

Assorted Attacks on the Bible

Scripture: Romans 1:18-32

Code: 90-320

For many months we have been studying on Sunday nights some doctrinal themes; that is subjects which the Bible discusses, about which God has spoken which are critical to our faith and life. And beginning tonight, and for a few weeks to come, we're going to be looking at the inspiration and authority of Scripture. We open the Word of God every time we come together in the services on the Lord's Day, in the classes that occur around this church campus, both Sunday morning and Sunday evening, in the classes that occur through the week, in the Bible studies that occur in communities all around, as you gather in small groups, the Word of God is opened in your homes. Many of you are regularly reading through the Word of God day by day.

The Word of God is the topic of our conversation and it is, in our judgment the path, as the Scripture itself says, "The Word is the way. The Word is the lamp as well as the path." We believe in the Word of God. We believe that it is inspired. We believe that it is without error in the original autographs, and God has protected and preserved it to this day so that it substantially remains faithful to its original revelation. We believe that when the Word speaks, we are commanded to listen. That's why the Bible is the theme of everything we do. We define life and ministry in biblical terms. It is what we believe, it is how we behave, and it is the message we proclaim. And the Bible claims to be the very Word of God and it does so in an unaffected and unambiguous way.

Old Testament writers, for example, refer to what they wrote as the very words of God over 3800 times. New Testament writers quote the Old Testament as the Word of God 320 times and refer to it at least 1000 times. And New Testament writers repeatedly claim divine inspiration as did the Old. Jesus Himself claimed that both the Old Testament and the New Testament are inspired by God.

There are a couple of definitive statements in the New Testament that sweep across our Scriptures to define for us the nature of inspiration. Listen to 2 Peter chapter 1 in verse 20, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

The Scripture is written down by men who are not writing from any act of human will or from any personal interpretation, but rather moved by the Holy Spirit to write down what is spoken by God. A very familiar portion of Scripture that speaks to this issue is found in Paul's second letter to Timothy, chapter 3 in verse 16, "All Scripture is inspired by God," literally *theopneustos*, God breathed.

It comes forth from God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. All Scripture is inspired by God, and that inspiration means that it comes from God through writers who are moved by the Spirit so that they write down what God has said and not what they wish to say. It is the very Word of God. Those are just two definitive texts. There, of course, are many more, and we'll look at some of those as the weeks progress.

Now obviously everything we need to know about God and about us and about salvation and about the future and time and eternity is contained in the Scripture. Everything is here. All that God wants us to know is here. That's why at the end of the last book, the book of Revelation, the Spirit of God prompted John to write not to add anything to this book, nor take anything away. This is consummate; this is complete.

It is even referred to by Jude as "the once for all delivered to the saints' faith." It is a body of truth that was delivered at one time, not to be diminished and not to be embellished. Everything we need to know is here in this book in terms of our understanding of the universe and God and our relationship to Him, as well as all other relationships.

Because everything that we need is in the Scripture, because we are saved by the Word of truth, because we are sanctified by the truth, the Word of God, because we find our hope of glory in the Word, because all instruction for living is contained here, this then becomes the point of the enemies constant and relentless assault. And we shouldn't be surprised at this at all.

Let's go back to Genesis chapter 3 and begin at the beginning. Genesis chapter 3. Now I want just to have us look briefly at the opening five verses of this very significant chapter. Chapters 1 and 2 describe the creation, Adam and Eve living in a world of bliss in a sin free environment, in perfect communion and fellowship with God. The end of chapter 2 sums it up. "The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." Shame didn't exist because sin didn't exist.

Everything changes in chapter 3 and I want you to see the nature of this. "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made, and he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said you shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'

And the serpent said to the woman, 'You surely shall not die for God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' " And, of course, you remember the rest of the story. She believed Satan, and ate and fell and took down the whole human race and stained the entire universe in that one act.

Satan is a liar and "he's the father of lies," Jesus said in John 8:44, and here he works his first great deception, and he works it very successfully. Let's look back at verse 1 for a moment. The serpent, Satan in the form of a snake, comes to the woman and he said to her, "Indeed has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?"

And of course we know that God in fact had said just that, that they were not to eat of a particular tree of the garden, chapter 2 verse 16. "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that eat from it you shall surely die." So Satan comes to the woman and says, "Indeed, has God said?"

And you might ask, "Why does he comes to the woman rather than to Adam?" Well perhaps 1 Peter 3:7 gives us the answer, "She is the weaker vessel, and her husband is her protector to whom she is to submit and under whose protection she finds safety." And so Satan finds her at a moment when she is vulnerable and unprotected, and his strategy is progressively very, very deceptive. And it

begins with what appears to be a somewhat innocuous question, "Indeed has God said?" This is the first question in the Bible, first question in the Bible, first question in human history.

Up until this time there are no questions, only answers. There are no mysteries. There are no dilemmas until this one. And the question is designed by Satan to start Eve on a path that legitimizes her questioning what God has said. That is the whole issue here, to lead her...and along with her, her husband...to question the truthfulness of what God has said. That's exactly what he does. You can translate this in the Hebrew, "So, God has said, has He?" And for the first time since creation, the most deadly spiritual force ever released in this world was released, smuggled covertly, almost innocently on the surface into the world, and that is this deadly force that you as a creature have a right to sit in judgment on what God has said.

He leads Eve to question what God has said. And Satan repeated what God said, "You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?" And he turns it from a positive to a negative, leaving out the part about you can eat everything else; twisting, perverting, inverting, putting the emphasis on what you can't do rather than on all that you can do. And in this way he presses the issue of prohibition. And the real question that he's raising in her mind is, "Why in the world would God want to restrict you?" This is the main assault.

The question is, you have a right to sit in judgment on God and ask the question why would He say things that restrict you. This is a negative statement. This is a prohibition. This is restrictive and narrow and limiting. And the implication is why would God, if He were fully good, do that? There is something in God's character, is the implication, that makes Him want to restrain your free will, that makes Him want to limit your pleasure, your joy, your satisfaction, your fulfillment, yes your freedom.

Somehow God is tampering with your rights. He's taking away some of your choices. And that raises the question about why He would do that. What would make Him do that? Is He cruel? Is that the reason? And maybe if there's some flaw in His character that makes Him put this limit on you, He is not to be totally trusted. And so Satan has set in her mind the idea that the one prohibition, which was really a means by which they could demonstrate obedience, now becomes, in Eve's thinking, evidence of a divine character flaw, casting suspicion on God's character and causing her to render judgment on what God has said as if she had a right to determine whether it was good or bad, right or wrong.

She has now been set in motion to distrust what God has said. She responds in a very weak fashion, verse 2, "The woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat.' " She should have taken a strong stand right there on what she knew to be true about God. She knew God. She knew God was true and spoke only the truth, that she knew God was perfect goodness. She had a very clear command that was not at all ambiguous. She should have been suspicious of anybody who caused her to question God. Actually, she should have been suspicious of a talking snake.

And she does make a stab at defending God in verse 3, "But from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it.' " And then she adds this, " 'or touch it, lest you die.' " Her reply is...is weak. And I really believe that this is where the fall occurred, right there, before she ever ate anything. As soon as she did not completely and wholeheartedly and unreservedly trust in the Word of God as true and good and the source of our highest joy and maximum fulfillment, mistrust in God had gained a foothold and sin had entered her heart and the fall

had taken place.

Not only does she not defend God, but she adds to what God said to make Him seem more harsh by saying, "You shall not eat from it or touch it." God didn't say that. But now she is accepting this as unnecessarily restrictive. In fact, it is so restrictive that she's even making it more restrictive. It's irritating her now that God has put this restriction on her. God has been judged as giving a command that is unacceptable and untrustworthy. And that was the fall, to distrust what God has said. Everything after this is just evidence of the fall.

Verse 4, "The serpent said to the woman, 'You surely shall not die.'" Satan moves in because he knows where she is, he knows that she has distrusted the Word of God. She doesn't any longer believe that God is necessarily trustworthy. There is a flaw in His character. He is unnecessarily restrictive and she should be free, and she has a right to sit in judgment on what God has done and even to speak of it as more restrictive than it is because she's bought into its negativity. And Satan knows that she has fallen. And so he moves in for a full denial of God's Word and he says, "You surely shall not die. God lied. God lied." In fact, God lies and here's an illustration of it.

I tell the truth, is what Satan is saying, and he's still saying it today even though he's the arch liar. You're not going to die. God is not truthful. His Word cannot be trusted as revealed. He does not have your best interest in view. And so she has bought into the fact that God is flawed and deceptive and needlessly restrictive and takes away freedom and limits joy.

And Satan says, "You won't die. You won't die. Free yourself from these restrictions, do what you want, no limit, no judgment, no consequences. Be free. A God like that is not loving. A God like that is not kind. A restrictive God, He's law, He's not love. I'm love," says Satan, "I give you freedom. Follow me and do whatever you want."

And then the question is going to be naturally asked in Eve's mind, "Well why would He do that? Why would He restrain doing that?" And Satan has an answer, verse 5, "God knows that in a day you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil." He doesn't want you to be like Him. He's jealous. He's envious. He's protective. He wants to remain superior. He lies because He hates rivals. Where did Satan pick that up? Satan tried to be a rival of God, didn't he? And he was thrown out of heaven.

"You do what you want, you be free like He is. He does what He wants and He's free and there's no restrictions on Him, and there ought to be no restrictions on you. And the only reason He put restrictions on you is because He hates rivals." So the father of lies brought down the whole human race on the premise that God's Word cannot be trusted as revealed.

It is deceptive because God is flawed and He is flawed by jealousy. Contrast Jesus' perfect trust in God's Word, perfect trust through suffering severe deprivation and restraint of His own divine prerogatives in His incarnation and, particularly, in His temptation where He still says, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

Well without taking time to trace the full flow of this satanic assault, Scripture reveals the history that began that day and continues all the way to the end of the book of Revelation. It is a history of attacks on the Word of God through an endless and relentless array of false prophets, false

teachers, liars, false apostles, deceivers, all the way from Genesis to Revelation. And the attack is going on even today. The battle for biblical authority wages in every generation, in every location. There is always the battle for the Bible. There is always a need to rise to the defense of Scripture.

I could define my own life in terms of the focus of those battles. If I just break down the ten-year periods of my life and ministry, approaching 40 years here. In those early years it was the battle over the inerrancy issue and the authority of Scripture. And for ten years I was on the inerrancy council led by Dr. Jim Boice with 100 scholars and we were working hard writing, producing material that defended the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. And out of that came the Chicago statement on biblical inerrancy, monumental statement for the church historically.

And once we had dealt with the front attacks of the critics, then along came the Charismatic Movement, and the Mystical Movement and we had to deal with that as well. In the next few years of my ministry, maybe that second decade of my ministry here, was a battle to defend the singularity of Scripture because everybody and their brother had a new revelation and a new word of wisdom and a new word of knowledge. And there was a proliferation of supposed words from God, words from Jesus. People were accumulating all these revelations and we were set for the defense of the singularity of Scripture against those kinds of attacks.

And then Scripture began to be attacked by the psychologists and the pragmatists who wanted to set the Bible aside and establish the necessity of human wisdom at some point or another to establish truth to which the Bible could add some spiritual insight. And more recently, another issue dealing with the Bible is the attack on its clarity, that it's not understandable, that it's not comprehensible, that it's impossible to interpret it accurately or be dogmatic. It's one assault after another and that's been the battleground and always will be the battleground and always should be, because, as I said at the beginning, everything that we need is in the Word of God.

Now, let me just talk to you a little bit. I give you a more of a classroom approach tonight of some of the things that are assaulting the Scripture that you just need to know about. And some of these things we would kind of see as friendly fire. They come from people that appear to be Christians, and in some cases actually are Christians who get deceived in their understanding of Scripture. Some illustrations of that.

There was an article a few years ago in the tenth anniversary issue of Modern Reformation Magazine, which was a magazine for many years that upheld sola scriptura. But this particular article was entitled, "The insufficiency of Scripture." The article was written by a man named Gordon who is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America, a denomination that came out of the Presbyterian Church USA because it had gone liberal and denied the Scripture. And in this article he suggests that Scripture is not really as complete a guide to life as most Reformed people think it is. He specifically argues that the information given to us in Scripture is not sufficient to tell us how to have successful marriages. He picks on the issue of marriage.

He says this, quote, "Whereas Scripture teaches us that marriage is a lifelong commitment, Scripture is manifestly not sufficient to teach people how to attain that end. Oh yes, Scripture contains some broad principles such as those encountered in Ephesians 5 or in Proverbs 29, but for all the evangelical talk about roles of men and women, such talk has obviously not produced happy or successful marriages," end quote. And then he goes on to say this. "That ten years ago he affirmed the full sufficiency of Scripture in harmony with the standard Reformed position on that matter."

Today he suggests that those who drafted the first chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith might have stated the case better if they had nuance their language a little. The Westminster Confession affirms the sufficiency of Scripture. Here's what the Westminster Confession says, "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture." That is the Westminster Confession. That's been the standard for Reformed theology for centuries.

Gordon, however, says, "The entire matter would have been better expressed had the divines articulated a more manifestly covenantal statement indicating that the Scriptures are a sufficient guide to the various covenants God has made with various covenant people." In other words, he would like something much more vague. We should not make claims for Scripture's specific sufficiency but we should talk about it in very large and broad categories. He particularly suggests that the expression "faith and life" ought to be interpreted in a narrow religious sense. That is, it doesn't really refer to life outside one's relationship to God, that is life in relationship to anybody else.

And you would ask the question, what made someone who had held to the view of sola scriptura and Scripture sufficiency...what would make someone like that back away from that? What made him change from an unqualified affirmation that the Bible contains all things necessary for God's glory, man's salvation, faith and life? Here's what he said. He changed his mind about biblical sufficiency when he saw a survey indicating that the divorce rate among evangelicals is about the same as, or worse than the divorce rate among unbelievers. And so he changed his view of Scripture because he saw a survey.

He writes, "The large practical matter that has influenced my thinking about the matter of the sufficiency of Scripture has been the publication of findings that the evangelical divorce rate is roughly the same as that of the general population. If we ask why evangelicals divorce at the same rate as those who do not necessarily recognize the Bible as the source of authoritative guidance, the answer must be something like this: that whereas Scripture teaches us that marriage is a lifelong commitment, Scripture is manifestly not sufficient to teach people how to attain that end."

He goes on to suggest that believing in the sufficiency of Scripture might even work against the success of evangelical marriages. He says, quote, "I would suggest that part of the reason our unbelieving friends succeed as often in marriage as we do is that they're never hoodwinked by any misunderstanding of the sufficiency of Scripture."

Now just what survey is he talking about here that made him jettison his theology? Well it was a survey in December of 1999 with a press release entitled, "Christians are more likely to experience divorce than are non-Christians." I remember when that survey came across my desk. I was pretty shocked. It said 27 percent of born-again Christians have been divorced compared to 24 percent of non-Christians who have been divorced.

Well that statistic in itself doesn't prove anything. Were they divorced before they became Christians? The survey also said the divorce rate among atheists and agnostics is well below the norm; only 21 percent of atheists and agnostics have ever been divorced, so 27 percent of born-again Christians and 21 percent of atheists and agnostic. And immediately one question flooded my

mind. By what criteria did you determine who is a born-again Christian? Fair enough? By what criteria did you determine who is a born-again Christian? And as I dug deeper into the survey, it became apparent that there is no way of determining that the people that are classified as born-again even go to church.

They were deemed born-again on the basis of two questions. Question one; have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus that is still important in your life? What does that mean? Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus that is still important in your life? Catholics can say that, Mormons can say that, Jehovah's Witnesses can say that, all kinds of people can say that. And there was also a multiple-choice question, one of seven possible answers; when I die, I will go to heaven because I have confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior.

Now, on the surface that sounds fine, the Roman Catholics can say that, Mormons can say that, all kinds of cultists can say that, people who don't understand the meaning of the death of Christ can say that. There is nothing there about the resurrection. There's nothing about the nature of Christ, the nature of God, the nature of the atonement. If they said yes, however, to the first question that they made some personal commitment to Jesus, and they chose the right multiple-choice category, they were classified as born-again. But we live in a culture where language about accepting Jesus Christ as personal Savior has become cliché. There's nothing in those two questions to guarantee that a person is truly born again.

In fact, if you survey further the born again people, 45 percent say that Satan is not a living being but a symbol of evil. Thirty-four percent believe that if a person is good enough, they'll earn a place in heaven. These are the born-again people, by their standard. Twenty-eight percent agree that while He lived on earth Jesus committed sins just like everybody else. Fifteen percent of born-again Christians claim that after He was crucified and died, He did not return to life physically. Twenty-six percent believe it doesn't matter what faith you follow because they all teach the same thing.

So you start out with a statistic that says more born-again Christians get divorced than atheists and agnostics. And that's shocking until you find out that you're only dealing with people who profess to be Christians. And now, in our country, I think it's reached almost 80 percent plus. And it caused a man to jettison completely his confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture. Those are really strange and yet common occurrences today, people abandoning historic true doctrine for the most whimsical of reasons. And because we have lost all ability to really define what it is to be a true Christian, you can virtually distrust every survey that identifies such.

Now let me just talk about some categories. Where do the attacks come from? Number one, the attacks come from critics. There are those on the scholastic side who still continually assault the Scripture. It all comes out of German liberalism, the Graf-Wellhausen higher criticism theory tied to a recovery in Barthian Neo-Orthodoxy; left a legacy that swept through the major denominations, swept through the colleges, universities and seminaries and just smashed and crushed biblical inspiration. This has been confronted. It has been dealt with for years and years and years, flat out over denial of Scripture as from God, true, inerrant, inspired and authoritative.

And it goes on even today in the most bizarre and foolish ways. Whenever you turn on your television and you see some examination of the Bible, you're going to hear from these critics. I was contacted recently by the History Channel and asked if I would be willing to be a regular expert and a regular contributor to discussions of the Bible. I couldn't say no fast enough because I don't want to

be hacked up, cut up, edited and stuck in between all of those people who deny Scripture.

Perhaps the leading group that are always, always polled and interviewed, whenever the discussion about the Bible, are those who belong to what's called The Jesus Seminar. Have you heard of that? The Jesus Seminar? They've garnered space in the silly religion sections of newspapers which normally provide a list of places to be sure and avoid. These self-appointed dead and blind are a number over 200, over 200 pseudo scholars professing to be wise. They are fools. They claim to be the scholastic authorities on Jesus and on the Bible. And they make their decisions about the Bible based upon a majority vote.

They have a curious way to do it. They take a section of the Bible and they vote on it. Each participant drops a red bead into a ballot box for sayings that he or she believe are probably authentic. In other words, it probably is true. Pink beads mean possibly authentic. Gray beads were used for sayings that they think have been altered by the disciples or early Christians. Black beads are the strongest; that's a no vote used for passages deemed entirely fabricated or spoken by someone other than who the Bible says spoke it.

The results are astonishing. The group decreed that only 31 of the more than 700 sayings attributed to Jesus in the gospels are really authentic. And 16 of those 31 are duplicates from parallel passages. More than half the sayings of Jesus received the dreaded black bead. All totaled, the panel utterly rejected 80 percent of the words that Scripture attributes to Jesus. Among the ousted passages, Matthew 5:11, "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me." And also Mark 10:32 to 34 in which Jesus foretold His crucifixion.

They rejected all the apocalyptic section, that is all about the future. They rejected everything in the gospel of John except one verse, verse 44 of chapter 4 which got a pink vote. And what it says is, "A prophet has no honor in his country." The seminar founder, Robert Funk, reckons most mainline scholars will agree with their dumping of John's gospel because, he says, "Jesus speaks regularly in adages or aphorisms or in parables or in witticisms created as a rebuff or retort in the context of dialogue and debate. It is clear He did not speak in long monologues of the type found in the gospel of John," end quote. And one would wonder just exactly how in the world he knows that. Thus decaying flotsam from the shipwreck of liberal theology continues to wash ashore.

And by the way, that...that which I quoted you is something I wrote some time back, and you know you're in trouble when you start quoting yourself. That's as bad as preaching such a good sermon, you autograph your own Bible. What you've got in the Jesus Seminar and what you've got in liberal theology is the radical protesters on university campuses in the '60s. They are now in the middle management positions and ascending to the top management in the university system. Their ideological creed has become the test of orthodoxy in most academic circles.

Scholars are expected to march lock step behind them and anybody who doesn't basically can lose his job in the religion or philosophy department or sociology department in the university. And there are sacred dogmas to these liberals. Equality for women, homosexuality as an alternate life style, environmental activism, animal rights, racial quotas, hard line anti-war doctrine and so on. And they will censure anybody who challenges any of those, especially Jesus, especially Jesus. One merely needs to look at the panel's decisions to understand what their real agenda is. The parables of the Good Samaritan, the Unjust Steward, the Mustard Seed, passages that are critical of the rich,

commands to love one's enemies, and verses that treat disciples...that entreat disciples to love one another get the red beads.

Anytime you help the poor, the downcast and the lowly, they buy into that. Passages that call for repentance, affirm Jesus' deity, make difficult demands of disciples, speak of the need of redemption and the new birth, they are literally blackballed. And they're not finished yet. They're going to stay at it, assaulting the Word and propounding this at every point where they can find someone who will listen to them. This is just one illustration of this attack on the Bible that comes from liberals. We could say a lot more about it but let's...let's move on a little bit.

We could talk about the new perspective on Paul, which assaults the New Testament understanding of the doctrine of justification. We could talk about the openness of God, which attacks the very nature of God. Perhaps I should say a word about that. Open theism is a new liberal agenda item that starts with the denial that God perfectly knows or controls the future. Open theism is the idea that God is open to the future. He has no idea what the future holds. He has no clue. He's just like you and I. He's trying to react to what is going on, and He has no more foreknowledge of anything than you or I do because it hasn't happened, therefore He can't know about it.

He doesn't know what's going to happen until people make choices. He doesn't know what the choices will be and He's responding like a very, very adept chess player doing His best to accomplish His will in counter response to the moves of all of us. This is a very, very popular, widespread, developing viewpoint. It has intruded into evangelical, quote, "Evangelical Theological Society," which up to now has been unwilling to dismiss people who hold that view. It attacks the very nature of God Himself. It attacks the deity of God.

God is not the God He claims to be. He does not speak truly of Himself when He says He knows the end from the beginning; therefore, God is a liar and it is rehearsal of exactly what we saw in the garden. Every assault by these critics that denies any portion of Scripture is a battle that has to be fought and a point at which we have to defend the authority of Scripture. But you have not only assaults from critics; you have assaults from cultists, cultists. And this is just...I'm not going to say a lot about this.

Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Theosophy, Unitarianism, all the way down the line to bizarre and strange smaller cults; these people who do not accept the Word of God and its accurate interpretation, but want to add to the Word of God the writings of some...some persons, some angel whether it's Joseph Smith, or whether it's Mary Baker Eddy Patterson Glover Frye...she had a husband issue, obviously...in Christian Science, or whether it's Judge Rutherford or Annie Besant or anybody else that contributed to these cults and isms. They assault the Word of God relentlessly with these documents that twist and pervert Scripture, authored by Satan himself.

Then there are attacks, I would say, from the Charismatics. And I say that knowing that that's a hard thing for some of us to hear. But when you say that the Bible is not the end of revelation, this is not all that God has said, He's saying more, He's giving new revelations, new visions, voices from heaven, trips to heaven, trips to hell, mystical hyper-subjectivity intuitive, secretive, mystical interpretations, you are assaulting the Scripture. You are assaulting the Scripture.

It is so critical for us to understand that we have no further revelation from God than that which is

written in Scripture, no further revelation from God than that which is written in Scripture. You even hear people today talk about, "Listen for the voice of God, listen and God will speak to you. Train yourself to hear the voice of God." That is not only ridiculous but dangerous. If you want to hear the voice of God, open your Bible and read what God has said.

There's a fourth attack that I would just mention to you, just to give you some idea of the landscape, the attack that comes from the culture. From the critics, from the cults, from the Charismatics, from the culture. We live in a day when culture is telling the church what the Bible will be allowed to say. A great illustration of this is the publication of the TNIV. Zondervan Publishing Company produces a Bible called the TNIV. The TNIV is distinguished by its deference to the Feminist Movement. It has altered the Word of God, changed the Word of God to make it compatible to the contemporary Feminist Egalitarian Movement.

And that is not the only one that has done that; there are others that have done it as well. The Word of God is not ever to be used in such a way as to accommodate a cultural perception. You do not take the Word of God, twist the Word of God, alter the Word of God change the Word of God, embellish the Word of God, diminish the Word of God in order to achieve something that accommodates cultural expectations. But that is being done and it's being done at the very core when it's being done with Bible translation.

When you translate a Bible, you have one responsibility. You take the Word in the original Hebrew, or Aramaic in the few places in the Old Testament where Aramaic occurs. You take the Word in the Greek in the New Testament and you translate it. You find the closest possible translation in the language into which you're translating the Bible and that's what you do. You do not change the Word because you think the culture would like it to be said another way. That's not a true and pure translation. Especially do you not adapt the Bible to sinful cultural attitudes, expectations, demands. That's the worst of all.

So we cannot allow the culture to define either how we translate the Bible or how we interpret the Bible. I was reading a...a book by one of the emerging church guys and he was asked the question, "Do you take homosexuals into your church? Do you allow homosexuals to be church members?" And his response was, "Sure, we also have people who are overweight and people who like chocolate." So you take homosexuality and put it at the level of being overweight and liking chocolate because you want to redefine the church and the Bible in terms that are acceptable to the culture.

So there is always that attempt to twist, to subvert, to alter the Scripture because the culture is putting certain demands on us. And along that line, I just want to mention something to you that I went over with the men in the seminary. And I even talked to the college kids about it last year. And that is, in the new emerging church movement, the trend is to say, and this really accommodates the culture bit time, that the Bible's not clear.

Boy, that is a really comfortable spot to land. "Well, we believe the Bible; we love the Bible, but let's be honest, it's not clear. We can't really know what it means by what it says. We can't really be dogmatic. We can't really be sure that we can interpret it rightly. It's a really ancient book. There are all kinds of interpretations. We never can say we got it right," as Brian McClaren says. "Nobody's gotten it right yet and I don't have it right either, and let's not have anybody say they got it right." That is *the* most convenient cultural accommodation.

It can say, "Well the Bible is true, and God gave us the Bible, but we really haven't got any idea what the Bible means." So you have people saying things like this, here's another somewhat well-known evangelical who's changed his view and he says, quote, "Certitude is often idolatrous. I have been forced to give up certitude. If there's a foundation in Christian theology, it's not found in Scripture. Theology must be a humble human attempt to hear God, never about rational approaches to texts." You can't go to the text and use your mind and get the truth. You have to be much more humble than that. Theology is a humble, human attempt. You can't find a foundation for Christian theology in the Scripture.

Why? Because it's not comprehensible. Brian McLaren says, "Clarity is sometimes overrated." Lesslie Newbigin says, "The gospel is not a matter of certainties." You have writers coming along like N.T. Wright in England writing prolific material about the Bible and basically coming up with new ways to understand everything as if everybody has always had it wrong until now. Which causes one to ask, "Well, if everybody else is wrong and through history they've always had it wrong, why would it be that you're right?" Which feeds again the mentality we can never quite get it straight.

And when you think about the Word of God, you have to understand that the Bible claims for itself clarity, clarity. Let me just give you some thoughts about that as we wrap up. Romans 1, "If the sinner is held responsible for the revelation of God in creation and the revelation of God and the law written in his heart and conscience –" Romans 2 – "so that he is without excuse." That is if he is held responsible before God, culpable before God, guilty before God for rejecting that revelation which is manifest in creation and conscience, if he's without excuse at that point, then believe me, he is without excuse for rejecting that revelation which God has written down in His Word. The sinner is responsible. Scripture is clear.

Scripture is necessarily plain because God, its author, Creator, Redeemer, and Judge speaks plainly or He cannot accomplish His redemption. If He does not speak plainly then people cannot know what they are to believe and how they are to respond. If He does not speak plainly, they cannot know of salvation, they cannot know of judgment to come. They cannot know of heaven and hell. They cannot know of sin and righteousness. But they must know and they are held responsible to know.

Scripture yields its meaning to ordinary reason and literal sense. There are no secret hidden implicit mystery meanings. It is everywhere called light. It is even light to those who reject it. John 3, "They hate the light and they run from the light because it is light." Scripture is clear not only because it is manifestly clear, in and of itself, and clear to the reasonable mind, but because the Spirit of God illuminates it. And by grace the Spirit makes what is incomprehensible comprehensible to the one upon whom the Spirit moves.

To give you an illustration of the clarity of Scripture, I would only say this. The Old Testament Scripture which may seem to some people a bit unclear is, in fact, so clear that God holds people and has always held them responsible for what was revealed in the Old Testament. Jesus Himself, for example, in His teaching, in His conversations, in His dialogues and disputes and debates never ever one time said to the Jews, "I understand your confusion. The Old Testament is really hard, very difficult and often unclear." He never says that, never.

He is speaking to first century people. They are...they are 1000 years from David. They are 1500 years from Moses and they are 2000 years after Abraham. And Jesus still assumes that they are able to read and rightly interpret the Old Testament Scripture. If it were impossible to understand the Scriptures for some people who were removed 1000 years away, or 2000 years away as they're telling us it is for those of us now removed 2000 years from the writing of the New Testament, then we would expect that Jesus would say something like, "I see how your problem arose."

But He never said that. And whether He is speaking to scholars, Pharisees and scribes, or to common people, He always assumes that they are to blame for their misunderstanding of any teaching in the Scripture. Again and again He says, "Have you not read? Have you never read? Have you never read the Scriptures?" He says to them, "You're wrong because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. Your problem is, you don't search the Scriptures. They are they which speak of Me."

Would you also go so far as to say this? It is even to be understood by uninitiated Gentiles. Paul writing to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 10, says, "The Old Testament Scriptures were given for our instruction even as Gentiles." And when the Lord was on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24, He opened the Old Testament, the law of the prophets and the holy writings, and He explained to them the things concerning Himself which they ought to have already understood.

And think about the New Testament epistles. You say, "Well, the New Testament's really hard." Is that right? New Testament epistles were not written to theologians, they were not written to church leaders, they were not written to scholars. They were written to congregations, to the church of God at Corinth, to the churches of Galatia, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, and so forth. Always to the churches, to the lowest common denominator, the person who was a new believer in Jesus Christ.

And Paul assumes in every letter and so does Peter, and so does James, and so does John, so does Jude, that his hearers will understand exactly what he writes. For example, in Colossians 4:16, Paul says, "When this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans and see that you read the letter from Laodicea." Spread the letters around and read them all in every church. So you have to understand that first century Christians were held responsible for an understanding of the Scripture.

First century Gentile Christians were held responsible for an understanding of New Testament Scripture based on Old Testament Scripture. The New Testament epistles were written to churches that had dominant Gentile converts with no Old Testament background, coming right out of paganism with no knowledge of the Old Testament whatsoever. And they had the responsibility to understand and to obey. The Scripture will be attacked all the time, relentlessly from every angle, whether it's coming from critics or cultists or Charismatics who want to add to it, whether it's coming from the culture.

I could even throw in the capricious, the silly, foolish attacks on Scripture like Bible codes. I was one time on the radio program and somebody said, "What do you think of Bible codes?" And I said, "Well I'll tell you what I think of Bible codes. I think you better be careful when you say God said something He didn't say, because for that God condemns false teachers." It's clear what God said in the Bible. But to find some acrostic in a computer and think that what God said is written in a diagonal up this way and halfway down that side and that what God meant to say was that Gandhi

would die in October of 1984 is a far cry from the revelation of God. In fact, people have found the same stuff in Moby Dick.

There are always attacks, finally, on the Scripture from carnal wisdom. The people look at the Bible and they say, "Well, that's not reasonable. I don't like the doctrine of election. I don't like the doctrine of eternal punishment. I'm going to trump God." The attacks from carnal wisdom. "I can't accept that." Dangerous stuff. We bow the knee completely to the Word of God. We stand in defense of it by lifting it up and letting it defend itself. And that's what we're going to do starting next Sunday night. We're going to get past all this, negative attacks in which we sort of set the issues in view, and we're going to look at how the Bible exalts its own authority. Well enough for tonight. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the...the Word. What can we say? And we have been in it for years and years and years and years and it vindicates itself every time. It is alive and powerful and pure and true and penetrating. It is destructive to those who reject it. It is constructive to those who accept it. It is the living Word. We thank You for Your Word. We rest all our hope in it, all our faith is based upon its truth. May we be not just defenders but proclaimers of its glorious truth and may we be obedient to it.

We thank You for the treasure that it is, that its treasury is inexhaustible, its riches are limitless and always available to those who will open its pages prayerfully, carefully study it. We thank You for it. We pray that in this day when so many are assaulting Your Word there might be a great movement back to lifting it up. "You've exalted Your Word – " Psalm 138:2 says – "even as high as Your own name." And we do the same. We're thankful for it, for in it we know all that You want us to know, all that we need to know so that we can give you glory. For this we offer our praise in Christ's name. Amen.

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