Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Reasons to Trust the Clarity of Scripture
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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I want to talk to you a little bit from my heart and soul tonight and in some ways, lay before you a rationale for why I do what I do and why we all do what we do in the proclamation of the word of God in this pulpit. And I think, as a starting point, if you will open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 2, I would just like to read a text and let it stand on its own with a minimum of comment but the foundation will be laid by this text, in your own minds.

1 Corinthians second chapter and we'll just pick it up at verse 7. 1 Corinthians 2:7, "But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery. The hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood. For if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

But just as it is written, things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him. For to us, God reveals them through the spirit. For the spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him.

Even so, the thoughts of God, no one knows except the spirit of God. But now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit who is from God that we might know the things freely given to us by God. Which things we also speak. Not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. For the natural man does not accept the things of the spirit of God for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

This section lays before us the idea, the truth of divine revelation. It is, as verse 7 says, the wisdom of God, hidden from the rulers or the leaders or the scholars or the religious and important people. None of them understand this, which is why they crucified the Lord of Glory and why the wise of the world continue to misunderstand the meaning of his death. We speak God's wisdom hidden from the world and revealed to us. It has been given to us, says verse 10, through the spirit. The spirit is the one who knows the mind of God and has revealed the mind of God in the Scripture.

So we have received, verse 12 says, the wisdom of God, the truth of God, by the spirit who is from God in order that we might know the things freely given to us by God his truth, his revelation, his promises, his commands - everything that God has freely given to us. The key phrase that we might know. God has revealed his thoughts by his spirit, in his word, so that we might understand and know these things. We can only know them, however, not by, in verse 13 it says human wisdom, but by the spirit. For the natural man, not accepting the spirit, is unable to appraise or to understand or to discern divine truth and finds it foolish.

On the other hand, we receive it and thus, verse 16 says, we have the mind of Christ. That is a monumental statement. We know what Christ thinks about everything he has revealed to us. And the mind of Christ is one with the mind of the spirit. And the mind of the spirit and of Christ is one with the mind of God. We know what God thinks. We know how God appraises all things about which he has given us revelation.

This presupposes that the Bible is a revelation. It takes that which has been hidden and brings it out of hiding, makes that which has been a mystery unknown and makes it crystal clear. The Scripture is given us by God, through the holy spirit in order that we might know how God things. And we might possess the very mind of Christ.

All of this demands that the Bible be a clear word, a clear word. Not only is it authored by the spirit of God, but it is illuminated by the spirit of God. Says in verse 12 that we have actually received the spirit who is from God that we might know. Illumination is different than inspiration. Inspiration brings us the revelation intact as the true word of God. Illumination is the spirit in helping us to understand it.

And so all of our spiritual lives, all of those promises of God and all of those demands and commands of God and all of his instruction and all of his wisdom and all of his knowledge presupposes that God has revealed this truth, that it is understandable and that the revelation of it came by the spirit and so the illumination of is comes by the spirit.

This is foundational of all of Christianity, absolutely basic to all our Bible study. Unless this is a clear word, we are hopeless meandering in its mystery. And here the Scripture itself claims to be clear, not only here, but this among many important passages.

We've been studying, on Sunday nights, the Roman Catholic Church. And the Roman Catholic Church has always advocated the idea that the Bible is unclear, that is to say that it is impossible for the average person to interpret. It is impossible for the above-average person to interpret.

In fact, throughout history, any effort to put the Bible in the hands of common people was met with fierce opposition and even martyrdom as the Roman Catholic system executed people for translating

the Bible into the vernacular so that people could read it for themselves. That's why William Tyndale was killed in Belgium. That's why his partner in the Matthew's Bible, John Rogers, was killed by bloody Mary along with 282 other people because they said that the Bible disagreed with the Roman system.

The Catholic church has done everything it could to keep the Bible from people up until relatively modern times all of its masses were even in the Latin languages which nobody understood. Church has affirmed that the only infallible and true interpreter of the Bible is the church itself. So the people have been cut of from the Bible and every time people have found their way to the truth and the truth has turned on the light, it has exposed the darkness of that system and frequently brought about the severe and deadly persecution.

In more modern times, the church has softened in that effort and allowed the Bible to be in the language of the people. But there is a concern always in the system that only the church is the infallible interpreter. It was interesting to me that on the fortieth anniversary of Vatican Two in honor of dei verbum, which is Latin for the word of God.

A group of Catholic leaders assembled and issued an edict just very recently. And the edict said that not all of the Bible is true. Not all of the Bible is true. So, from the viewpoint of these folks, it is not only not understandable by the populace, but it's not even all true. And so if you could understand it, you might not even know what you should understand because you might not know which part is true and which part is not.

Any effort to keep people from the study of the word of God, any effort to keep people from reading and understanding the word of God is really a Satanic ploy just to keep people trapped in some kind of error for the purpose of perpetuating that error. The Roman Catholic church replaces truth with symbols. Symbols are only effective and they're only useful in direct proportion to the obscurity of truth.

But this is not just a Roman Catholic issue. I regret to have to say that as a Protestant Evangelical, it concerns me equally that there are some in Evangelicalism who are telling us essentially that not only are we not able to understand the Scripture because we ourselves are not the authorized infallible interpreters of Scripture. But, the Scripture itself is unclear.

One writer, John Armstrong, who's written a number of books that we have had in our bookstore in years past who in more recent years has been in motion at a rapid rate in the wrong direction said this. "Certitude is often idolatrous. I have been forced to give up certitude. If there is a foundation in Christian theology, it is not found in Scripture. Theology," he says, "must be a humble, human attempt to hear God, never about rational approaches to texts."

Astounding statement from a man with whom I have shared the platform and the pulpit in conferences around this country. Certitude is often idolatrous? You've been forced to give up being certain? There is no foundation in Christian theology to be found in Scripture? Theology is a humble effort to hear God without a rational understanding of his word? This is the ambiguity that has now been embraced and welcomed into evangelicalism.

Brian McClarren who is the guru behind the emerging church movement says, and I quote, "Clarity is sometime overrated. Shock and ambiguity often stimulate more thought than clarity." In his book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, which I read to my own personal pain from beginning to end, he celebrates the idea of ambiguity from beginning to end. Leslie Nubingen, another writer says, "The gospel is not a matter of certainties." And this is what is now being called the _____ of humility. They say, "I'm too humble to tell you that I know what the Bible means. I would never be so proud to do that. Anybody who does that is very proud and egotistical and intolerant and doctrinaire and dogmatic and divisive and I'm humble. So I'll admit I don't know what it means because we can't know what it means."

It's amazing to me that they still have church and celebrate, I guess, and worship in the throes of their ambiguity. But the sinner's inability to comprehend the spiritual truth in Scripture is a function of the unregenerate mind.

Romans 8:7 says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." It is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. The unregenerate person, that's we read in verse 14, does not understand the things of God. The carnal mind, the fleshy mind, the unregenerate mind does not understand the things of God. It is not subject to the law of God. It cannot be. So one could conclude that these people who do not believe the Bible can be understood are in the category of the natural man or the carnal mind.

So we have this avalanche of teachers who are saying that we can't know the Scripture because the Scriptures can't be known. It's not a matter of studying Greek and Hebrew and theology and comparing passage to passage and all of that. It's needless to do that because we can't know because no one can know because the Scriptures themselves cannot be understood.

And yet we just read, in 1 Corinthians 2:16 that we have the mind of Christ. Simple statement. Not talking about some mysterious experience or some personal ascent to secret knowledge. It simply means we know what he thinks. The only way I know what he thinks if I rightly interpret this book.

We have been given the mind of Christ revealed by the Holy Spirit and then we have been given the Holy Spirit to enlighten us about the true meaning of God's word. Our redemption of - our redemption - I guess you could say it this way, overcomes the noetic effects of sin to a very great degree, the noetic meaning the mental or the understanding. Our inability to understand, our inability to grasp, our inability to know is overcome by redemption. We now have the mind of Christ. We now are

taught by the spirit as we read. We now understand the connection between spiritual thoughts and spiritual words. The spiritual man appraises all things.

And so to be a Christian is to understand. If you didn't understand, you couldn't be saved. If you didn't understand you couldn't be sanctified. These current quote-unquote influencers constantly harping on the dangers of overconfidence, on the dangers of being dogmatic, on the dangers of saying you know what Scripture means by what it says are implying that God has not spoken clearly. It's a tragic thing. It's an attack on God. God mumbles, God stutters, God isn't clear.

These are some of the same people who say, in the new openness theology that God doesn't know the future. They're trying to get God off the hook for all the bad stuff that happens in the world and they say, "Well the reason we can get him off the hook is he doesn't know what's gonna happen until it happens. He's just like we are. You can't know the future until it happens because until it happens, it doesn't happen. And so how could you know that it happened?

So even God doesn't know the future and that's what it means - the openness of God. So God's not responsible. He's just trying to react to everything the same way we are."

There are people, then, who say that God doesn't know the future. They would say he does know some things. He knows some things, but those things that he does know he hasn't then, apparently is unable to communicate clearly. What kind of God is this who doesn't know the future and what he does know he can't communicate?

On the other hand, listen to what it says in Scripture. "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the son of God that you may know that you have eternal life and that you may continue to believe in the name of the son of God," 1 John 5:12. These things are written that you may know. Everything in the Bible is revelation. Everything is written in the Bible so that you know what God wants you to know.

Now, let me just talk about this a little bit because it's a very important thing in understanding the issue today and in approaching the Scripture. Let me give you some principles regarding clarity and we'll see how much time I have to rattle through some of these.

These are some things to think about when people might bring up the idea that you shouldn't be dogmatic, you shouldn't be doctrinal, you shouldn't say you know what the Bible means by what it says. That's being divisive and that's being egotistical and proud. Let me just answer that with some things to think about.

First of all, if the sinner is held responsible for the revelation of God in creation, Romans 1, and if the sinner is held responsible for the revelation of God in conscience, Romans 2, then he is surely to be

held responsible for the written and preached revelation of God in Scripture.

In Romans chapter 1, we are told that the sinner has enough of the revelation of God in creation so that he is without excuse before God. There's no excuse for the unregenerate, unconverted man. There is no excuse for not believing in God and coming to God because that which may be known of God is, first of all, revealed around them in the creation, and then Romans 2, in them in the law of God, written in the heart and the attending conscience that activates that law so that the sinner has no excuse. No one will ever be able to stand before God and say, "I didn't know that you existed and I didn't know what was right and what was wrong." If the sinner is without excuse for that which is revealed in creation and conscience, he is certainly without excuse for that which is revealed in Scripture.

Furthermore, the sinner's knowledge of God in creation and the sinner's knowledge of God in conscience means that he can grasp the power of God and the authority of God and the law of God and the concept of guilt because his conscience is accusing him. And so he understands, not only is there God, not only has God given me a moral law in my heart, but there is a God who will hold me accountable to that by virtue of a conscience that activates guilt when his law is violated. And this should lead the sinner to pursue a way to reconcile with an offended God, which offenses have produces in his own heart feelings of guilt.

Would we believe for a moment that the ignorance of the sinner, the blindness of the sinner, the deadness of the sinner is somehow to be compounded by God who makes a clear revelation of his power and Godhead in creation, who makes a clear revelation of his moral law in conscience, but delivers an incomprehensible revelation about how to do anything to be saved or how to live; as if the Bible is allegory or myth or Kabala or Gnosticism. This would be the most foolish of acts that God ever did - to reveal himself in creation and then reveal himself in conscience and then muddle up the revelation that leads to the true and saving and fulfilling and glorifying knowledge of himself? No.

If God holds the sinner responsible for his revelation in creation and conscience, believe me, he holds the sinner responsible for his revelation in Scripture. And do you remember just two Sundays ago, the words of Jesus through the fictional Abraham in the story of the rich man and Lazarus where Jesus twice, speaking through the fictional Abraham, says, "Let them hear Moses and the prophets." If they don't listen to them, it'll do no good if someone rises from the dead. Jesus is saying, "They can determine the truth that will save them from Hell if they listen to the Scripture." Jesus condemns people, "clearly because they believe not on me. Search the Scriptures. They are they which speak of me." There is no ambiguity in Scripture. People want ambiguity in Scripture.

And I can simply remind you why if you turn just quickly to John 3. This is a very important passage. We've talked about it before. John 3:19, "This is the judgment, that light is come into the world." Light. "And men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil." Light is life.

Light is clarity. Light is understanding. Light is revelation. Light is God revealing himself. And light has come into the world in the incarnate word and in the written word. Light has come into the world. It is light, it is not darkness. It is light, which is to say it is lucid and clear and discernable and understandable and comprehensible. But men love the darkness rather than the light. Why? For their deeds were evil. You turn on the light and you expose all the wretchedness and all the filth.

And verse 20 says, "For everyone who does evil hates the light and doesn't come the light lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." If you belong to the Lord, you run to the light. You want the light to shine into your life and expose the evil so you can repent of it. It's not that the Bible is darkness.

The Bible is not darkness. The Bible is light. It claims to be light again and again and again and again. Men redefine it because they don't like what the light reveals. So the ignorance and blindness of sinners and they're saying that Scripture is ambiguous, is only a testimony to their love of sin.

The fault is not with God. It is with man. Let me give you another thing to think about. Scripture is necessarily plain because God, its author, creator, redeemer, speaks plainly to accomplish his purpose. And what is his purpose in human history? It is to redeem men and women, to gather a bride for his son. It is to bring a message of salvation so that those who were chosen before the foundation of the world in Christ can hear and believe and be saved and be brought to eternal glory as the bride of the Son of God.

God's purpose is crystal clear. God's plan is plain. What sense would it make if God has a clear, plain plan, but ambiguity as to the necessary truths to bring that plan to fruition? God isn't a fool. If he has the plan, and the plan is clear, then the means by which the plan is fulfilled is equally to be clear. In fact, it's more clear how to be saved in the Scripture. More clear how to live to the glory of God than even the deep things of the plan of God. Those things belong in eternity and are known perfectly in the mind of God.

We don't know the depths of all those things. We do know all that is necessary for us in the power of the spirit to bring that plan to fulfillment. Scripture then has to be plain in the matters of salvation and spiritual life so that God can do his work. Let me say something else that's absolutely essential. Scripture yields its meaning to ordinary reason and literal sense. Scripture yields its meaning to ordinary reason and literal sense.

Now when I talk about literal, it's exactly what I mean, that you can take the Bible at face value. It means just what it says. And you say, "Well, sometimes it's not really clear what it says." Sure, I understand that. But you can use your ordinary reason - and I will tell you my reasoning capabilities are very ordinary.

And every week of my life, I apply my ordinary, rational skills to a literal understanding of Scripture. There's nothing secret. There's nothing hidden. There are no implicit meanings tucked in obscure fashions under the surface of Scripture. Everywhere Scripture is called light, light, light, light, it is even light to those who reject it. Light has come into the world and men love darkness rather than light, as we read.

It is even light to those who reject it. They can understand God as creator. They can understand God as moral lawgiver because they can, through their reason, understand the original cause of the cause and effect reasoning process through conscience they understand moral law. They are even capable of understanding the gospel, to some degree, because they know sin and they know guilt and they know alienation from God. Those are thing that are real in the hearts of men. It is light even to those who reject it. It is blazing shining light to those who accept it. And it yields itself to ordinary reason and literal sense.

We have this debate a lot, particularly in the area of prophesy. People are often talking about how do we interpret the prophetic literature? How do we interpret, say, the Book of Revelation? If you were to meet with collective scholars as I do frequently and go around the room and say, "What's your view of the Book of Revelation" and yours and yours and yours. You probably, typically, might not find two that agreed. And I have a sort of standard answer.

"Well, I understand that perfectly gentlemen because if you don't think it means what it says, then you certainly couldn't know what it meant." Right? If it doesn't mean what it says, then who knows what it means? If forty-two months doesn't mean forty-two months then three-and-a-half years doesn't mean three-and-a-half years and a thousand years doesn't mean a thousand years. If Satan being bound doesn't mean Satan being bound, if this isn't talking about the future, if it's not talking about actual holocausts in heaven where the sky rolls up like a scroll, where great bodies of the sky, stars and asteroids or whatever come plummeting out of the sky and smashing into the earth, if it doesn't mean that a third of the population of the world is going be killed, if it doesn't mean that, then what does it mean? But once you've said it doesn't mean that, I'm out. Because I don't really think you have any right to offer an opinion because I'm not sure you've been given extra revelation.

If it doesn't mean what it says then - this is what was so refreshing when I went over to Kazakhstan and traveled after 35 hours and spent a whole day talking about the Book of Revelation. And a the end they said, "We agree with you." How could that be? This is 35 hours away in the middle of central Asia. How could they come to the same conclusion that I did about the Bible? Because they have the same Bible and the took it at face value. And they said, "This is wonderful. You believe like we believe."

That, my friends, is one of the reasons why we've had an ongoing connection to the Russian church. That's why they trust us, because we take the Bible at face value. Now they've been saved from going to school. There are some things you can only learn in school and many of those things are what twist and pervert the Scripture. So you approach the Bible with ordinary reason and it yields its literal sense. Otherwise, God cannot accomplish his purpose.

True clarity comes only by regeneration. That's exactly what we read in 1 Corinthians 2. True clarity comes only be regeneration and the in-dwelling spirit who really illuminates the meaning of Scripture. The sinner can understand sin, guilt, the need for reconciliation, the need for restoration to God. Understand all of that up to the Gospel and for the understanding of the Gospel, there has to be an awakening of the mind and an awakening of the dead soul and that by the work of regeneration. But the fact that the unregenerate cannot fully embrace and believe the Scripture on their own, without the aid of divine, regenerating grace by the holy spirit, doesn't prove the Bible's ambiguity. It simply proves man's depravity. Scripture then becomes clear to the believer by the grace of spiritual life.

You know, what I teach here, week after week, year after year after year is in the great flow of the historic teaching of the church. I'm not out on a limb. I'm not telling you something brand new. I may have insights here and there and applications that maybe you haven't heard before. And I need to do that 'cause you need to need me, otherwise I won't have a job.

So I can't just tell you what you can see for yourself, but in the great historic flow of divine truth, I stand arm in arm with faithful men through all the ages who understand the same book in the same way.

Now, just to give you some illustrations of how clear it is - Jesus himself in his teachings, his conversations and his disputes with the Jews never blamed their ignorance on the Old Testament. He never said, "Oh, I can understand why you don't receive me. Hey, I understand it. I perfectly understand that the Old Testament is really confusing." He never said that. But he was speaking to first century people removed from David by a thousand years, removed from Moses by fifteen hundred years and removed from Abraham by over two thousand years. And Jesus refers to David and Moses and Abraham like that was familiar turf. And he assumes that people living a thousand, fifteen hundred, and two thousand years after those people could read and rightly understand the Old Testament Scriptures.

Never, ever do you hear Jesus say this, "Oh, I understand how your problem arose, the Scriptures aren't clear on that subject." He never says that. Instead, whether he's talking to Jewish scholars or untrained rabble crowds, he always assumes that the blame for not understanding any teaching of Scripture is not to be placed on the Scripture, but on the ones who fail to understand. Every time. Again and again he says this, "Have you not read? Have you not read? Have you never read in the Scriptures?" Or, "You are wrong because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God,"

Matthew 22. The problem is not with the Scripture, but with you. It's all there.

That again is why we saw in Luke 17, they have Moses and the prophets, "Let them hear them." It presupposes that that is comprehensible, understandable revelation. We also want to add that the full meaning of the Old Testament, which is clear, the full meaning, however, comes in the New Testament. The Old Testament message is crystal clear but unfulfilled. And the fulfillment comes in the New Testament. Now these people in the emerging church movement would say that even the New Testament's not very clear, not just the Old, but, you know, we can't draw any doctrinal conclusions out of - that's why is gave you a little illustration this morning about Chris Say who is one of the writers in this movement, when asked if they accept homosexuals as church members, he responded, "Of course. We also accept people who are overweight and people that like chocolate." That was his response because he's convinced that there is no clarity on the Bible either on chocolate, obesity, or homosexuality.

Is the Bible unclear? Is the New Testament equally unclear about these issues? I just want to remind you of something that ought to be pretty basic to everybody. The New Testament epistles, let's just take the epistles, the gospels too, but just focusing on the epistles for a moment. They were not written to theologians. None of the New Testament was written to theologians. It wasn't written to scholars. It wasn't written to highbrow interpreters. It was written to common people - common, ordinary people. And the epistles, with the exception of Hebrews, were written to, for the most part, people in gentile cultures who didn't even have, for the most part, Jewish history or any knowledge of the Old Testament.

Paul says to the church of God, which is at Corinth, which is at Corinth - what kind of a religious background did Corinth have? What kind of knowledge of the Old Testament did Corinth have? What kind of theological footings did they have? Or, to the churches of Galatia, which is a region. Or to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are Philippi and so on and so on and so on. Thirteen epistles of Paul and then the epistle to the Hebrews is the one written to the Jews, but most of the others focus primarily, although in some cases being written to scattered Jews, but primarily on Gentiles. And Paul, writing to Gentiles, with no background in the Old Testament, assumes that the common, ordinary person sitting in the meeting of that church in Corinth, in Philippi, somewhere in Galatia, in Ephesus, wherever, that the common, ordinary person sitting there will understand what he writes and what he means by what he writes.

For example, to the Colossians, he said this, "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea." They swapped them and passed them around and they were just congregations of new converts out of gentile culture with no understanding of the Old Testament who were responsible to understand, fully, the message that Paul was bringing them by the inspiration of the spirit of God. Relatively new Christians. And yet, the New Testament authors showed no hesitancy in expecting these Gentile

Christians to be able to read and understand the Scripture. And to read even a Greek translation of the Old Testament that was around and available or even a translation of the Old Testament in their own language. And there were some of those as well.

So, in no case are we to say that the teaching of the Bible on any subject is confusing or incapable of being understood correctly or ambiguous or unclear. Scripture, rightly interpreted is not arrogance. And Scripture deemed ambiguous is not humility. It is willful sin and it is an assault on God himself who speaks so that we can understand.

John Piper said, "Arrogance is the condemnation of choice in the religious arena for anyone who breaks the rules of relativism." If you say of anybody's view of God that it is wrong and harmful, you will be accused of arrogance.

Just a couple of other thoughts. All Scripture - this is where I come in - is not so clear as to need no interpreter or expositor. What do I mean by that? Now, follow carefully. Scripture has heights. And it has depths of truth which, like God himself, who is high and deep, and it yields those heights and depths of truth by diligent study.

And that's why we are commanded to study, to be approved of God, a workman that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word. That's why the noble Boreans searched the Scriptures to see if these things were so. The basic message of Scripture is clear, it is comprehensible, it is understandable. But Scripture truth goes high and goes deep. It is milk but it is also what? Meat. And so God has given us pastors, evangelists as well as apostles and prophets for the edification of the saints. He's given to the church pastor teachers, teachers, elders, bishops, overseers, all the same office for the teaching of the word of God. He's gifted saints for the teaching of the word of God. He says double honor is to be given.

He says to Timothy, "Through the elders who labor hard in preaching and teaching," and to it is not to say that it is so clear that it does not need interpretation or exposition. It is clear as to its message but you know that the basic message is one thing and the work of exposition that takes you high and takes you deep is something that enriches and blesses and enhances your worship and your service because it enhances your knowledge of the things of God.

Scripture is bread. It is bread in the reach of a child. But it is also gold deep under the surface to be dug out only by a diligent laborer. And we enjoy both. Scripture contains truths hard to understand. Scripture contains truths that demand all our mental powers, sublime transcendent truths that we look into and we can't even plumb the full depth of. Though we spend a lifetime doing so. Listen to what Peter said regarding the writing of our beloved brother Paul. That's what Peter called him. 2 Peter 3, he says, here how he talked about Paul. "In his letters, speaking in them of these things in which are some things hard to understand." Even Peter found Paul hard to understand. "Which the untaught

and unstable distort as they do also the rest of the Scripture to their own destruction." Sure, if Peter found Paul hard to understand and knew him and lived in his era, there are part of Paul that I find, on the surface, hard to understand. But with the proper approach, it can be understood with the diligent approach it can be grasped. It can be known.

And so we come to the word of God, trusting with all our hearts in its clarity, its absolute clarity. This is not arrogance. This is true humility bowing to the truth of Scripture. Actually, to deny the clarity of Scripture, to deny the certainty of Scripture is arrogance of the worst kind. It is really a kind of blasphemy that accuses God of an inability to communicate clearly and then hold people accountable for their eternal destiny for truth they can't comprehend.

Scripture is clear to the one who diligently searches. And there is amazing uniformity of agreement on the central truths of Scripture throughout the history of the whole church. The central doctrines of the Christian faith are apparent to all who study diligently. And so we believe the Scripture is clear.

Now because it's clear, I just want to close with just some simple thoughts for you to grasp. I understand what my job is and that is to take this clear word and preach it so that its clarity comes forth. I understand that you can read your Bible and get a lot of it on your own. But I also understand its height and depth and length and breadth. And that's why I spend so much time digging into the Scripture, past that truth on the surface to expand your understanding of these glorious truths. I can't give myself to anything else. And so I am what is called an expositional preacher. There's an old English verb to exposit. It means to explain. Expositional Scripture is expositing, explaining the Bible. And there are a number of reasons why you do this manifesting its clarity - let me just suggest them to you and another time maybe give you some more detail.

One, it establishes the authority of God over the soul. It's a question of authority. Who has the right to speak in the church? Who has a right to speak in the church? God does. It's the church of God, purchased with his own blood through his son Jesus Christ. As we said a few weeks ago, Christ is the head of the church. He has the right to speak to his church. I give you the word of God because I'm only an errand boy. I'm only a waiter, I'm not a chef. I don't cook the meal, I just deliver it. I bring it to the table. It is the word of the Lord of the church to his church. It is simply my responsibility to tell you what the Lord of the church has said. It is a clear message. I give you its clarity the best I can to the height and depth and length and breadth of which I am able. I believe that anyone who does not preach the word of God interrupts the Lordship of Christ over his church, hinders the work of the holy spirit because the spirit uses the word understood, the word magnified, the word clarified to save and sanctify. And where you don't proclaim the word of God, you don't teach people to submit to it.

And the church is full of mavericks, self-appointed, self-styles entrepreneurial mavericks who don't want to submit to biblical truth and so they cultivate, in their people, the very same thing - indifference

to and lack of submission to the word of God and therefore to God himself. Because the word is clear - another thing to think about. Because the word is clear, it sanctifies. It just doesn't sanctify you, it sanctifies me.

If I never preached a sermon publicly, if I never showed up here on Sunday, if this wasn't what I did, if my whole life had gone by and I never preached a sermon, I would still thank God every day for the study. If I just studied and prepared and never preached, I would thank God for the sanctifying work of his word in my own life. And I worry about preachers who aren't in the word regularly because it doesn't do its sanctifying work in them unless they are. And if you're just giving your little quick cutesy ditties here and there and never into the deep things of the word of God, then you're not exposed to the power and pruning and purging of this word.

You have to preach the Scriptures, you have to exposit the Scriptures by example in order to help people understand the priority of Bible study. One thing that happens in the church where there's not an expositional ministry is people don't see Bible study as a priority. They might see meeting felt needs as a priority. They might see, you know, being successful as a priority. They might see politics as a priority. They might see, you know, philosophical theory as a priority. Whatever comes out of the pulpit. But one thing true, if the pulpit is filled with the exposition of the word of God, that's the high point of the church. This is the church at its pinnacle of its assembly. When God speaks through his word. And if that is the priority at the highest moment of the church's life, then believe me, you all get that message.

That's why 2,000 of you or so went out this morning and bought a study Bible. Because you understand that the Bible needs to be studied. We can have that little exercise in the patio at many churches and they would say, "What? That big, thick thing? Don't you have, like, a small version?"

A lot of churches use video tapes of people like myself and other preachers and teachers to play in classes because if you don't preach from the pulpit and teach the Bible from the pulpit, people in the pew don't learn to do that. So you have a church without teachers. Most churches today - mega-churches have no such thing as Sunday School because there's nobody to teach. It's not a priority.

Well, when you exposit the word of God regularly and make clear the great truths that are in it, you produce spiritual depth in your people. And that produces transcendent worship. Leave it out and you have cheap, shallow worship manipulated by music. And you have entertainment. When you teach the word of God, people think deeply about the things of God and their worship is exalted because they think deeply. You take your people down in understanding so they can go up in transcendent worship.

People remark about that when they come here. The worship here, the worship here, and a lot of people on the outside think this church is probably a little heavy handed and legalistic 'cause they

hear me on tape and they think it's just sort of pounding the pulpit. But the work of the word is to produce a congregation that worships and once they come, they see that. The other thing I hear is, "This is a church that is amazingly loving." Really? Is that a shock? That's exactly what the word produces in people. So you take people down so they can go up in their worship.

Another reason to exposit the clear word is this: you protect your people from error and carnality. You protect your people from error and carnality. There's a lot of error in this world and there's plenty of carnality everywhere and you don't want to aid and abed it. You want to do everything you can to defend the church against it. Unfaithful shepherding means no deep soul work, no convicting preaching, no penitence, no fear of God. Then you get a congregation of people who are carnal, who are subject to drifting off into error 'cause they don't know anything. Imagine going to a church where the believe that there was nothing clear in the Bible and everything was ambiguous. How in the world would you live your life in that kind of ambiguity? You'd end up not only in error and carnality, but you'd end up weak, cowardly and compromising. You wouldn't have any convictions about anything, therefore you couldn't confront anything, therefore you couldn't protect yourself from anything. And so these are the compelling reasons why the word of God must be preached.

And I've said more than I intended to say tonight and that's enough to give you a sense of what is important. This is a clear word from God. We rejoice in its clarity. It reminds me of Mark Twain who once said, "It's not the things I don't understand that bother me, it's the things I do." And what ought to bother us, as Christians, is what we do understand about the word of God. It ought to bother us into obedience and spiritual devotion.

Father we thank you for wonderful day. And we have endeavored tonight, feebly, to lift up your word. And we offer ourselves to you as a congregation of people who thank you for speaking clearly. We think every person needs to have a Bible in their hands and needs to have their face in it prayerfully, thoughtfully, because it's clear, because it is revelation. It is not hidden. It is revealed. And we think - and this is because you've said so, that by an understanding of what is clear in the Bible, we can be saved from sin and death and hell, saved from eternal torment. We can be saved unto eternal life in heaven. We can be given the rich, full satisfaction of living life to its maximum joy here in this world and on through eternity. And we can be useful to you and bring glory to your great name and find our full delight in you. We thank you, oh God, that you've given us a clear word. We thank you for faithful teachers through the centuries who have helped us all understand its height and depth and length and breadth with their diligent search for its rich truths. We thank you that it is bread for a child. It is also gold buried deep, found only by a diligent searcher. And in all its richness, we give you the praise and the glory and we have found our life in this book. And it has brought your life to us. Give us an increasing love for it. May we grow in its understanding that we might grow in knowing and loving and honoring you. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

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