing world and so forth? Now, like I said, I didn't agree with Dave Hunt's interpretations of everything, and I don't agree with all his beliefs, but I certainly sided with him in saying that he has the right, as an individual Christian of low stature, it may be, compared to some of these men, to take them on and say, listen, I don't think what you're saying is biblical. Because you, no matter how much stature you have in the body of Christ, you still have to be subject to what the Bible says.

And no matter what you say, if it's contrary to the scripture, there's no light in it. I don't care who you are. You can be a celebrity.

You can be the biggest pastor in the world. I don't care. You're not God.

And you can't contradict the Word of God and get away with it. Now, I had that opinion toward Chuck Smith, my first pastor in the Jesus movement. I mean, he knew the Bible forward and backward.

He could quote it, practically all of it, without opening the book. He was spiritual. It was through him that I first learned the baptism of the Spirit.

And I mean, I'm indebted to him. I respect him to this day. He's a humble man.

He's not a proud man. He's a humble man. I can't think of anything bad to say about the humble man, really.

I mean, I could, in some areas I disagree with him now. But in the early days, my view of Chuck was he could do no wrong. I mean, I was 16.

He was in his 40s and had been, he could quote the Bible more than I could and everything. I thought, well, if he thinks that's what the Bible means, who am I to question it? You know, I could find a pastor that thought, well, I don't know if that agrees with what Chuck says, but he says it means that, okay, Chuck, it's you. Now, I'm not saying this to say that Chuck is off the wall today.

I'm just saying that my attitude toward Chuck was not a healthy attitude. And I don't think he probably would have encouraged it. He didn't know that I had this attitude, and I

don't think he would have encouraged it.

And likewise, no teacher who's submitted the word of God would ever want his audience or his students or his parishioners to believe what he says if they felt it was unbiblical. If somebody hears what I say and says, Steve, I don't think that's biblical. I say, well, let's talk about it.

Let's look at the scriptures. Let's see. Maybe you're right.

Maybe you're wrong, but it can't hurt to look. I've had many people tell me that in their own church that they go to, they've at times gone up to the pastor after and said, Pastor, I don't know that you were really telling, you said such and such, but I think the Bible says something else. And the pastor turned on and says, you know, well, where did you go to theology? Where did you study theology? Or, you know, where'd you get your degree or something? I mean, the pastor obviously was not pleased to be challenged.

In some cases, I've known people who get soundly rebuked by their pastor for no better reason than they suggested the pastor may be something the pastor said might not agree with scripture. Any pastor who does not welcome correction from the scripture, you turn your back and run as fast as you can and find another pastor. Because if a pastor is submitted to scripture, he will not mind that you challenge him.

Because if you challenge him, if you challenge me, there's two, I have two things can happen. One is you may be right. And I may be wrong.

If you're challenging me, you might be right. And you could correct me. That's good for me because I'm a teacher.

We receive the stricter judgment. If I'm teaching the wrong thing, whoever corrects me and gets me to stop, stop teaching that wrong thing is doing me a big favor. Because otherwise I'm going to keep teaching the wrong thing.

I have to answer to God for that's not, that's not an enjoyable prospect. If anyone can correct me from scripture, I welcome it and thank them for it. On the other hand, it's possible that they may be wrong and I may be right.

In which case I can, I can show you, you know, if I'm right, I can show you that scripture is on my side in that case, in which case you can be corrected. Being corrected is a good thing. Wise man must correction the Bible says.

And therefore no one should be intimidated or offended. If someone comes up and says, I don't think you're right according to scripture, that just provides an opportunity to look at the scripture more closely and say, well, let's see, maybe I'm not, maybe I am, let's just find out. And it's, it's always great to say the scripture.

So, I mean, any pastor, any leader who just feels like he's above criticism, above biblical criticism, that's more like a cult leader than a, than a pastor or, or a biblical leader. Okay. Let's move along here.

That's, that's what I had to say about human authorities. Human authorities might be political authorities have that kind of authority, or they might be people who have some kind of, uh, imputed authority because of their scholarliness or their spirituality or the size of their church or how many books they've written or whatever, or just that their, their, their face is known on television and everyone knows who they are. That is not real authority, of course, but they are such people are regarded as authorities and deferred to as if they were authorities in our culture.

And that's maybe okay. Sometimes there are such things as legitimate human authorities, but they never can be given authority above the word of God. In fact, all five of these rival authorities, I want to identify a few, all of them are legitimate at times.

All of them are legitimate sources of information. In some cases, the problem I'm talking about is when you give these sources and authority above the authority of scripture, so that you believe them instead of believing the Bible. That's the problem.

That's where idolatry begins. Okay. The second rival authority to the scripture is human reasoning.

And once again, I'm all for human reasoning. I'm a reasonable man. I'm not anti-intellectual.

I like intellectual thought and stimulation. I'm in favor of it. I'm in favor of logic and reasoning.

But the problem is there are times when people will trust their reasoning more than they'll trust the word of God. You know, the Bible says in Proverbs 3, 5, trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. One of the best examples of a violation of this principle that I'm aware of is the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Ironically, the Jehovah's Witnesses see themselves as the true champions of the authority of scripture. They believe that they alone really are using only the scripture. They think they're free from church tradition and all that garbage from the Catholic and even Protestant traditions.

They think that they have the pure stuff, the pure scripture, ironically. However, they are the worst examples of some of these things. They believe what they believe about the scripture because their organization tells them to and won't allow them to believe something else.

They'll get kicked out if they believe something else. Furthermore, they don't believe, for

example, in the Trinity. Now, can the Trinity be established scripturally? Well, the Bible doesn't anywhere say the Trinity is, you know, it doesn't say God is three persons, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, at least three or one.

God doesn't actually say that anywhere. It comes close to saying that in one verse that's authenticity is questionable over 1 John 5. But I believe you could establish the Trinity on the basis of various statements in the Bible taken together. You can't find it all in one place anywhere.

But I personally think that when you find in the scripture again and again that there's one God, there's one God, there's one God, there's one God, and then you also find the scripture, the Father is God, Jesus is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and Jesus is not the same person as the Father and the Holy Spirit is not the same person as Jesus. Therefore, you've got this phenomenon. You've got one God, but you've got three different persons who are all called God.

Now, that's not the same thing as putting the doctrine of Trinity into a codified form like they did at the Nicene Creed. But it seems to me that if you take scripture seriously and let it speak for itself, it's hard to avoid a doctrine of the Trinity. It seems to be a deduction that the scripture leads us reasonably to.

Well, of course, Jehovah's Witnesses are among those who deny the doctrine of the Trinity, and they don't believe Jesus is God, and they don't believe the Holy Spirit is God, and they think there's only one God that's the Father and Jesus, and the Holy Spirit therefore must be lesser things, created things or whatever. And I've had many discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses, and I've taken them through the scriptures that I believe would establish that the Trinity is a biblical doctrine. And they will try at first to try to show me biblically that the Trinity is not biblical.

They do that by mistranslating certain verses and so forth. But once we've gotten through it and looked at the Greek and all that stuff, and I've shown that the Trinity can be established biblically, I say, well, then why don't you believe in the Trinity? And they say, well, because no one could understand a doctrine like the Trinity. How could three be one? No one could understand that, and God wouldn't expect us to believe something that is impossible to understand.

This is what I've heard time and time again. They've said this again and again to me. God would not expect us to believe something we don't fully understand.

Therefore, we reject the Trinity since we can't fully understand it. Now, here's a classic case of people who should trust in the Lord and not lean to their own understanding. If the Bible teaches something is true, but I don't understand it, what am I to trust? My reasoning or the Bible? The Bible doesn't say I have to understand everything.

It does say I have to obey and believe what it says. I don't have to understand everything it says. Usually my response to them is, well, do you believe God has always existed, never had a beginning? And they say yes.

And I say, well, do you understand that? I don't, but I believe it's true, and so do they. They believe it's true, and they don't understand it. So they pick and choose what they're willing to believe that they don't understand.

But the fact of the matter is we are counted on to believe some things we don't understand. But some people say, I won't believe anything that I can't figure out. I can't logically explain.

Well, that is putting the authority of the human reasoning above the authority of Scripture, because the Scripture may declare to be true certain things that we may never be able to explain. And we just have, or we're put in a position to believe only what our mind approves by logic, on the one hand, or to believe what the Scripture says, whether or not our mind approves it by logic. And if human reasoning is sided with in such a case, then human reasoning is a higher authority than the Bible in our thinking.

It's the height of arrogance to think that what God has said can be challenged by the puny reasoning powers of the human mind. In Psalm 131, the psalmist, quite humbly and correctly, acknowledges that there are some things that are just too high for him to know, too lofty. Psalm 131, verse 1, David says, Lord, my heart is not haughty.

That means not arrogant, nor my eyes lofty, neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me. And the King James says, too high for me. There are things that are too high for me.

There are things too profound for me. This doesn't mean that when I become a Christian, I check my brains at the door and don't think anymore. I just accept what I'm told.

But it means that when I have found Christianity is generally reasonable and there are reasonable grounds for believing the Scripture, I then can also reasonably conclude that some things God knows and understands might be above my ability to reason through. If I have reasonable basis for believing that God has revealed the Scripture, then it's equally reasonable for me to say I'm going to have to sacrifice at times my desire to fully understand something before I accept it. I have to accept it on the basis that God said it.

I'm not arrogant. I don't concern myself with great matters or things too profound for me. It's a wise thing and a humble thing to say there are some things that might be just a little too profound for me.

In Isaiah 55, 9, God said to the wicked, he says, my ways are higher than your ways. My thoughts are higher than your thoughts. As high as the heaven is above the earth, so high are my thoughts above your thoughts and my ways above your ways.

Isaiah 55, 9. I've known Christians who would reject the doctrine of God's foreknowledge. They don't believe that God knows in advance what we will do. They're Christians though.

They believe in God. They believe in Jesus. They believe the Gospel.

But their concept of God does not allow that he knows everything future. They believe he knows everything present. They believe that the doctrine of omniscience, which means knowing everything, means that God only knows all things that are knowable.

And future moral choices I'm going to make haven't been made yet. They don't exist, so they're not knowable, they say. They argue that if God knows for certain and infallibly that I'm going to, let's say, sin tomorrow, then I can't do anything else but sin tomorrow because God knows infallibly I'm going to.

If I do something else, then he didn't know correctly. And the very fact that he knows infallibly I'm going to do it means I've got to do it. And therefore, there's no human freedom and no human responsibility in the action and so forth.

It's all determined by God. Now, see, there is the possibility, it seems to me, that God may know the future without causing it and that there may be still a freedom to do and a responsibility for doing moral choices that God may know about without him causing, so to speak, by knowing it. All I know is that the Bible does teach that God knows the future choices of people.

There are many examples. One of the most striking is where Jesus told Peter, you're going to deny me three times before the cock crows. Those are three moral choices he had to make within a certain time frame.

He did it all just the way Jesus said it. By the way, had he not done it, what would that make Jesus? False prophet. We dare say Peter could do nothing else once Jesus predicted it without making Jesus a false prophet.

And yet, Jesus didn't make it happen. He simply knew it would happen. Oh, it gets all twisted up in our thinking when we try to figure out how could I be free to do something, yet God knew I was going to do it, but I could do something else.

But then in that case, he knew I would do something else. But how does God's foreknowledge exist alongside my free moral choices? I don't know. I don't quite understand it, but I presume God does.

How does God know the future? I don't know. I don't know how he knows. Some people say he's in the eternal now, but that Bible doesn't say so.

That's a possibility. It's a theory. I think C.S. Lewis popularized that theory or someone

did.

But anyway, it may be true, but the Bible doesn't say it. We simply aren't told how this works out, that God knows what I'm going to do, but I'm still free to do whatever I want to do. It's like the Trinity in a way.

It's affirmed, but never explained. And I don't understand it. But I can believe that there are things too profound for me.

There are things that God understands that I do not. And therefore, I can believe the Word of God anyway. Another area where human reasoning sometimes wins out against the Word of God in the lives of certain people and even Christians is that God's justice described in scripture sometimes goes against the grain of our concepts and our beliefs about what's fair.

Sometimes life doesn't seem fair, and yet the Bible declares that God is a just God. If God sends people to hell, for example, forever, and yet those people, they may have been bad people, but they couldn't have possibly sinned for more than 70 or 80 years, because that's as long as they lived. And it doesn't seem fair.

That person could sin for so short a time and yet suffer so long, forever for it. It just doesn't seem fair. A lot of the things God did in scripture don't seem fair to us.

Why would he command the destruction of women and infants and children and everything when the Canaanites were to be slaughtered? That doesn't seem fair. Now, on the other hand, the Bible affirms that God is just, but my reasoning doesn't tell me how that is just. Now, by the way, I can come up with all kinds of explanations of why an eternal hell is fair and why killing all the Canaanites was fair and so forth, and I might even be right.

But a lot of people have struggles and they can't figure out why that would be fair. There are some things that God commanded. I just don't know why that is just.

But the Bible affirms that God is just and without embarrassment, he reveals these judgments, that he makes these judgments of people. And I can't figure it out. My reasoning doesn't tell me why that is just in every case.

And because of that, some people simply reject God or reject the word of God. I just can't believe in a God who would do that kind of thing. I just can't believe that God would send people to hell.

And that's because they can't reasonably understand how those things can be right and just. I am of the opinion that God can be right, and I don't know why he's right. I assume that God has more data than I have.

God knows all the factors I don't know. God is more committed to justice than I am. My own life has proven that, because he's never done anything unjust than I have.

Therefore, if God is committed to justice more than I am, then it'd be folly for me to trust my own notions of what's right, what's fair, and judge God, who reveals in scripture what he says is just and fair. It's better to just acquiesce, I believe, to what God has said. Why not? My children don't always know why it's fair for them to get one scoop and I get two scoops.

Because justice is often measured subjectively by the observer. I would like to have two scoops. Why does he get two scoops and I only get one scoop? Remember, and yet I know there's reasons.

I don't want my kid to have that much sugar. I'm twice his size. I can handle it.

Or I deserve it. Or I'm buying it. It's my money.

He doesn't deserve even one scoop. There's all kinds of things I know that I don't have to explain to him. All he knows is it seems unfair.

But if he knew what I know, he'd know there's nothing unfair about it. It's just his own plain self-centeredness that makes him call it unfair. And so many times when we call God unfair, it's because we're on the side of our kind, sinners.

We're taking sides with the rebels against God. And that is not what Christians are supposed to be doing. They're supposed to be on God's side.

And because we are humans, because we are sinners, and because we are so self-centered and so ethnocentered, we're in favor of our own race. We're likely to be a little bit off kilter in the ability to really objectively know what's right and just in every case. Our own reasoning can't always serve us adequately in this area, but God's word can.

If God says this is right, then it is right. There's a parable Jesus tells about a landowner who owns a vineyard. He hires some people to work all day, comes later, hires some people to work half the day, comes out later, hires some more people to work a couple hours, and one group works one hour.

They all get paid the same thing at the end of the day. And the guys who worked all day say, that's not fair. We worked all day and you paid us only the amount you said you'd pay us.

But these people worked only an hour and you paid them the same amount you paid us. Now, what does the owner say to them? Excuse me, isn't it just for me to dispense my favors as I please, to do what I want with what is mine? I didn't do no wrong. He says, I promise you this money.



That's what I paid you. If I want to be generous to this person and give him the same amount for less work, isn't that my business? You see, the person who worked all day and got only what he was expecting and what he had coming. He doesn't think that's unfair until someone works shorter time and gets the same amount.

Suddenly that's unfair. Well, no, it's no more unfair. I mean, if I worked at a job all day long and the guy says, listen, you clean up this yard for me and I'll pay you 50 bucks.

Okay, I can use the bucks. So I clean up the yard. I don't think it's unfair when he gives me the 50 bucks.

But if I find out that my assistant who sat around did nothing all day long, that he got 50 bucks for it too. Suddenly it's unfair that I only got 50 bucks. No, that's self-assessment.

What's fair is so self-centered. God is objective. His judgments are much more trustworthy.

Our reasoning often is flawed by our total self-centeredness or by our lack of taking into consideration all factors, some of which are not available to us. Another area where human reasoning often emerges above the word of God is in some of the discussions about qualifications for leaders in the Bible. The Bible puts pretty high standards, pretty narrow standards for who can be an elder in the church in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus chapter 1. Most churches have leaders that don't meet those standards, but it doesn't seem reasonable to hold out for people who meet those standards.

I mean, what if a person's children are not in order? What if a man's children are not believers? Now the Bible says they're supposed to be, but hey, reason tells us that he can be a good leader anyway. Reason does, but the Bible doesn't agree. Actually, the Bible doesn't tell us whether he can be a good leader or not.

It just says that he's not to be in that position. Likewise, women in leadership. The same passages say that women should not be elders.

Well, boy, that's a hornet's nest today. People say, well, why not? Women are as smart as men, I think. They can get a good education in theology as good as a man.

Sometimes they're even more sensitive, more spiritual, much better pastoral types than men are. I could agree with all those statements. That doesn't change anything.

All that means is that if I was going to use my reasoning to tell me who qualifies for leadership, I'd have to include women too. But that's not what I go by. I don't go by reasoning.

I go by the Scripture. The Scripture says I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man. Let the elder be the husband, the one wife, and so forth.

I mean, the Bible's not ambiguous about this. There's no unclarity about the biblical teaching on the subject. And yet, there's unclarity in the minds of many Christians.

Why? Because they're pulled by the way they reason about this. There's some other things that pull them too, and that's cultural pressure. But the fact of the matter is, many people say it's just not reasonable.

Well, I don't know if it is or not. That's not for me to judge. What's for me to judge is whether I'm obeying the Scripture or not, not whether I'm doing what I could reason out to be the smart thing to do if I didn't have the Scripture to guide me.

There are times when trusting God's Word will lead you to do things that people consider reckless and dangerous. It's not reasonable. Remember when Jim Elliott, his relatives and friends knew that he was going to go down to the Aucas in Ecuador.

The Aucas had had another missionary approach some decades earlier. He was immediately killed by them. And Jim Elliott and his companions were like valedictorian of their college class and talented, good-looking, athletic men.

I mean, guys who were highly valued in the world's eyes. Men, that kind of people. And they were going down there to reach a group of natives that had killed the only missionary that had ever come before.

And it was assumed, maybe they'll kill you too. Probably will. And many of their friends said to him, you are a fool to throw away the opportunities for ministry or for success or for happiness that you can have right here in the United States and go down and throw away your life with these people.

Now, that does seem foolish, doesn't it? The critics were very reasonable, it seemed. And everybody now knows what Jim said. It's an often quoted statement.

He says, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose. Now, somehow that sounds even more reasonable than what they're saying. If you give up what you cannot keep, meaning your life, in order to gain what you cannot lose, eternal rewards and the souls of people who will be saved through your efforts, that's not foolish.

It seems foolish to risk your life. Many things seem foolish to the world because they don't know the facts. They don't know the whole picture.

There are some people who say it's foolish to trust God for the size of your family. Well, why? Well, because you might get more children than you can support. Well, that sounds reasonable if you don't believe the Bible.

The Bible indicates that God will never give you more children than you can support. He

provides all your needs according to his riches and glory. He opens and closes the womb.

He said it's a blessing to have a lot of children, not a liability. I mean, the Bible teaches something very different than what our culture says, but our culture will reason with even Christians. They'll say, well, you know, if we didn't use birth control, we'd have this huge family and we couldn't support it.

Really? How do you figure that out? Well, because, you know, it costs a lot of money to have kids. Well, how do you know that God wouldn't provide? Can't you believe the Word of God? Your reasoning is telling you this. Your reasoning is trying to figure it all out.

The fact is, God can be trusted. Some people think it's risky. You don't use birth control, you'll ruin yourself financially, or you'll just, you know, you'll lose all your freedom.

You'll be raising kids until you're an old man. Well, if that's the will of God, is that so bad? Our human reasoning tells us we deserve a break. After about 50 years old, I'd be able to retire and have no kids in the house.

No more responsibilities. That's not biblical. I mean, our culture is shot through with unbiblical notions that come from reasoning things out humanly without God in the picture.

I heard recently a Christian talk show host say, he was actually referring to me. He was on another program, but I heard, I was listening and he mentioned me. Someone had called and asked him about birth control.

He said, my friend, Steve Gregg, doesn't believe in birth control. But he says, he says, I personally think that there's times when it would be, he says, Steve Gregg and his wife are great parents, you know, and it's fine for them to not use birth control. But he says, I've seen some families that, you know, they're not very good parents and therefore they wouldn't really be very, I wouldn't rather recommend that they have a lot of kids and so forth.

Well, I mean, the man who said that is a friend of mine, as a matter of fact, and I would have liked to call him in and correct him, but I didn't want to do that on his own talk show. I had my own talk show to do that kind of stuff. But what I would have said to him is, well, yeah, okay, listen, it is unreasonable to trust God for one thing, if you're not following God in all things.

The life of God is not so many anecdotal rules. A life of God is a whole fabric of obedience to everything He said. And people who are bad parents and therefore shouldn't have a lot of kids, they are bad parents because they're not following what the Bible says on other areas of their life.

Yes, I wouldn't recommend that somebody who's disobedient to God in a whole bunch of

areas of their life, you must be obedient in this matter of childbirth. You know, I mean, frankly, obeying God in one thing isn't reasonable, if you're not going to obey Him in everything. And one could reasonably say, well, look at all these, you know, it's not right.

People could say, well, it's not right to have the man be the head of the home, because so many women are battered by men who are the head of the home. And the Bible says man is the head of the home, but that wouldn't work out right, because too many women are battered by men who are the head of their homes. I say, well, they're not battered by men because their men are the head of the home.

They're battered by men because the men are sinners. And because they're not obeying God in other respects. It's true to obey God in one area and not in all the other areas of life is foolish.

But to conform your life wholly to the word of God is not so risky. It works. But even if it didn't work, it's right because the Bible says it and people reason their way out of biblical positions because it just doesn't seem to make sense.

It doesn't seem like it would work out right. But there are times when the person proceeds with a reckless faith in what God has said, looks like he's doing something very unreasonable. Looks like he's doing something risky, something dangerous, something stupid.

But to trust God and to proceed on that trust is never stupid. It may seem it, but if someone will not trust God because they reason that it's stupid or foolish or it's dangerous, that person is following reasoning, not the word of God. So human reasoning in many ways is a rival to the word of God as an authority in our lives.

Let's move along here quickly. A third rival to the word of God is human traditions. Traditions or beliefs or practices whose validity rests upon their antiquity.

That has been done a long time this way. We've always done it that way. Our ancestors always did it this way.

Honoring tradition has sometimes been defined as giving our ancestors a vote. I heard it defined this way by somebody who was saying we should honor tradition. I mean, that's just giving our ancestors a vote about things.

Why should we think we're smarter than them? Let them have something to say about it. Well, I'm fine. I don't mind having the ancestors vote if there's a vote to be taken.

But as far as reality goes, it's not determined by vote. Truth isn't determined by majority vote. I don't care if all the people in the world who've ever lived voted one way, if it was against the word of God, they're wrong.

Paul said, let God be true in every man a liar. Just because they've done it this way forever and ever and ever, as long as anyone can remember, doesn't mean that there's some validity to it. People can be wrong for that long.

I had a friend who was a YWAM leader, a lady actually, in Australia. And she was from a Catholic background. And she had an outreach to Catholic priests in Brisbane, Australia, and had made some good friendships with them and witnessed to them and so forth.

And she was telling me about a conversation she had with one of these priests. She said, you know, Father, I've often wondered why it is that you Catholics believe in purgatory, since the Bible doesn't seem to agree with the doctrine of purgatory. Why do you believe in purgatory? And he said to her, well, I just figured that anything that's been believed in the church for 2,000 years must have something to it.

He didn't even say in the church. He just says anything that's been around for 2,000 years must have something to it. Well, that's a ridiculous thing to say.

A lot of horrible things have been around for 2,000 years. Prostitution has been around longer than that. Witchcraft, too.

That doesn't mean there's anything to it, at least nothing that Christians should endorse. A lot of error lives a long time and gets passed down from generation to generation. Peter was speaking to the Christians about the traditions that they came out of when they got saved.

And he said in 1 Peter 1:18, he said, knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, these Gentiles prior to being converted, their conduct was aimless. They received a way of life that was passed down by tradition. Christians can have wrong ideas passed down by tradition, too.

Tradition. Jesus said in Mark 7 to the Pharisees, full well, you betray the word of God in order to keep your traditions. And he gave examples of where the word of God told them to do something, but the Pharisees had traditions that nullified that.

He says, therefore, you nullify the word of God to keep your traditions. That is a bad thing to do. Now, tradition isn't always bad.

If you have a tradition of meeting with your family for Thanksgiving, every Thanksgiving for dinner, and the tradition is you have turkey every time, that's a tradition. There's really nothing but tradition that calls for that behavior. I mean, why else would you go there on that particular day or have that particular meal predictably every year? It's a tradition, but it's harmless enough.

There's no reason Christians need to be, you know, opposed to all tradition. The problem

is when tradition ranks above Scripture. When we say, well, the Bible doesn't teach purgatory, but traditionally this has been believed for a very long time.

And the very antiquity of the thing gives it some weight in the eyes of those who honor that tradition. Tradition is harmful when it adds to the word of God. It says in Proverbs 30, verse 5 and 6, it says, every word of God is pure.

He is a shield to those who put their trust in him. Add thou not to his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. There are traditions that even evangelicals have that they've added to the word of God, and they think it's as good as the word of God.

That's what the Pharisees did. You see, they had all these additions to the word of God. God had given the law, and they made up all these traditions, and they judged people by the traditions as much as by the words, as if human traditions were as authoritative as the word of God.

You know, I grew up a Baptist, and Baptists are relatively untraditional compared to some groups. I mean, if you compare that with, say, the Lutheran or the Episcopal or the Catholic, which are much more liturgical, Baptists are very free and unstructured. And I had a Catholic friend.

My best friend in high school was a Catholic, and he wanted to be a priest. And I attended the Catholic Church with him once or twice and invited him to come to the Baptist Church. And I remember going to a Catholic Church.

I thought, man, I'm glad I'm not a Catholic. I'm glad I don't have these traditions. I'm glad I'm not part of a traditional church.

Well, as a matter of fact, I didn't know how many traditions there were in the Baptist Church. I accepted them as truth, but as I grew and studied my scriptures, I realized many of the things I was taught as a Baptist were merely traditions. They were not Catholic traditions.

They were Baptist traditions. I moved from there into a charismatic framework. And I thought, ah, praise God, I've finally gotten free from all those Baptist traditions.

I now have the pure stuff. And as the years went by, and I studied the scriptures, I found out Pentecostals and Charismatics have their traditions. I had begun to wonder whether I'm ever going to get to the bottom of this.

And it's like trying to clean the paint off a wall. You say, boy, this old paint, it's got to go. So you start sanding off the paint, and the green layer is gone.

And you don't find the wall. You find a yellow layer. Well, I'll sand on that.

And you get through the yellow layer, there's a red layer. There's another green layer

under that. And you keep getting more layers and layers.

And you think, man, is there any wall under here? Or is it just layer upon layer and layer of paint? It's like peeling an onion. You know, you peel off one layer and say, well, just one more layer, I'll peel off this. No, that one's... And you keep going down, and eventually there's nothing there.

Just the onion is all layers. There's no core to it. And you begin to wonder sometimes when you learn how many things you believe are tradition.

You begin to wonder if once I've peeled away all the traditions from my belief system, will there be anything left? Is there any core of truth there? Well, believe me, there is. But that core of truth is often covered with many, many layers of tradition. And in the 30 years I've been teaching the Bible, I've found again and again and again, things that I had believed, that I thought were taught in the Scripture, were just traditions.

Some of you heard when somewhere that I questioned whether Satan is a fallen angel. Well, you're not allowed to question that. That's a tradition.

It goes back to Tertullian in the second century. It's been around a long time. Christians have always believed that Satan is a fallen angel.

Well, that's fine, as long as it's true. Is it biblical? Well, you look and find out for yourself. I did about 17 years ago, search the Scriptures to see if these were true, because I was always taught that Satan was a fallen angel.

It's a tradition of the Baptists as well as anybody else. Catholics, Protestants, they all believe that. But once I turned to Scripture, I couldn't find it.

I've been looking for 17 years, been through the Bible many, many times, still haven't found it. There's no statement in Scripture that says the devil was ever an angel. And for that reason, and Ezekiel 28 mentions somebody who was a cherub, although it doesn't say it was Satan.

It says it was the king of Tyre. But anyway, I don't care whether the devil is a fallen angel or not, but I want to be aware of whether what I'm teaching is taught in the Bible or whether it's just a tradition of man. And in my opinion, all those things you've heard about the devil being an angel, a choir director in heaven, and a third of the angels being in heaven, that's all tradition.

It's not in the Bible. You won't find it. I guarantee you that.

I'll pay you if you find it. Okay. So it's not just the Catholics, Protestants and Evangelicals, Charismatics, they all have their own traditions.

A movement just has to exist for more than one generation or even less than a

generation. And it's got its traditions. You know, the founder did it this way.

We established it on these principles and we just keep doing it that way. And that's what the distinctives of each denomination are usually just the traditions that they accept that some other denomination doesn't accept. Almost all denominations accept the core truth of the Bible, but there are other views, peripheral things that they have their own traditions about and differences of opinion about.

And traditions need to be examined in the light of the word of God. And if they're contrary to the word of God, then of course they must be abandoned in favor of biblical practices and beliefs in order to be true. We need to watch out.

Sometimes people will keep with tradition even when they see the word of God is not in its favor. There's a very common traditional teaching. We could say this has become a tradition in the Evangelical Church.

There's a certain teaching about the last days, about when the rapture is and things like that. It's become almost a universal tradition of the Evangelical circles for the past 100 years, maybe. And I hold a different view on it.

I believe the Bible teaches something else. And I have a set of tapes where I talk about this. And this set of tapes was given to a pastor who held the traditional view.

That is the view of the most recent traditions of the Evangelical Church. And a friend of mine who gave him my tapes asked him, what did you think about those tapes that Steve did on eschatology? And the guy said this. He said, well, he said, everything you said sounded biblical.

But if I would accept those views, I could no longer be a pastor in my denomination. In other words, even though I can find no biblical flaw, and this sounds like a biblical position that Steve's presenting, I cannot allow myself to accept it because it goes against the traditions of my group and it would rock the boat so I'd probably be kicked out. And so this happens all the time.

People go with the traditions rather than what they see to be in the Bible, I think, because of fear and intimidation. So they don't want to rock the boat. They don't want to be considered a loose cannon.

They want to fit in with the traditional norms. This is true societally, too, not just in the church, but in society in general. There are certain traditions in our society.

Traditionally, you only have 2.3 babies in your family. If you go more than that, you start getting people looking at you funny. Traditionally, you go to college when you get out of high school.



It's just what you do. Why? I don't know. You just do it.

You're supposed to do that, aren't you? Well, is there some career you're aiming for? Well, not necessarily. What do you do when you get out of high school? You go to college. But doesn't that cost a lot of money? Yeah, that's a lot of money.

Well, what's the point of spending all that money? It's just what you do. That's what Americans do. They go to college.

I'm glad I didn't think that way. I would have wasted four good years of my life, maybe more. Out of high school, I just went into the ministry because I didn't have anything I needed to study in college for my calling.

Now, if you're called to be a doctor, then you go to college not out of tradition, but out of necessity. But there's just some things people do unthinkingly. You're out of high school.

What do you do next? You go to college. What else? Double-income family, a tradition of our modern culture, of our modern society. It's not biblical.

The Bible indicates that women have a different role in the home. The husband's supposed to support the family. Women are there to take care of the matters of the home and the children, that kind of stuff.

But now these people shuttle off their kids to institutions so the women go out and they can make more money and have a more posh lifestyle. That's not biblical. It's a tradition of our society, and many Christians would never dream of questioning it.

They'll go along with what has become the new tradition of American way of life. There are things that people do all the time who are Christians. They're Christians and they do these things, but they're not biblical and it's never occurred to them to ask whether they're biblical.

Why? Because it's traditional and you're always comfortable. Comfortable enough not to even challenge it, usually, if you're going along with the traditional idea because the tradition is the consensus of the culture or of the religious group or of the family or whatever. A family or a religious group or a culture has their own traditions, their rites of passage, their methods of raising children and things like that.

These are traditional things. They become traditional because they're passed down from generation to generation or from year to year or whatever. Not all of them are bad, but any of them are bad if they're conflicting with the scripture, and yet it's much more comfortable to flow with whatever's the tradition of the group you're in because traditions hold a very special place in the hearts of people who honor them.

Patriotism, it's a big, big tradition in America, Christians. I remember hearing one

Christian on the radio saying, this broadcast comes to you from such and such a Christian college where we advocate no ism except Christian Americanism. I remember thinking, your boast is that you don't advocate any ism, apparently like communism or some kind of socialism.

You don't advocate any ism except Christian Americanism. Well, isn't that an ism? And is that an ism that a church or Christian organization should champion? Did Jesus champion Christian Americanism? Did the apostles teach Christian Americanism? I'm not aware of it. Is that found somewhere in the Psalms or something? Christian Americanism.

What is Christian Americanism? It is the traditional idea that God founded this country as a special nation and that Columbus and the rest of them who founded it, they were fulfilling some divine mission, not described in scripture by the way. And there was this thing, sure they kind of treated the Indians a little badly, but it was God's will. After all, he did tell the Jews to treat the Canaanites pretty badly, didn't he? And therefore, there's some kind of divine mission here.

America is God's country. It's the new promised land. It's the salvation of the world.

If America goes down, the world goes down the tubes. This is Americanism. It is, as near as I can tell, idolatry.

Now, am I happy to be an American? You bet I am. I'm sure glad I wasn't born in China or Russia right now or almost anywhere else. I'd rather be born in America than anywhere else in the world.

I thank God that I'm an American. It wouldn't be so bad if I was. I mean, there are some places I wouldn't mind.

I wouldn't be in torment if I'd been born in Australia or Canada or somewhere like that. But I mean, being an American, there's advantages. I'm glad for them.

I thank God for them. I don't take them lightly. I'm not against America.

What I am against is Christians thinking that America is somehow, and its traditions and its values and its goals are somehow all mixed in together with whatever God's goals and values and traditions are. It's like, you know, it's God and country. My loyalty is to God and country.

No, my loyalty is to God. Country, I obey its laws so long as they don't conflict with God. But it's a tradition with many that, you know, not only is our loyalty to God, but also to America, the beautiful America, the wonderful, and so forth.

What about pledging allegiance to the flag? Christians supposed to do that? Don't we already have an allegiance to someone? How can you give a secondary allegiance? Man

can't serve two masters. How can you have allegiance to two entities, God and the flag too? I don't think so. The early Christians certainly wouldn't pledge allegiance to the emperor or to anyone else other than God.

But it's traditional. Of course, Christians pledge allegiance to the flag. Sometimes they do it in their church service.

Anyway, I always stir up problems when I give this lecture, but you can say that traditions need to be examined in light of the word of God. But some people don't. Some people just follow traditions and they don't bother to place the word of God above them.

We have two other challengers to consider in our next lecture, but we'll have to take a break at this time because we've run out of time in this lecture. Let me remind you that I don't think that human authorities or human reasoning or human traditions are bad in themselves. They can be valid, but when they are in conflict with scripture, they are usurpers and need to be put in their place.

Okay, a couple more points next time. We'll stop here.