

**Sermon for Sunday, October 28, 2012**  
**Dr. Dan Doriani**  
**The Reformation: Scripture Alone**  
**1 Peter 1:10-12**

<sup>10</sup> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, <sup>11</sup> trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. <sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

### **The quest for certainty**

Tom Cotton is a rising politician, thirty-five years old, from the small town of Dardanelle, Arkansas. A gifted student, he went to Harvard. He was a senior in Harvard's Law School when the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks occurred. He knew he wanted to enlist. Not as military lawyer far from combat but as Second Lieutenant in the Infantry. He went to paratrooper and ranger training before he volunteered and served on the ground first in Iraq, then in Afghanistan. He did all this without hesitation or doubt. How?

Most people have doubts about things like war zones. In fact we feel uncertain about all sorts of things. We go back and forth, consider and reconsider. The founder of the Reformation, Martin Luther was uncertain in his youth. Luther's father saw his talents and determined that law was the right career. Young Martin was unsure. One day, a storm caught him as he walked across open fields. As lightning burst around him, he cried out to God for deliverance and vowed to become a monk if he lived.

He became a monk but found a new fear. He feared God in his justice and the punishment of sin. He became obsessed with confessing his sins, hoping to find forgiveness. He exhausted his confessor who said, "Come back when you've done something."

He tried to make up for his sins. At the time, the church promoted the idea that good deeds could cover, expiate or make up for one's sins. So he went on a pilgrimage to Rome by foot in 1510, at the age of twenty-seven. He crawled up a sacred flight of stairs – on his knees, because it was supposed to release him from punishment for sins. When he finished, he stood up and said, "I wonder if it is true." And he remembered Romans 1, "The just will live by faith."

When he returned home to Germany, his mentor told him to stop worrying about himself. Instead he should study Scriptures and teach. Luther obeyed, steeped himself in Scripture and as he studied and taught the gospel became clear. He found God's grace in the Psalms and Romans: "In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed through faith... The righteous will live by faith."

He had rediscovered the gospel, in Scripture, believed it, proclaimed it, wrote it. The justice of God is not bent on punishing sin. Rather Jesus covers our sin and in his justice he justifies. Because Jesus satisfied God's justice, *God is now just as he forgives*, loves and shows mercy.

These ideas are familiar to us, but in that day, it challenged the church, which emphasized getting right with God through sacraments and works. The German people were electrified, but the church hierarchy was outraged. Eventually the pope decreed that Luther's writings were heretical and must be burned. He must stop writing, recant and repent or be excommunicated.

The church convened a debate that was also a trial. The official leader stacked up Luther's books and asked if he stood by them, even church dogma contradicted them. He replied: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils) alone... I am bound by the Scriptures... and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot... recant anything. May God help me.... Here I stand. I can do no other.

How did Luther become certain? How can we be certain when we have to make a tough decision? When the crowd is going one way and we're sure the other is right? When an angry authority threatens? When your friends are pushing for something, asking you to go one way? When financial interests push you toward something that seems wrong? Can we be as bold as Luther and say, "I am bound by the Scriptures... and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Here I stand?"

We should be able to say so, but let's explore the basis. Unless we are monks devoted to study and teaching, we may not have as much confidence as Luther.

First, let me add texture to Luther's account. Historically speaking, Luther was in the minority, but he did not stand alone. Other church leaders stood with him. After centuries when Bible's were hard to find, a wave of fresh translations of the Bible put the Scripture in many more hands. Others were studying and coming to the same conclusions as Luther - Calvin, Beza, Zwingli, Melancthon, Bucer. They had been trained in seminaries. They were ordained, they had sworn to defend true doctrine and they too saw things in the Bible that contradicted the teaching and practices of the church.

For Luther, for everyone, if no one understands God's will and God's word as we do, we should pause. If we are right, we may be in the minority, but we should not be entirely alone. Let's go to apostle Peter and see what he says about Scripture.

### **1. Peter tells us what the Bible is and how we got it.**

*1 Peter 1:10* Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care,<sup>11</sup> trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.<sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Peter wrote these words as a man who had walked with Jesus every day for three years. Nonetheless, as Peter writes, he doesn't cite his experience as the source of his authority. He cites his God-given role as an apostle:

*"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ..." (1 Pet. 1:1).* Jesus appointed the apostles "to be with him" (Mark 3:14), to hear his words (Luke 9:44), to witness everything from Jesus' baptism to his resurrection (Acts 1:22). Jesus chose Peter to witness his deeds, to remember his words, and to explain what they meant. God made Peter his spokesman and representative.

But he doesn't boast about his experiences with Jesus. He says the prophets spoke of the grace to come as the Spirit directed them. The theme is this: "In his great mercy [God] has given us... a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1:3-4, 9). He says the prophets and apostles speak with God's authority. The apostles "preached the gospel... by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven" (1:12).

The apostles knew their writings were authoritative. Paul said things like, "This is the rule I lay down in all the churches" (1 Cor. 7:17). John said that Jesus promised that his Spirit would help them remember and understand his words and deeds (John 2:22, 12:16, 14:26, 20:30-31). So Peter, Paul and John agree that God inspired their writings.

1 Peter 1:10-12 says that salvation is the theme of Scripture: "Concerning this salvation, the prophets... spoke" (1:10). The prophets "spoke of the grace that was to come to you..." God appointed the prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New Testament. They received revelation: "The mystery of Christ... has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:4-5, English Standard Version (ESV)).

This came by the inspiration of God's Spirit and yet the prophets and apostles were active. Luke carefully investigated" the life of Christ (Luke 1:3). The prophets didn't just receive their messages. Peter says the prophets "searched intently, with the greatest care" (1:10). The prophets were "trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing..." (1:11).

Peter also names the core message of all the prophets and apostles: "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1:11). The Bible says many things, but the heart is the suffering and glory, death and resurrection of Jesus. That's central to our experience too. Peter: "Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (4:13).

The church needs to identify with Christ in this suffering. We must stand "firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And God... who called you to his eternal glory in Christ... will... make you strong, firm and steadfast" (5:9-10).

So then, the prophets foretold this salvation, Jesus accomplished it, and the Spirit led the apostles to describe it. God first **predicts** our salvation, then **fulfills** our salvation, then **interprets or explains** our salvation – God created us in his image, we rebelled and felt the catastrophic consequences, and God restored us by Jesus. Before him we repent, in him we believe. Every other theme is secondary.

Notice: The prophets didn't discover everything they longed to know. But, "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke... by those who have preached the gospel to you... Even angels long to look into these things" (1:12). What angels and prophets hoped to know is given to us in the gospel. 2 Peter 1:20 says: "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

So Scripture is the work of men, the prophets who "searched intently." And it's the word of God, "for prophecy never had its origin in the will of man." Rather "men spoke from God" as the Holy Spirit carried them along.

So Scripture has a dual authorship. Luke drew on "**eyewitnesses** and servants of the word" as he wrote. He "**carefully investigated** everything from the beginning" (Luke 1:2-3). Similarly, Paul wrote "with the wisdom God gave him" straining with all his skill to apply his gospel to the challenges of his churches. That's why the style of Scripture varies from book to book.

So Peter and Paul agree that Scripture is "inspired" or God-breathed. Our sixty-six books are the word of the triune God. Paul: Scripture is inspired and "useful" for **teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training** in righteousness, so the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." The Bible guides both creed and conduct. What to believe and how to behave.

Scripture is **inspired** because it comes from God, as the Holy Spirit guides his apostles and prophets. John says God's "word is truth" (John 17:17). It contains no errors; it is **inerrant**. God stands behind his word, so it never fails; it is **infallible**. It is the reliable guide to the church's faith and practice.

Still, many people read the Bible sporadically. Some hardly read outside of worship services. Sadly, large numbers of church leaders read the Bible only occasionally. Christian leaders tend to address this through straight exhortations: "You need to read the Bible more!" But if people don't read there are reasons. I'll mention two. Sometimes we're not sure it's true and reliable. And sometimes we read and don't gain much from it. I'd like to address those two issues.

## 2. The Bible is reliable and true.

The Bible doesn't ask us to live by blind faith. There are reasons to believe the Bible is reliable. Any open-minded person can see them, especially if they know how historical evidence works. There is a wide variety of literature that shows how historical stone inscriptions and archaeological remains verify the Bible's historical accounts. One masterful defense of the reliability of the gospels is by Craig Keener, [The Historical Jesus of the Gospels](#).

First, Jesus prepared Peter and the other New Testament writers for their work. Jesus appointed the apostles "to be with him," to listen to him, and to witness everything (Mark 3:14, Matt. 17:5, Acts 1:22). People remembered the great events they witnessed (Luke 2:19, 22:61, 24:8). Some worked hard at writing, after careful research. Luke consulted "those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word" then "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" (1:1-4).

John says Jesus performed "many miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples." His gospel doesn't tell them all, but present enough "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 21.25, 20.30-31). Peter said, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories" about Jesus, "we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16).

There is hard evidence for this. I'll mention five points. First, we can trust the record of Jesus' words because memorization was essential to education in that day. Students were expected to memorize the main principles of their teachers and teachers often repeated their main ideas. Beyond that, even then students took notes on the teachings of their rabbis.

Secondly, ancient Greeks and Romans had standards. Herodotus, called the father of history, was roundly criticized around 440 B.C. for putting fables and morality tales into his accounts. In 400 B. C. Thucydides said he confined himself to factual reports of political and military events, based on first-hand, eye-witness accounts. To be precise, he noted that he sometimes summarized the main points of a speech.

Everyone knew the difference between history and fabrication. An elder was deprived of his office for embellishing the history of Peter, even though the additions were "edifying" (Tertullian).

In New Testament times almost everyone spoke Greek. Since the New Testament is in Greek, there was no need for a translation; everyone understood the original. One day a preacher spoke on Mark's account of the lame man whose friends brought to Jesus. In the end, they lowered him through a hole in the roof so that he lay on his stretcher before Jesus. The word used for this stretcher in Mark 2 is a common one – *krabbatos*. The preacher substituted a more elegant Greek work – *skimpeus* – for the original. Immediately someone within the congregation called out, "Are you superior to the one who said *krabbatos*?" So the church insisted on accuracy.

Third, some events are unforgettable. Memorable events emblazon themselves on the minds of witnesses. I will never forget walking my daughters down the aisle for their weddings. I remember the time a group of policeman accused me of murder and pulled their guns on me (I didn't do it). We couldn't forget these things if we tried. We all have indelible memories.

Think then of the disciples when Jesus calmed the storm at sea, when Jesus called the risen Lazarus, still wrapped in grave cloths, out of his tomb with the thunder of command. Imagine the moment they saw the risen Christ. These events burned themselves into the disciples' memory.

Fourth, living witnesses had a role. The New Testament names little known Roman officials like Pilate and Gallio, who pop up in secular chronicles. They also name ordinary people and specific events. For example, Jesus healed blind Bartimaeus who used to beg outside Jericho on the road to Jerusalem (Mark 10:46).

Jesus raised Lazarus, who lived in a small town named Bethany (John 11:1). When Jesus stumbled under the cross, Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, carried it for him (Mark 15:21). These are real people, known to the church, known in their towns. The gospels would have been instantly discredited if fabricated stories reached towns where the gospels say these events occurred. But the gospels were not discredited. No, they were received as Scripture everywhere they went.

Fifth, the witnesses sealed their testimony with their lives. It's true that people will die for a lie. This usually happens when people are duped. Sometimes a person will die for what they know to be a lie – if it brought them great benefits. But the disciples gained no earthly benefit from their testimony to Jesus. No, they suffered every kind of abuse for their testimony. Yet they stayed with Jesus to the end. None recanted to save their skin because they knew their testimony was true.

There are all sorts of random testimonies to the truth of the gospels. Example, on a letter to his son, Mara bar Serapion makes the point that misfortune overtakes those who persecute wise men. He mentions Greeks who killed Socrates, and then Jesus: "What did it avail the Jews to kill their wise king, since their kingdom was taken away from them from that time on. Socrates is not dead, thanks to Plato. Nor is the wise king [Jesus] because of the new law which he has given." He was no Christian, but he knew essential facts about Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

I hope this gives you confidence that the all books of the Bible, especially the gospels are reliable, not fables. Then you can read the Bible as God's sure guide to faith and life. Still, it's not enough to believe the Bible is true. We must read it carefully. But Scripture can be hard to understand, as Peter himself says later, so how can we gain from it?

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<sup>1</sup> Bock, Study Jesus, 53

### 3. When we read faithfully, the Bible gives us direction and makes us bold

First, read the Bible widely. Listen to Bible on a CD. Read three chapters at once. Read in church. Read the recommended Scriptures for the week. The more you read, the more you will find that it speaks to you. When something does strike you; slow down. Listen. Read it twice, three times. Receive it as God's word to you.

Peter mentions the Spirit, so let's remember that the Spirit gives us both Scripture and illumines it for us. We can see this in surprising ways. One day a man whom I faintly recognized strode up to me and said, "Five years ago you were a guest speaker in my church and you said something that changed my life. I was a hypocrite; I'm not sure if I was a Christian or not, but I certainly wasn't serious. But as he continued I felt dumbfounded. The lesson he shared seemed both true and important, but I was sure I had not said it, and told him so: What you say is certainly true and I believe it, but it's not the kind of thing I would say in public. I'm happy for you but you must be thinking of someone else."

He stared at me as if I were insane, then began to quote me line by line: "You said – a, then b, then c, then d – the words God used to change my life." He was right! I remembered the week, what had been in my thoughts. It wasn't in my notes, but apparently the Spirit nudged me to say words his receptive heart needed to hear. So the Spirit uses teachers to apply the word to us in unexpected ways, according to his purposes. How then do we read?

First we read the Bible **seriously**. This means we take the Bible literally when it expects us to do so. And we read it metaphorically when appropriate. We must take it literally when the gospels say Jesus performed miracles, died on the cross and rose again. We read metaphorically when Jesus uses hyperbole: "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away." We see no battalions of one-handed Christians. But we do take our sins seriously, and take action to remove it.

Second, we read **holistically**. That is, we don't snatch isolated statements from the Bible and find meaning that the authors never intended. We let the Bible's themes guide us. After his resurrection, Jesus declared Scripture's theme:

Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms... "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:44-47).

The promises give us hope of a redeemer; the law shows our need of a redeemer. The history of Israel shows that no ordinary human can be the redeemer. Every leader fails. Jesus alone is true. The leadership structures of Israel leads us to Christ. He is the great prophet, revealing God to the world. The great high priest, offering a perfect sacrifice. The great king, protecting his people from their foes.

Third, we read the Bible personally. We take the Bible to heart instead of using it to condemn others. How easy it is to read the Bible and think of our friends who need it. Perhaps they do. But do you see that you need it too? Let's apply God's word to ourselves, before we recommend it to others.

Forth, we must read the Bible meditatively. It's good to listen to teachers and preachers, whether live or through mass communication media, but at some point, if someone wants to become a Christian or grow as a Christian, we must become active readers. We must read slowly, contemplating what the word teaches about ourselves and the life of a disciple. We must read with a godly goal.

So let us read meditatively to apply Scripture to ourselves that we might repent and believe and grow in godliness. Let us read for real history, for sound doctrine, and for the person of Jesus Christ, son of God and Savior.