

# ASK MY PASTOR!

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## HE KNOWS THAT STUFF

A quick-start guide to what Christians believe

“ARE YOU NOT IN ERROR BECAUSE YOU  
DO NOT KNOW THE SCRIPTURES OR  
THE POWER OF GOD?”

MARK 12:24

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*“If you do not listen to Theology, that will not mean that you have no ideas about God. It will mean that you have a lot of wrong ones—bad, muddled, out of date ideas. For a great many of the ideas about God which are trotted out as novelties today, are simply the ones which real Theologians tried centuries ago and rejected.”*

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Root Robertson is a big-picture type, always fascinated by the panoramic view of life and faith, 'cause he thinks context helps. For 30+ years, he's traveled the nation as an evangelist and a musicianary. His call includes kids and families. He's been privileged to be present at the moment when thousands of kids have said yes to the call of the Holy Spirit in salvation. He's all about **downloading the nuts and bolts of our common Christian thing** in songs, sermons, and crusades.

Alan's love of teaching has made him *have to be* a lifelong learner. Along the way, he's noticed that **a ton of us don't know what we believe or why we believe it**. And we really don't know how to even begin to remedy the problem; hence, this book which puts the basic non-denominational teachings of the Bible into the hands of those who sincerely want to know what's going on with their faith in Jesus Christ.

Alan is uniquely equipped for this job by his default mode for simplification, encouragement and his seeming inability to be serious for long stretches of time. Here in this book are **the basics of what believers believe**: an eagle's-eye view of the landscape of biblical doctrine. As the hymn says, “How firm a foundation, ye saints of the LORD, is laid for your faith in His excellent word!”

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Great, a dry book about a dry subject: doctrine. We want to laugh, to dance, to pass the time and get relief from our problems. We want to be entertained. But God meant our lives to be a hugely satisfying adventure, not just an existence ... to be the overcomers, not the overcome. If knowing more about a stupid cell phone can unlock riches unknown, what do you think knowing more about Almighty God might do? Are we living to die, or dying to live?

→set up  
**HEY: WHY BOTHER?**  
is ignorance really bliss?

Christianity seems to have become a professional sport. We hire a church staff to act like Christians all through the week so the rest of us can go about our business. We buy tickets for those highly scripted Sunday events by dropping money in a collection plate that passes through the crowd, and we then sit back and evaluate how well our team is doing. The pastor is showing marked improvement, the worship leader's still struggling, while the Sunday school teacher? Let's just say they're not keeping us *entertained*. We think of trying that other church on the corner. They serve soy milk lattes in the sanctuary.

Apparently, we Christians are judged solely by occasional church attendance and maybe not even that. We're no longer expected to know what we believe and why. We're not even sure what God expects of us anymore, we're so busy telling God what *we* expect. We said a sincere prayer when we were in high school, and we were told our ticket was punched. We were good to go, yet we still have the feeling we're missing something. Sunday mornings, we drive past people reading morning newspapers at the coffee shop and we wonder what it would be like to dare to sip expensive hot drinks in tee shirts and sunglasses at an outside table

every Sunday instead of having to show up and evaluate the church staff.

We think we oughta be happy and successful because, after all, God's reputation is on the line and we don't want Him to be embarrassed. We're nagged by the suspicion that we fall woefully short of pleasing Him, so we double our efforts to produce lives that look OK on the outside. We're supposed to be doing and believing something or other, but it's complicated and confusing. We can't even agree on Bible translations: forget being salt and light. We've just sorta checked out.

What? You have a question about Christianity? Sorry, no clue. Ask my pastor, we pay him to know that kind of stuff...

We talk about movies, we talk about sports, we talk about the weather, we talk about restaurants and cars and clothes. My friend and former pastor Ron Ferguson rephrased a Chesterton axiom when he said, "Everything matters except what *matters*." We want to think of ourselves as deep, but our conversations take us no further than the shallow end of the conversation pool. But each of us, deep down inside, want to talk about, and be about, the things that really *do* matter.

Everybody's got an opinion, and thanks to social media, everybody can benefit from knowing what ours are. It's a great time to be alive because apparently nobody's opinions are wrong. Unless your opinions should happen to come from the Bible. Then those most certainly are wrong: bigoted, out of date, intolerant and horrifically, embarrassingly wrong! If you think that's an overstatement, try this: Stand up and declare, "God hates divorce!" Or maybe, "Ten percent is only a minimum suggested beginning amount of money for giving!" Or the ever popular, "If you follow Jesus, expect your life to be really hard!" These are some of God's opinions. There're bunches more where those came from. Don't like 'em? Then I guess you can go make your own time/space continuum any way *you* like! But we'd better at least know what his opinions *are*, don't you think?

This book is about God's opinions revealed in Scripture. What does God think about stuff? What's he revealed in the Bible? These revelations are the stuff of Christian doctrine. Do we even know these things anymore?

Doctrine has been relegated to the domain of theologians and it should never have been. It's the coin of the realm of the Kingdom of God and thus ought to be the birthright of every one of his children. Ignorance of doctrine frustrates our desire to mature and produce the fruit of an effective and victorious life. I mean, come on. Are we scared to have our own beliefs challenged by the Scriptures? Maybe we should be! Maybe we might have to alter or ditch some of them!

Doctrine attempts to tackle questions about which we ought to be curious. Charles Spurgeon said doctrine answers such questions as: why do we exist? How can we know anything? How much can we know? Who is God? What's wrong with the world? How is God going to fix it? How do we reconnect with Life? Is God just?

What does God expect of us? What's the key to belonging to His family?

Doctrine is like a swimming pool: it takes the “deep things of God” and puts them in a handy, comprehensible box—a tub where we can touch the bottom and the sides and not feel like we're in over our heads. As fun as the ocean is, have you noticed people would rather actually *swim* in a swimming pool? No one wants to be helicopter-dropped in the middle of the vast bottomless ocean. Doctrine provides a safer way to come into the always overwhelming world of God's thoughts and actions, helping us systematize His revelation so we can better know what He's like and what He expects of us.

Doctrine is the theological equivalent of a “fixed point.” Surveyors and astronomers sometimes designate a fixed point as a stationary observational position from which to begin to map the landscape or the constellations. A benchmark. A null point. A point of reference. An unmoving belief system platform from which to judge the veracity of the ideas flying all around us.

Doctrine is a storage place for concepts about God. When you have to organize a large room full of stuff, it's helpful to have shelves with labels. We can take one of God's revealed truths and roughly categorize it by placing it on a shelf with other revealed truths like it. It will be there when we need it.

Doctrine provides context for the vocabulary we come across in the Bible, guarding us from gross error. Sharing a vocabulary is not enough unless we also share a dictionary. In the dictionary, “fast” means both rapid and stationary. “Bark” is either something you can touch or something you can hear. And “bad” can mean defective, unpleasant, decayed, diseased, guilty, worthless, immoral or even surpassingly good. The point is, words without *context* can often give the opposite idea of what was intended.

Doctrine decodes the messages that bombard our senses. If you don't know the code, the colors of the traffic lights mean nothing. If you come up to a light with 5 lights in a circle (pink, orange, blue, magenta, and purple), what will you do if the magenta light is on? Stop? Go? Wait? Freak out? The point is, we need the code.

The doctrines in this book are generally ones about which most Christians *agree*. My bias is conservative evangelical with a touch of liturgical charismatic flavoring. I've tried to compensate, but you'll have to adjust your screen for that slight skew! Any book written by human beings will fall short, and this one certainly does. The reason I wrote it is because the church is constantly tossed about by changing tides of societal pressures. Doctrine can serve as an anchor to keep us from drifting.

Jesus said, ***“You know these things; you're blessed if you DO them.”*** It's crucial that we *do* whatever we know to do; yet we must “know” first before we can then “do!” May this book help us celebrate the commonwealth of the wisdom and the knowledge and the love that is found in Jesus Christ, and in Him alone.

If you could experience a life without any truth, what do you imagine it would be like? Obviously at that point, everything you believed would be of no value whatsoever. Nothing would be reliable. Everything, and I mean everything, would simply be a cheat and a fraud. Maybe we under-appreciate the vital role of truth in our lives. It's kind of like oxygen: we don't think about it, but we sure do miss it when it's not there!

## →chapter one

# TRUTH: THE UNDERLYING REALITY

listen: can I tell you a secret?

“THE SECRET THINGS BELONG TO THE LORD OUR GOD, BUT THE THINGS REVEALED BELONG TO US.”

DEUTERONOMY 29:29

Everyone loves a secret. Everyone loves to *blab* a secret. Everyone loves to *hear* a secret blabbed. Well! God's been blabbing a ton of secrets. He calls it *revelation* truth. Is there any conceivable reason that we might not listen?

Luke 8:10 says, “*The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you.*” This is stupendous stuff. This is Indiana Jones, Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus magnitude. Secrets of the Kingdom? Given? To us? Is that a past-tense verb Jesus uses? You'd better believe it, pal. It's no small matter. Will we pay

attention to this gift? Will we leave this gift under the tree? Will we chase after lesser gifts and ignore this one?

For good reason, we honor truth above all things. Even when it's painful, we want the truth. We adjure our court witnesses to stick to it. We expect our philosophers to seek it. We want our songwriters to explore it. We demand our children tell it. We hate lies and liars more than we hate anything.

Truth destroys lies as light destroys darkness. Truth battles destructive heresy as Lysol disinfects toilet bowls. Truth fills up our lives the way good, hot, honest food satiates a hungry man. Truth connects with us in our deepest place, reminding us of what we already suspected but perhaps hadn't yet come to realize. Truth is like cool water to our thirsty souls. Truth is the most solid, satisfying thing we know. So why would we settle for anything less than the absolute truth?

I don't know. You tell me!

## • EVIDENCE

how many blatant, barefaced signposts do we require?

“WISDOM CALLS ALOUD IN THE STREET, SHE RAISES HER VOICE IN THE PUBLIC SQUARES; AT THE HEAD OF THE NOISY STREETS SHE CRIES OUT, IN THE GATEWAYS OF THE CITY SHE MAKES HER SPEECH: HOW LONG WILL YOU SIMPLE ONES LOVE YOUR SIMPLE WAYS? HOW LONG WILL MOCKERS DELIGHT IN MOCKERY AND FOOLS HATE KNOWLEDGE?”

PROVERBS 1:20-22

If our senses are working at all, we know there's a God. We know He's powerful and masterful. We know He's vast in His imagination and creativity. We know that He's beyond our ability to figure out. We know that He's purposeful and unstoppable in whatever He decides to do. All this just by standing still and experiencing our surroundings. All this without ever cracking open a Bible. God definitely wants us to know a lot about Him.

We of the western world have a procedural custom that comes from Greek and Jewish culture by way of the Roman Empire. We try to lay aside our feelings and emotions and attempt to be rational about things. To *think* rather than react based on hormones or outside stimuli. We place an emphasis on our determination to gather the facts, and based on our assessment of the veracity of those facts and their claims, to act accordingly. Modern science was formulated by Western civilization.

In this light, the “if it feels good, do it” motto of the 60s in America is a vile regression from Western thought, so much so that the generation that subscribed to that empty philosophy have become bankrupt, both rationally and morally. Sadly, it is these 60s people in our time who are in elected office and Hollywood, steering the culture with disastrous results—perhaps unintended, perhaps not. Still, who cares what they intend if the result is the same?

Naturalism, gnosticism, animism, legalism, dualism, materialism, multiculturalism, secular humanism, and new-age demonic spirit-guides are more often the norm than we might want to think. These are irrational beliefs. To buy into them, a person must push away the witness of creation, their own conscience, their mind, the Bible and the Holy Spirit. The worst kind of deception is self-deception, but I think in the case of our relationship to God’s truth, it’s the only kind of deception the devil ever needs, because it works so well.

Into this tangle of wrong thinking comes the witness of *evidence*, obvious clues left everywhere. All around, in every language of sensory experience, we get a billboard of truth that calls us to the right road. In the end, no one will be able to say they never knew that God is who He says He is, nor can they credibly claim that their search for truth yielded no answers. When we stand before God, ignorance is one excuse that just won’t wash.

Evidence ought to be something that changes the way we think. Perhaps it won’t change the way we feel, but it definitely should affect our mindset. If I know my business associates are cheating scumbags, I may still like them and want to stay friends, but it’s unlikely I’ll loan them money. When evidence is produced it ought to redirect any decision-making process. Evidence influences. Evidence shapes. Evidence persuades. Evidence convicts.

Evidence does not leave us where it found us. It calls us to a make a choice. It demands an assessment of our present course. We sidestep evidence at great cost. God has left us scads of evidence about Himself. What will we do now that we know what we know? There are four possibilities: *ignore* the evidence, *contest* the evidence, merely *assent* to the intellectual veracity of the evidence, or *act* upon the evidence.

Ready? Choose.

## 1 meaning

does it make sense that anything makes sense?

“WHAT MAY BE KNOWN ABOUT GOD IS PLAIN TO THEM, BECAUSE GOD HAS MADE IT PLAIN TO THEM.”

ROMANS 1:19

God’s not playing hide and seek with us. If we can’t see Him, it’s because we refuse to look. Perhaps our observational abilities have been seared like a steak on a sizzling grill. We persist in rationalizing our wrong behavior, and the warning signals of God’s truth no longer reach us as easily as they used to. It’s as if we’re calmly resting our hands on a hot stove because our pain response has been deadened. But the truth remains. Everyone knows the truth. Truth is plain as the nose on your face. God is for real, God is in charge. God makes the rules not us. We turn our backs on Him at our own peril.

Meaning must exist, or else we’d have no idea that it didn’t! Do you get that? I’m not sure I do, but it’s true. Meaning is what we call *self-evident*.

Let me try again. Meaning must exist before someone could possibly posit that it doesn’t. Meaning must be real, because if it weren’t, we’d never know that it might not be. I mean, plug in your own explanation here and see what YOU get. Hah! It’s not so EASY, is it? Even the attempt to talk about meaninglessness is difficult to accomplish in a meaningful way!

I know Solomon said *everything* was meaningless, but he wasn’t sawing off the rational branch he was standing on. When he spoke of “meaning,” he was using the word as a synonym for “purposefulness.” It couldn’t be otherwise. How could Solomon possibly bemoan the lack of something that wasn’t bemoan-able due to it’s not being there? This is getting so weird. Even here, there is a clue to the truth.

To even *say* that everything is meaningless proves the reality that everything does in fact have meaning. As Jon Foreman of the band Switchfoot says, “*The shadow proves the sunshine*.” Meaninglessness is not the problem. It’s not possible for life to be meaningless, because if it were, we would be unable to wonder if it were.

So we have positive proof of the existence of meaning. What does this tell us? Meaning is not accidental, nor is it evolving. Meaning can only be recognized by sentient, conscious, aware beings, so it must proceed from a sentient, conscious, and aware Being. Don’t read too much into this. We aren’t yet even close to the God of the Bible or His goodness or creativity or power or love. We’ve only said this: our ability to wonder about meaning is a solid fact of the existence of Someone from whom meaning itself emanates.

This is such a telling fact that agnostics either have to ignore it or fall on their knees. To an agnostic or a neo-Darwinist, meaning is a pink elephant in the room. Once we admit that life has meaning, we must admit that there is a bigger Someone of some sort if we want to keep a shred of our intellectual viability. And if one admits to the existence of meaning, there's a tiger loose in the house. There's no telling what's going to happen now.

God might be good, might be maniacal, might be loving, might be sadistic, might be compassionate or might be out for only Himself. But you can't say that He doesn't exist and call yourself perceptive. Can you?

The existence of meaning lets us in on a secret: there's more to the universe than just what we can see or what we can observe in a petri dish or describe with a thermometer or a telescope. There is something alongside us in this universe that enriches things with significance and consequence. There's a *point* to life, whatever that point is. And the question of what is the ultimate point of the universe haunts us deep inside our soul.

Meaning just *IS*. It exists with no help from any of us. And, my friends, it absolutely must *originate* from Someone who *IS*.

## 2 mind

are you aware that you're self-aware?

“WHO ENDOWED THE HEART WITH WISDOM OR GAVE UNDERSTANDING TO THE MIND?”

JOB 38:36

Scientists cannot produce a brain.

Oh sure, they can make a computer circuit that will produce calculations based on an algorithmic program and bake it into a silicon chip. No emotions, no morality, no memory of joy and laughter. No sense of *self*. No longing, no regret. In the future, we will continue to produce toys that look and act deceptively more like ourselves, but bear in mind, *deceptive* is the operative word.

Our brains are just a collection of fat cells with connective pathways. How in the world did Someone make that into a mind, into a soul? Do we understand the implication of “mind”? Look at me. I asked you a question.

The fact that we *have* a mind points to the inescapable conclusion that we *came from* a Mind. Mind does not come from mindlessness. Our mind comes from THE

Mind. Descartes said, “*Cogito ergo sum*.” Since we're all Latin scholars, I don't really need to translate that, but I'll do it anyway just to show that I can use Google: “I think, therefore I am.” Sure, thinking proves we exist, but it also proves that THE BIG THINKER exists. Beyond “I think therefore I am” is this inescapable proposal: “We think . . . therefore *God* is.”

We would not be able to think unless God exists. Dr. Ravi Zacharias, the Christian apologist, was once asked by a student during a Q&A: “Do I exist?” To which the good doctor replied, “Whom shall I say is asking?” Love it.

Can we wonder if mind exists? Then, ergo and ipso facto, it does. And equally ipso facto, eons of mindless evolution of fatty tissue does not account for the existence of mind. Mind comes from mind. It's not mindless nor is it accidental. The presence of our mind reveals the presence of God's mind. I'm belaboring this point because it is routinely overlooked in our world. The smartest people can (and standardly *do*) miss this pedestrian and glaring reality. So I don't apologize for belaboring it.

The mind has the distinction of being the only body part Jesus ever added into a quotation of Old Testament scripture! In the Shema, Moses says in Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5, “**Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength.**” In explaining the most important commandment, Jesus said, “**Love the LORD with all your heart, all your soul, all your MIND, and all your strength.**” We are obviously to go all out in our love and service to God, but *why on earth would Jesus add the word “mind” here?*

First, I honestly don't know. Second, I'm fairly sure it wasn't because Moses didn't hear correctly the first time. My guess is that Jesus was speaking to a Western culture that valued mind in a way unprecedented in civilizations to this point. After all, both the Greeks and Romans were slowly overrunning the land of Israel.

We in America have deep roots in Israel, Greece and Rome. Western civilization and the Enlightenment have elevated rationality to a new level. We are to apply not only our hearts, our souls and our bodies to loving and serving God, but also our *minds*.

Make of that what you will. Our minds are perhaps the most amazing creation of our Amazing Creator. For those of you (like Charles Darwin) who prefer that the *eye* should be the most miraculous body part God made, I won't argue, but the mind is right up there. Our present day supercomputers are poor mockeries of something God made in a nanosecond on the sixth day of His creation. Watery protoplasm that houses personality, memory, cognitive ability, learning, reasoning, awareness, recognition, input processing, language management . . . the list is endless. And don't forget the mind's ability to appreciate beauty, create poems and paintings, impose itself over our sense of self-preservation, and laugh at jokes.

Our minds mimic the Great Mind that fashioned them.

### 3 causality

does a universe just happen by accident? really?

“WHEN I ACT, WHO CAN REVERSE IT?”

ISAIAH 43:13B

God is the First Cause. He's where everything originates. Even evil does not exist on it's own; there's no balanced yin yang in the universe. Evil is the result of God's gift of free will gone sour. Evil is a product of the Creator giving creatures permission to make decisions outside of His own will and purpose. There isn't anything that God did not ultimately cause. His actions are the initial determinant power fed into the closed system He instigated.

He started all of this. All of it.

Sometimes truth is discovered through the application of logic. If I see a man in a suit carrying a briefcase riding a transit to the city, I can logically deduce he is a businessman instead of a farmer. This deduction is based on assumptions and conclusions I can draw in my mind. Or since I know that a car was designed and manufactured, not the result of random sun rays bouncing off inanimate materials accidentally leached into a pool of water, I can assert that human beings of greater complexity and functionality than a car have been designed and manufactured. They have a Cause. Simple enough. This is not rocket science.

If I see a room with shelves of ordered books, arranged furniture, and plugged-in light fixtures, I don't think, “Wow, what a coincidence. It must have been star beams!” Similarly, if I see a universe with discoverable scientific principles, I see a system that must have a Principle Establisher. If I see a universe with ordered orbits I must conclude that it was put in place by an Orbit Designer who prefers certain orbits and can bring them about and maintain them. If I discover that there are personalities in people that I meet, I arrive at the deduction that a Personality is at work in the universe. If I see beauty in the world around me, there must exist a Lover of Beauty who caused it and triggered the appreciation of it in me.

It is in fact *illogical* to not believe there is a God. It's embarrassing how many legitimate lines of reasoning must be disregarded to do so. There are smart atheists like Christopher Hitchens (now dead) and clever atheists like Richard Dawkins (who will someday die), but there are no wise atheists. Psalms 14:1 explains why: *“The fool has said in his heart, ‘No God for me.’”*

Someone calculated that the last time a single person could know all of what can be known was sometime around 1850. Even if an atheist were to know nine-tenths of everything there is to know in all the world, that little one-tenth they did not know should give even an atheist pause before pronouncing that God is fictional. Frankly, we don't even need a tenth of all knowledge to catch the aroma of God's presence. Just watch ants go about their daily business. Now *there's* a sermon! Even old Solomon was impressed with them in Proverbs 6:6.

The thing is, every event has a cause. As the brilliant philosopher Julie Andrews sang in *The Sound of Music*, “Nothing comes from nothing: nothing ever could.” Causality is only logical. That's why it amazes me when evolutionists and big bang believers say that Christians are backward rubes! Come on! How clueless do you have to be to ignore the inviolable law of causality? You might be clever, but you can't possibly be *smart*.

If the principle of causality holds, then there are many corollaries. Causality requires a First Cause, we call him God. Causality requires a First Cause full of purpose and design, since what He caused is full of purpose and design. Causality requires a First Cause who is concerned about us, since He fashioned a planet with the perfect size, temperature, composition, and everything needed to support life. And causality requires a First Cause who is willing to reveal Himself to us, which is what science attempts to accomplish: map the fingerprints of the First Cause.

The logic of causality, when applied, should comfort us in ways biblical theology might not even be able to do!

### 4 conscience

that tiny angel hovering over your shoulder

“WHEN GENTILES, WHO DO NOT HAVE THE LAW, DO BY NATURE THINGS REQUIRED BY THE LAW, THEY ARE A LAW FOR THEMSELVES, EVEN THOUGH THEY DO NOT HAVE THE LAW, SINCE THEY SHOW THAT THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE LAW ARE WRITTEN ON THEIR HEARTS; THEIR CONSCIENCES ALSO BEARING WITNESS, AND THEIR THOUGHTS NOW ACCUSING, NOW EVEN DEFENDING THEM.”

ROMANS 2:14-15

In this passage, Paul instructs the Christians in Rome that no one can credibly claim, “Nobody told me! I never knew how God expected me to behave! I'm off the hook because no one ever read me the rules!” Bah-lony! The fact is, we *all* know what's right and wrong. Jew and Gentile. Ancient and Modern. Eastern and Western. Educated and Ignorant. God's rules are written on our hearts.

That's inarguably true and we know it. Case closed.

If we think about it, we didn't really even need the Ten Commandments, since they're already part and parcel of our very nature. Who doesn't already agree with the Ten Commandments? Respect authority? Check. Hands off what belongs to others? Check. Do the right thing? Check. This is stuff we all reinforce with our kids, but no one really needs to be taught. We know these laws without being told. We call this phenomena *conscience*. Like noses, everybody (and every body) has one.

Conscience comes as software preinstalled on our hard drive. It automatically loads when our computers boot. No one has to tell us it's wrong to steal. No one argues that lying is a virtue. While people may disagree about when it's alright to fight, nobody values a coward or a thug.

Conscience is not, as the Darwinists would have us believe, an evolved instinct to preserve the species, since quite often what our consciences tell us to do might short-circuit our chances of survival.

Conscience is uncomfortable, since most of what we *feel* like doing is frowned upon by our conscience. Conscience is inconvenient. Inescapable. Bothersome. Cold water. Conscience is the goody-two-shoes party-pooper you wish you'd left behind. We just want it to shut up.

Have you ever seen the cartoons where a tiny angel sits on one shoulder and a tiny devil on the other? Often, the angel and the devil look exactly like the character on whose shoulder they appear, and they argue with each other. The angel is our conscience, the devil is our own will. Hence the idiom "our better angels," coined by Abe Lincoln. The conscience is a built-in gyroscope that keeps us flying right.

Should we break in line? Should we help old ladies? Should we kick cats? Should we tell the truth? Should we dump our garbage in someone else's yard? Should we encourage people to break their promises? Should we laugh at the sufferings of others? Should we flaunt authority? Are these questions hard? Of course not. We all have consciences and we don't have to get out life's rulebook and look up the answers to these questions.

Right and wrong is easy. Not at all easy to *do*, but easy as pie to figure out!

In the Garden of Eden, God declared that after eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve were now like Him in the sense of knowing right and wrong. Knowing right and wrong is part of the "fruit," if you will, of The Fall. We now have the *responsibility* of making right choices, and guess what? We don't. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Nobody chooses right. It's not that we're ignorant, it's that we're *rebellious*. Our consciences should protect us from our boneheaded decisions, but instead they only rag on us after we flame out and bomb in our behavior. If we don't know the Mosaic Laws, it doesn't

let us off the hook for our sins, because God's laws are part of our inner code—in our consciences. We know right. We do wrong.

Tabula Rasa is a lie; there's no such thing as being born with a clean slate. We don't reach the age of one without ignoring our conscience about something. "Warped" comes as close as anything to describing our native state.

Sorry, I guess. Especially if you're a humanist! Get a better cosmology, pal.

## 5 witness of creation

*ever been overwhelmed by the wonder of the world?*

**"THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD; THE SKIES PROCLAIM THE WORK OF HIS HANDS. DAY AFTER DAY THEY POUR FORTH SPEECH; NIGHT AFTER NIGHT THEY DISPLAY KNOWLEDGE. THERE IS NO SPEECH OR LANGUAGE WHERE THEIR VOICE IS NOT HEARD. THEIR VOICE GOES OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD."**

PSALMS 19:1-4

Creation just *preaches*. Wherever you look, everything that has been fashioned by the hand of God declares the glory of it's Maker and Master. Ever studied how our eyes process light and distance and movement? How they recognize familiar features? How they focus near and far without conscious effort on our part? How the stereo imaging they're capable of keeps us from ricocheting off walls? Even the spiritually confused Charles Darwin looked at the eye and saw a major problem with proposing an accidental solution to the problem of the origin of species. And the eye is easy. Don't get me started on how our throats know to send air to the lungs but food to the stomach as they come down the same chute.

In many ways, we're at a disadvantage in our age of computer screens, movie screens, TV screens and hand-held-device screens. Why would I say that? *Because we spend our time in front of secondhand information.* Much of what reaches our perception is already hearsay. We don't smell the strong aroma of wet dirt, don't see the distant grey blue of the hills, don't hear the brave song of the house wren, don't marvel at the myriad starry points of fierce light in the night sky. We're cut off from creation which sings a continual song of it's Creator.

There's no surer way of feeling like big stuff than frying a planet-load of virtual space aliens with a joy stick and a down-arrow key. And there's no better way to get a real read on how small and fragile we are than to sit on your back porch and watch a thunderstorm sweep in over the neighborhood. We need to get away from a backlit screen and sit quietly watching a backlit sky.

Naturalism is the belief that there is no Creator, that this nebulous force/concept of “nature” produced the cosmos and everything in it by accidentally using just the laws of science. The naturalist is widely respected in our society, so much so that to gainsay a naturalist means that you must be anti-science! Don’t get me started on that one. So which will it be, believe your own lyin’ eyes that tell you the universe was created by God, or the textbook in which the naturalist explains that everything came about naturally by mere natural accidents in an infinite natural universe? Careful. You don’t want to be called anti-science, do you?

We place a ton of confidence in scientific truth in our society, which is fine up to a point, but then we badly misplace that same confidence in the scientists themselves. When a scientist claims the Bible can’t be true because of something they discovered, before we do anything else, we should consider the possibility that the scientist is wrong. After all, a scientist is a human being with grant money to apply for, a party line to toe, an agenda to defend and a distinct bias brought on by long study in atheistic higher education. And the Bible? Well . . . it’s *the Bible*.

Take evolution: an example of a scientific theory. Where’s the data set? What are the assumptions necessary to fill in that data set? What is the rationale for making those assumptions? Is the theory of evolution proven? Is it even provable? What would it take to prove it? Can it be replicated? Falsified? Can it accurately predict a future event? Is evolution science or is it philosophy?

There’s a tendency in our society to categorize the Bible as faith and to categorize scientific theory as fact. The reality is quite the opposite. We can more reliably count on the findings of the Bible than on the theories of macroevolution, man made global warming or cooling, alchemy, phlogiston, spontaneous generation, the four humors, vitalism and atomic particles known as gluons. In case you missed some of those things, they used to be the “facts” of science. They really did.

If a space alien experienced both witch doctors and naturalistic scientists, they might conclude that there’s no *practical* difference. Both receive blind acceptance by their respective hangers-on and both achieve their “results” in ways none of the rest of us can follow. Naturalistic scientists don’t deserve more (or less) respect than any other profession deserves. As sentient beings, we ought to apply our own tests as we assess the witness of the universe around us. Creation preaches to us in plain and inarguable sermons of the greatness and glory of God.

Watery tissue inside our skulls can receive stereoscopic sensory input from sounds, light and smells, process those signals, and determine such things as how good supper will be, whether or not a camera will require a flash, and how close an oncoming wall is to our face. Other tissue within our skulls can control the production of cells in our bodies, tell our teeth when to chew and when to open for certain vowel sounds while singing, cause our heart valve muscles to involuntarily pump blood through our bodies, and get our lungs to hold our breath behind a smelly tractor trailer on the highway. Still other tissues within our skulls can help

us balance when we’re standing up, understand abstract concepts like calculus and maps, and not only think something’s humorous but instruct the abdominal walls of the trunk of our bodies to contract rhythmically in laughter. Tissue inside our skulls can remember, imagine, love, and solve complex problems. We’ve just begun to describe some of the phenomenal things skull tissue does, and yet, if you separate the skull tissue from what we simplistically call life, none of the functions can continue. Our Creator somehow animates the tissues in our skulls to do all these spectacular things. Skull tissue does skull-tissue-bending things.

We get so excited when our cell phone can react half intelligently to a clear vocal command. Did the cell phone get this ability from sun rays? From rocks in hot water? From exploding gas over eons of time? No? *Then why think skull tissue did?*

Creation screams, “God made me! I am purposeful, beautiful and meaningful! I have the signature of my Maker! Pay attention and give the Creator great praise!” Creation makes a fool of a naturalist without really trying.

## 6 natural law

### why does everyone seem to know certain things?

**“FOR SINCE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD, GOD’S INVISIBLE QUALITIES: HIS ETERNAL POWER AND DIVINE NATURE, HAVE BEEN CLEARLY SEEN, BEING UNDERSTOOD FROM WHAT HAS BEEN MADE, SO THAT MEN ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE.”**

ROMANS 1:20

“Natural law” is not the law that governs nature, but *the laws mankind naturally ought to know and obey*. The dictionary defines natural law this way: a body of unchanging moral principles regarded as a basis for all human conduct. The Constitution of the United States plainly invokes “the laws of nature and of nature’s God” as justification for the action taken by the British colonies in the Revolutionary War. There were no *national* laws that applied to a collection of colonies rejecting the rule of a mother country. Therefore, the writers of the Constitution appealed to a *universal* law acknowledged by all of mankind: natural law that comes from God.

As a corollary, those that blather on about “separation of church and state” must not realize that there would be no “state” if the framers did not appeal to natural law which proceeds from God Himself as the trump card over all other law. Natural law is the only universally recognized morality.

Natural law is self-evident and produces such “self-evident” truths as this: all men are created equal. By the very nature of our making, we are all God’s creatures, equal in His sight and equally protected and constrained by the laws of nature and nature’s God. The Constitution goes on to say that each of God’s created people are

endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are rights that are immoral for a society to deny its citizens. A contract (such as citizenship) can abridge natural law and a person can sign away their commonwealth rights for a consideration, but this is not natural law. The new contract may circumscribe a new set of agreed behaviors, but these would not be *rights* under natural law, rights that are self-evident, rights that come straight from God. Rights not found under natural law include welfare, healthcare, gay marriage, abortion, a minimum wage, the Great Society and so on. These are the constructs of people determining how they will co-exist, not natural law.

The interesting thing about natural law is that people acknowledge it who do not live by it. When people are caught stealing, they never say it's okay to steal; they always explain why their particular case is the *exception*. They do not challenge natural law; instead, they rationalize why, in this special case, natural law does not apply. That in itself is a tacit admission of the jurisdiction and universality of the intrinsic morality of natural law.

No one taught societies this morality. It's understood, self-evident, inarguable. Oddly, these laws, while universally acknowledged, aren't universally *followed*. This is a fascinating conundrum. We all know what to do, whether or not we in fact do it. Cultures from around the world and throughout time have valued the same virtues and frowned upon the same transgressions. It's as if our individual consciences extended into society around us.

That's why Madeline Murray O'Hare in the 1960s was so successful in her diabolical takedown of prayer and the Ten Commandments in public: America was tired of being reminded that we do not abide by God's natural law. We now have people scream, "Separation of church and state!" when what they are really saying is, "God can't tell *ME* what to do, only the government!" But we can't just brush God off or make Him go away. He's a little too large. A little too in charge.

Here's the truth: everybody knows God has *lawful demands* of our behavior. Natural law is the universal morality that every society in every age has intrinsically known to be in force: marriage between man and woman, protection of the young, rights of private property, the right of standing before one's accuser to refute the accusation, honoring the elderly, telling the truth, not taking innocent life, doing what you say you'll do, being willing to fight to protect your family and your neighbors and your country from enemies, and so forth. There has not been a healthy and intrinsically good society where precepts such as these were not held virtuous and naturally expected of all people in that society.

Natural law proves the existence and goodness of The Natural Lawgiver.

## 7 miracles

doesn't God know He can't violate laws of science?

**“JESUS DID MANY OTHER MIRACULOUS SIGNS . . . WHICH ARE NOT RECORDED IN THIS BOOK. BUT THESE ARE WRITTEN 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 20:30-31

Jesus did miracles for a specific reason—so that a stubborn and stiff-necked people would know that *He is God*. Brokenness to wholeness. Water to wine. Sickness to health. Tormented to sane. Tempest to mirror calm. Lunchbox to banquet.

I've heard it said that the reason primitive people believe in miracles is because they don't understand science like we do today. Just stop it! There's never been anyone who thinks you can be born of a virgin. Nobody has ever thought you could step on the surface of a lake and walk unless it's frozen. And nobody has ever believed that it's natural to rise from the dead and be able to walk through walls and travel at the speed of thought.

But there *are* people all around us who sincerely believe that the universe came about from exploding hydrogen gas and life arose from rocks in hot water over time! These are the people who don't understand science! These are the people who believe in the wildly miraculous while mocking others for doing so. "Primitive" people would find them extremely amusing.

Some people can hear the gospel and just believe. Others want God to perform a miracle before they'll listen. A miracle is NOT a natural process we don't yet understand. *It's a contradiction to a natural process we know very well*. It's not a miracle for a match to light, or for a plane to fly, as amazing as those are. But it *would* be a miracle for a brilliant shining star to remain in place over a stable in Bethlehem Ephrathah and guide three wealthy and wise amateur astronomers from Arabia to the birthplace of a Baby who turns out to be the King of kings.

We can't chalk up the miracles in the Bible as being mass delusions or misunderstandings of ordinary processes we understand today. The Bible describes events that no one in their right mind would claim or believe ... unless they actually happened ... which they did!

Enoch really *did* go straight to heaven without dying. Noah really *did* survive the destruction of the antediluvian world in a wooden boat God told him how to build. The Red Sea really *did* part to let the Israelites walk through on dry ground and came back together to drown the Egyptian army. The walls of Jericho really *did* fall. Joshua really *did* stop the sun in the sky. The Assyrian king Sennacherib really *did* attack Jerusalem and woke up to find 185,000 of his soldiers had died in their sleep.

Elijah really *did* stop the rain for three years and really *did* call fire down from heaven. Isaiah and Ezekiel really *did* see God on His heavenly throne and angels covered with eyes and flying with gyroscopes.

The disciples really *did* watch Jesus heal crowds of sick, blind, crippled and demon-possessed people and raise Lazarus to life after three days of being dead and decaying in a tomb. They also talked and touched Jesus for 40 days after they saw Him dead and buried—neither ghost nor zombie—but so full of life that He rose up to heaven one day as they were watching Him. Miraculous indeed! It doesn't matter how much you know or don't know, miracles still happen.

God is in the miracle business. It's nothing for Him to make time go forwards or backwards, to cause damaged cells to be repaired in the blink of an eye or for the stars of heaven to flame out and fall to earth. God works miracles with both His hands tied behind His back.

Miracles insult and invade our complacent and cynical sensibility. They bear unmistakable witness to our miracle-working God who made the inviolable rules of the universe and then, at His whim and fancy, stomps gloriously all over them.

Speaking of miracles, have you heard of the Scriptures?

## • THE SCRIPTURES

where do we find truth in black and white?

“THEN WE WILL NO LONGER BE INFANTS, TOSSED BACK AND FORTH BY THE WAVES, AND BLOWN HERE AND THERE BY EVERY WIND OF TEACHING AND BY THE CUNNING AND CRAFTINESS OF MEN IN THEIR DECEITFUL SCHEMING. INSTEAD . . . WE WILL IN ALL THINGS GROW UP INTO HIM WHO IS THE HEAD, THAT IS, CHRIST.”

EPHESIANS 4:14-15

There is truth that cannot be trumped. Transcendent truth. Ultimate truth. Unchanging, reliable, stable truth that doesn't bend and sway with the winds of passing fads. That truth is found in the Bible. What the Bible says is absolutely right for Adam, for Moses, for St. Peter, and for you and me. On the truth meter, the Bible not only pegs, it breaks the needle off and keeps going around.

Why do we say that the Bible is authoritative? Because Psalms 138:2 says, **“You have exalted above all things your Name and your Word.”** In John 10:35, Jesus proclaims: **“Scripture cannot be broken.”** Saying, *“It is written,”* Jesus quotes Scripture continually to crowds, to His disciples, and to the Scribes and Pharisees. He employs it to

triumph over the temptations of Satan. Jesus equips His own army with the Scriptures in Ephesians 6 by giving them **“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”** Jesus seems to think the Bible is uniquely, powerfully true.

Charles Spurgeon, that great preacher, said that the Bible is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion, just let him out and he'll defend himself. That's another way of saying that Bible truth is *self-validating, self-supporting, self-authenticating*. We recognize the truth when we hear it because truth reverberates deep inside. It has a familiar ring to it, even if we've never read it before. Biblical truth is indomitable, relentless, unstoppable.

For example, secular humanists tell us we're born as innocent as little lambs—that human beings are basically good. That's just not true. Not to be harsh but . . . *it's a lie*. The Bible, in marked contrast, says that we're all morally bankrupt from birth and that we came into this world ready to make our own rebellious choices. That's the unvarnished truth. Even if we may not want to believe it, the Bible turns on a light deep inside us, and the Holy Spirit verifies it as only He can. When we hear biblical truth, no one needs to tell us it's right. *We already know it's true*.

Hey! Question. If we don't rely on the Bible to provide truth, what's our next option? Trust our own brilliant intellect? Rely on someone else? Listen to the fantastically beautiful people who make ads and movies or the insanely cool singers who perform our favorite music? Believe the politicians? Our friends? Trees? Pets? Dice? Tea leaves? Horoscopes? Modern science? Ancient mystics? Where exactly would we look to find authority?

Truth is found in the Bible like it's found nowhere else. Second only to Jesus Himself in unveiling the glory of God, the Bible is an inspired source of wisdom and revelation truth unmatched in all the world around us. It's the best selling book of all time with no close second. It's the most translated, most quoted, most read, most influential, most beloved of all books ever read.

Why would that be if it's just another collection of stories? Why would our American system of jurisprudence be based on it? Why is our western culture saturated by it? Why are the walls of our buildings carved with it? Why would modern U.S. presidents want to be seen on camera carrying it into church? Why do preachers preach from it? Why do people take oaths while resting their hands on it? Why would people give their lives so that others could have it in their own language and read and believe it? Why would we quote and memorize and honor this book above all others? Why would God so miraculously preserve it for us?

Why indeed. Do we usually leave our birthday presents unopened?

## 1 apostles

### how big an army does it take to conquer the world?

“THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES’ TEACHING.”

ACTS 2:42A

Why would the early church “devote” themselves to what Peter and James and other apostles were saying? They must have been serious about the letters we find preserved in the New Testament. Didn’t those guys know that doctrinal study is only for salaried professional Christians? Wouldn’t their time have been better used producing after-school programs and feeding the hungry? And isn’t the word “devoted” a little heavy handed? We should check with the original Greek wording there. The translation surely has to be something more like “they intended to listen to the apostles’ teaching, but they found it was really hard with all the other things they had to do, and anyway that was the job of their pastor.” I’m not sure why Acts 2:42 is even in my Bible. *Just kidding!*

Actually, I’m not wondering at all. It’s there for a transparent purpose: we also should “devote” ourselves to the apostles’ teaching. Often in the Bible, the word devote connotes an irreversible giving over of a life as an act of worship. For us today, the apostles’ teachings are preserved in the New Testament scriptures. And the apostles continually quoted from the Old Testament. (Check the references in the center column or at the bottom of the page in your Bible!)

Think about what Jesus did: He sent us firsthand instructions through His apostles. Because Jesus selected, trained, and commissioned the apostles, it’s that very *apostolic authority* we look for in determining what is and what isn’t orthodox scripture. These apostles were men whose qualifications for office we’ll never know. The paperwork is missing, probably because they never actually applied for the job. The fact remains that they lived and ate and slept and laughed and cried with Jesus for all three years of His earthly ministry.

The eleven faithful apostles and the apostle Paul were dispersed throughout the nations to inaugurate the Great Commission, going into all the world and making disciples, baptizing in God’s name, and teaching obedience to everything Jesus said. Then according to eyewitness accounts, 10 of the original 12 plus the apostle Paul died horrible deaths in carrying out this calling. The book of Acts records the death of the apostle James—“put to the sword” by King Herod.

According to church tradition, the others were stabbed to death, hurled from the top of buildings, boiled in oil, beaten to death with clubs and whips, tortured and crucified. Not one of them recanted the gospel. Not one of them said, “Hold it. It’s not true. We just made it up. No sense in being *tortured* for a myth we invented! I take it all back. Remove me from your list of people who call themselves followers of Jesus of Nazareth.” No sir. Each one of them braved the worst that wicked men

could dish out with their firm conviction that Jesus is who He personally told them He was, who He continually demonstrated Himself to be; whose teachings *are* worth living for and in the case of the Apostles, worth dying for too.

The New Testament is a collection of books and letters, gathered into one volume. How did we know which books or letters had the divine mark on them? It boils down to a single question: Is the book unquestionably of apostolic origin? To be canonized, the early writings had to be authentically associated with an apostle somehow, some way. No book that was not clearly connected with one of Jesus’ disciples was considered for inclusion in the New Testament canon.

The instructions of the apostles are the teachings we call “doctrines,” and these doctrines are what give us the direction we need to grow and become increasingly more useful to Jesus for His Kingdom work. If it’s in the New Testament, we can confidently say that it’s in the teaching of *the apostles*, who learned it straight from Jesus. Even Paul who never met Jesus during His earthly ministry, still learned His doctrine by direct revelation from our Lord. Read Galatians 1:12. Nothing is supposition or hearsay. We learn what Jesus said from the people to whom Jesus spoke, and we learn what Jesus did from the people who were there and saw it happen.

This is pretty basic stuff, but I didn’t know it until recently. Oh, *you* did? Well if you’re so smart, which apostle wrote Hebrews? What’s the recipe for manna? What was Mrs. Noah’s first name?

So you don’t know *everything*. Your shoelace is untied.

## 2 doctrine

### what are the fundamentals of our faith in Christ?

“YOU MUST TEACH WHAT IS IN ACCORD WITH SOUND DOCTRINE.”

TITUS 2:1

First, *doctrine* is not just for theologians, although theologians use it constantly. They use it as shorthand to keep from having even longer conversations than they do already. They can simply say, “When you boil it down, it’s a kind of sovereignty/theophany thing,” and they know exactly what they’re talking about. “Covenant” is a doctrine they not only understand in English, but in Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic and Arabic. Still, doctrine is not the sole property of the scholarly.

For us, doctrine is not shorthand, but a kind of conversation starter. If you heard someone utter a phrase such as, “*That book has a quasi-millennial pneumatological supralapsarianist slant to it,*” you and I would want them to explain. We don’t use

doctrine as shorthand, but rather as a doorway into discussions about the things of God. We use it as a file folder in which to gather our ideas about who God is and how He works. (“That’s very *covenantal*.”) We use it as identification. (“I’m kind of *Arminian* on that one.”) And we use it to pick up very large ideas with a single word. (“We are a *fallen* people.”) Doctrinal study is not only useful in our conversation, it’s requisite for our spiritual growth. If you found someone who was using their computer for nothing more than to crack walnuts, you might tell them to read the manual a little more carefully.

Second, *doctrine is not denominational*, although denominations use it to beat each other up. Pre this, post that, sprinkle, dunk, wine, grape juice, transubstantiation, purgatory, baptism of the Holy Spirit, tongues, liturgy, freedom, instruments, no instruments, women in ministry, hats in the sanctuary—the church has argued doctrine through the ages, and as a result, we’re denominationalized to the max. Correct doctrine is important, with no caveat. But it should never be weaponized for use on Jesus’ family.

All of our denominations are fine if they’re no more than flavors of the one faith (Ephesians 4:5-6: **“One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all”**). But we should know better than to set ourselves up as the sole arbiters of doctrinal correctness. Paul said in Romans 14 that the stronger ones in the faith should not exercise their theological freedom in such a way as to hurt those who are weaker. In other words, our doctrine should never bind us. *We can be free within our own constricting doctrine*, and that freedom includes the liberty to give grace to other’s doctrine.

Third, doctrine is not esoteric, although esoterics—wait a minute, I’ve got no idea where I was going with that. Trying to make three points like a real preacher I guess. Never mind esoterics. We don’t care about them anyway. Just remember that doctrine is *not* the sole property of theologians or of any of our myriad denominations. Don Finto says, “No church has the ball.”

So that’s a little of what doctrine is NOT. Here’s what doctrine is. It’s a way to pick up large helpings of scriptural truth with a word or a few words. It’s a condensation of a lot of nuanced and complex information about God, just as a gallon of maple syrup comes from 50 gallons of maple sap. Doctrine is a doorknob: easily grasped, yet it opens the way to a much larger and mysterious reality behind the door. Doctrine is what every sermon and Sunday school lesson really ought to be about. Doctrine is the ABCs and the multiplication tables of Christianity. Doctrine is a security check on all ideas. Doctrine is a flashlight in a dark forest of seeming contradictions. Doctrine is a Sherpa guide through the high mountain passes of God’s thoughts.

So what about *sound* doctrine? Sound doctrine is doctrine that passes muster with the Holy Spirit. If I say God wants His people to drive fuel efficient cars, you can guess this is *not* coming from the Holy Spirit. What about if I say that it’s okay to

get drunk on Saturday nights as long as you’re safe in church Sunday morning? No sale? Good for you. If I say God has an undyingly unique love for His people the Jews and you say that’s sound doctrine, you’re right. What if I say we’ve got to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and reinstitute the sacrifices prescribed by Mosaic Law? I hope that you’d tell me this is lousy doctrine, since Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross cancels any need for further temple sacrifice. Now the redeemed children of God have become His dwelling place.

Sound doctrine is hard to define, like the flavor of a banana. But you know it when you run into it. It’s doctrine that has the stamp of God’s approval, witnessed in our hearts, testified by centuries of practice and teaching within the family of God. *We bring it to mind, and remind each other of it whenever we can*. For 2,000 years, the family of God has been reminding each other of the Trinity, the creation, The Fall, The Flood, the inspiration and revelation of Scripture, the Law of Moses and the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ, blood atonement, the cross and the empty tomb, the return of the King, and the renewal of all things—reminding each other of the gospel truth couched in sound doctrine.

Bypassing the serious study of doctrine is easy: just completely ignore your Bible!

### 3 scripture

#### why would God have this stuff written down?

**“NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO ESTABLISH YOU BY MY GOSPEL AND THE PROCLAMATION OF JESUS CHRIST, ACCORDING TO THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY HIDDEN FOR LONG AGES PAST, BUT NOW REVEALED AND MADE KNOWN THROUGH THE PROPHETIC WRITINGS . . .”**

ROMANS 16:25-26

The word Scripture means “the writings.” God spoke to people and they wrote it down. And ever since, God’s people have used the Scriptures when they talk truth with each other. Hey, the writers of the *New Testament* constantly, and I mean *constantly*, cite the *Old Testament*! The Apostle Paul loved it when people checked his preaching out with the Old Testament scriptures, as the Bereans did in Acts 17:11.

When Jesus announced the start of His ministry, He quoted from Isaiah where the writer prophesies, **“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me.”** In dialog with His opponents, Jesus used the Scriptures to baffle and antagonize as well as to pose thorny questions and provide thoughtful answers. The Pharisees and Sadducees wondered where He got His extensive knowledge of the Bible, not realizing that He had personally dictated the whole thing in the first place!

Can we take the Bible literally? Stop it. Yes, of course. But what about the metaphorical language? Oh, I see the problem: we think that metaphors are a misdirection, a fake-out. But the Bible uses metaphors as place holders for ideas too big for us to grasp. We metaphorically call Jesus the Good Shepherd. We don't mean He's a smelly man in a bathrobe who stays out all night with a herd of sheep. That kind of shepherd is an illustration of Jesus. But calling Jesus a shepherd doesn't imply He's NOT a shepherd either. The pictorial language stands for a reality that is *more* true, not less.

For instance, the fact that Genesis 1 uses metaphor doesn't mean it's merely a bedtime story, or, as some say, that evolution is the science while Genesis is the context. Good grief. Metaphors in the Bible are accurate descriptors of realities too big to fit into language. Did God *literally* create the earth. Yes! Did He *literally* do it in six days? Well, there's a reality beyond our understanding, but that doesn't invalidate the truth of six days, rather, it augments it. The use of metaphor does not signal a half truth in the Bible, but a truth on an even grander scale. Not sure I got that point across. You may have to ask God to explain this one—I tried!

We've all heard people say this stuff: "There are a million interpretations. You can make the Bible say anything you want. Some of the worst atrocities in history have been committed in the name of the Bible." Blah blah. Yada yada. Some just don't like biblical authority. But sincere people also say these things, so to them we have four replies.

One. There are many interpretations of Scripture, but the major doctrines aren't up for grabs. The Bible is the all-time champion of clarity because of the Holy Spirit helping the writers write and the readers read.

Two. You can't make the Bible say *anything you want* unless you're willing to be intellectually dishonest. The Bible *doesn't* say that human sexuality is evolving. It *doesn't* say that it's okay to kill unborn babies. It *doesn't* say that Christians are perfectly behaved. It *doesn't* say that God let's people into heaven if they're good. People accuse the Bible of saying stuff that it just doesn't. That's not the Bible's fault, is it?

Three. Atrocities are committed using whatever excuses people can grab, including the Bible. The wheel has enabled innumerable atrocities. Shall we get rid of the wheel?

Four. People who claim the Bible can't be clearly understood haven't approached it with a humble, teachable heart! We first ask the Holy Spirit to reveal truth. THEN we read.

Our Bible is traditionally subdivided like this. Genesis through Deuteronomy make up "**The Law**" or the Pentateuch, written by Moses. Joshua through Lamentations make up "**The Writings**" and include philosophy, poetry and history of the Jews.

Isaiah through Malachi make up "**The Prophets**" including both prophecy and history. Matthew through John make up "**The Gospels**" which present eyewitness accounts of Jesus' 33-year earthly ministry. "**The Acts of the Apostles**" is the authorized chronicle of the early church. Romans through Jude are "**The Epistles**" (which are NOT the wives of the Apostles), the letters of the apostolic leaders of the early church. Finally, "**The Revelation**" is an apocalyptic vision given to the Apostle John.

In the Bible, the mind of God is revealed, at least all we can begin to grasp with the brains we've got now. Apparently, what's in the 66 books of the Bible is all we need to know to make it victoriously through this world and into the world to come. No wonder Christians through the ages have uniquely treasured the Bible. No wonder our churches build their foundation upon the Bible alone. "Sola Scriptura," the exclusive reliance on biblical authority, was both Luther's and Calvin's point of no compromise!

God reveals truth in many ways, but the Bible gives us a unique benchmark from which to calculate the veracity of all other revelations.

## 4 canon

who gave which writings the right to be right?

"[JESUS] WAS TAKEN UP TO HEAVEN, AFTER GIVING INSTRUCTIONS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE APOSTLES . . ."

ACTS 1:2B

The Bible is the standard measurement of truth. What about if something comes along that contradicts the Bible, something exciting and new? I'll tell you what happens in that case: believe your Bible. How simple is that!

Say I want to build a house and you're going to help, along with some of our friends. We have a blueprint, but we don't all agree on what we mean by an inch or a foot. When you bring me your 2" by 4", it's shorter than everyone else's. When someone else bring me a 6" pipe, it's way too big to fit. Without agreement on measurements, we're sunk, defeated before we start. When we finish the house, it looks like a Picasso painting of a nightmare. In order for us to have a prayer of building a functional house, standardized measurements are imperative. Close enough is *not* close enough.

So it is with truth. If we are going to establish what is unquestioned, we need some standardized book that contains reliable measurements. The church fathers long ago determined that the books in your Bible are the ones God meant to be there.

Canon, with one *n* in the middle, means “ruler” or “measuring stick.” The canon is the standard by which the books of the Bible were measured for inclusion and all others for exclusion. The Old Testament canon was essentially set by the time Jesus was quoting it in His teachings. Merely the fact that our Savior used the Old Testament canon and treated it as authoritative should be enough of a recommendation. But there’s no doubt that from earliest times, the apostles regarded the majority of the Old Testament canon as beyond dispute. The Christian church began with a set of recognized, standardized, authoritative books of the Old Testament.

This is not to say that there aren’t a few discrepancies. Apocryphal books accepted by the Catholic canon are not included in the Protestant canon. There are three major versions of the Old Testament we have: the Hebrew Bible, the Greek Septuagint (reputed to have been done by 70 scholars, hence the “*sept*” part), and the Latin Vulgate (“*vulgus*,” for the “common” man). These are not identical in their selection of canonical books. Make of that what you will, but know that the overwhelming majority of the Old Testament canon is absolutely agreed on.

Hey, if you want to get touchy about it, Jude quotes the archangel Michael and the patriarch Enoch from unknown source books, which may be one of the reasons it took so long for the church to recognize Jude as canonical himself, even though Jude is the brother of both James and Jesus! Any controversy is comparatively minor.

Ephesians 2:20 says the church is founded on the Apostolic teachings. Those teachings were preserved in letters and accounts that were written or orally passed on by those who had been with Jesus. Other writings had infiltrated the church and were making the rounds, claiming to be the real deal. If you’re going to die for a letter or a book, wouldn’t it be nice to know that it was authentic Scripture from God and not some half-baked correspondence from a pretender? So the church fathers came up with the New Testament canon—those books that bore the mark of apostolic authority. Acts 4:13 records this unique and defining characteristic of the Apostles: **“They took note that these men had been with Jesus.”**

The first listing of the New Testament canon was in the early part of the second century AD, including the four gospels and much of the rest of the New Testament. Hebrews, Jude, James, Revelation and some of the shorter epistles took longer to be acknowledged beyond doubt. The final canon was established and it was in general acceptance by the end of the fourth century. That’s a lot of information. The thing to remember is that to be included in the New Testament, a book had to be sourced to an apostle.

They just . . . *smell* right. There’s an unmistakable aroma about them. They hold together miraculously, with shockingly few apparent contradictions (we say “apparent” because contradictions in the Bible appear exactly where our understanding disappears). Our Bible is made up of 66 books and not one of them

is a stinker.

Well, maybe Song of Solomon. Just kidding. That book does kind of creep me out though. I can just see the letters coming in to the editor.

## 5 authority

### where do you go to get your truth?

**“THE GRASS WITHERS, THE FLOWER FADES; BUT THE WORD OF OUR GOD SHALL STAND FOREVER.”**

ISAIAH 40:8

The Bible tells us authoritatively what’s happening in heaven, why there’s such a place as hell and who has to go there, what a seraphim is and what it’s capabilities are, how to worship God the way He requires, what to do about money we have or don’t have, how to deal with friends and enemies, how to pray and get results, who the devil used to be and what he’s been doing lately, why bad things happen to good people, what to do when you’re sick or sad, why a tiny city like Jerusalem is the center of the universe, what will happen at the end of time, who gets to return with Jesus when He comes in power and glory to make everything in the world right again and . . . oh, you get the idea.

The doctrine of biblical authority has two challengers. Some *outside* the faith say the Bible is just another book, and it’s packed with contradictions. And some *inside* the faith believe the Bible is not the *only* standard of truth, but that the pronouncements of the church fathers are also authoritative. We’d better look at both of these bumps in the road.

Let’s deal with those within the faith first. The Bible is universally accepted as authoritative within the Christian faith, but for some, the Bible is not the *sole* authority—for instance, with the Catholic wing of the family of God. For a Catholic, the Pope has a big say in what we should consider authoritative. I have no doubt that the Pope is a God-fearing man, unique and set apart, and yet I cannot quite give him the allegiance I save for the Bible. Call me crazy!

Others within the church have said the early church didn’t have Bible,s so obviously they had to rely on oral tradition. Wrong. The early church may not have had the New Testament canon until the fourth century, but that doesn’t mean they didn’t have the Bible. The early church considered the Old Testament the authoritative Word of God and as such read from it in their meetings along with the letters from the apostles that were copied and passed around. As the apostles and those who knew them died, God preserved the Old and New Testaments together for those like us who would come to faith in Christ later.

Now as for those outside the faith who trivialize the Bible, I admit that I used to be one of them. The simplest explanation for my change of heart is that before I was born again the Bible was a letter that was written to someone else, and now that I'm a child of God, it's a letter written to me. Now I "get" the Bible.

But perhaps some outside the faith don't even *want* to understand the Bible. They doubt the authority of anything outside themselves. To the one who says there's no right and wrong, I ask, "How do you know if you're right about there being no wrong?" To the one who says there are no absolutes, I ask, "Oh? Absolutely?" To the one who says there's no ultimate authority, I ask, "Oh yeah? By what ultimate authority do you say that?" I hope you're appreciating the irony dripping from this paragraph.

*If we refuse to rely on Scripture for truth, then what WILL we turn to? New ideas simply because they're not the old ones? Our feelings that go up and down constantly? Our own brilliance, proven by the way everyone can't wait to hear what we have to say? Maybe our pop culture icons, those beautiful buffoons? Horoscopes we could write ourselves with equal accuracy? Science that changes every few years? Clever academics who make stupid wild guesses? What's our source of absolute truth if not the Scriptures? If not the Bible, then what?*

The thing is, the Bible is reliable, trustworthy, dependable and supreme truth in one handy book. It speaks with a ring of authority to every corner of our lives. If the Bible is not our authority on truth, we are treading water in a sea of unreliable opinions and will, at some point, sink.

## 6 inspiration

### didn't imperfect men write the Bible?

**"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."**

2 PETER 1:20-21

When we say the Bible is inspired, we mean that it comes straight from the Spirit of God. *Inspire, conspire, perspire, respire* and *spirit* all have the same root that means "breath" or "breathed." God breathed life into Adam who became a living soul. He breathed truth into the Scriptures and they became life-giving sustenance for our spirits. We use the word "inspired" sometimes to mean that someone has produced something so great God must have directed it. Well? The Bible is all that and more. Papered. Pedigreed. Passed down from on high. The Bible is a record of

the very words of God, straight from His heart and mind.

The Bible is doubly inspired, for not only did God breathe the Scriptures to the ones who wrote them, but He can breathe the Scriptures *again* to us as we read them. We're able to hear what God is saying to us today in the words He inspired thousands of years ago. The same one who initially spoke the original words in the hearts of the writers now speaks them once more in our hearts as we open the book (the very hardest thing to do) and read (the next hardest thing).

This is why we pray before we begin to study the Bible. We ask God to reveal again to us today that which He first revealed to those long ago. Of course He promises to do just that. In Matthew 7:7, Jesus says that if we ask and keep on asking, it will be given; if we knock and keep on knocking, the door will be opened; if we seek and keep on seeking, we will find. In John 16:13, Jesus tells His disciples that He's going to send the Holy Spirit who will guide them into all truth.

1 John 2:27 says, **"As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you."** John tells the believers that they have an *anointing* from God that teaches them what the Bible is saying. Strange? Not so much. That anointing is simply the presence of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the anointing was embodied by pouring olive oil on the recipient's head. However, the Old Testament anointing was unique and transitory, given for a specific purpose and then the anointing lifted.

Attention! Something has changed and here it is: now under the New Covenant, the anointing does not lift and is not transitory. It *remains*, as the scripture above tells us! When we pick up a Bible to read and hear from God, we don't have to be recommissioned with another pouring of anointing oil and another solemn ceremony. The Holy Spirit is right where He was the last time—living in God's children. Living in you and in me.

That's why those who say the Bible is only a history book are flat-out wrong. The Bible resembles a history book in the same way a sweaty, worked-up, terrifying, armed-to-the-teeth-and-fighting-mad in the flesh pirate resembles a cardboard storybook about pirates. When we hold a Bible in our hands, we're holding the real living, breathing thing—a modern day miracle. The very words breathed by God, passed down through the millennia by the diligence of the faithful and the purposes of Him who breathed those words to begin with.

Imagine having all the knowledge of the universe crammed into a book you can slip into your pocket or download to your phone. Imagine having the very wisest of the wise men waiting for your call day or night. Imagine having the secrets of the ages ready for you anytime you feel like opening up the treasure chest that holds them.

Ever wanted to see the cheat sheet on a really tough test? In the test of our lives, the cheat sheet is the Bible, with all the answers that really matter written down for us,

inspired by the great Teacher of the classroom of life. We have been given the answers to the great questions of life, questions like: who made this universe, why did He do it, where are we going, and what can it all mean?

If Genesis tells us Adam became alive when God breathed into him, His inspiration today can surely make the Scriptures alive to us.

## 7 inerrancy

isn't the Bible full of mistakes and contradictions?

“ALL SCRIPTURE IS GOD-BREATHED.”

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

When we say the Bible is *inerrant*, with no mistakes, uninformed people say, well how about all the translations that disagree? They miss the meaning. By “inerrant,” we mean *mistake free in the original manuscripts*. Our modern versions of the Bible can be widely dissimilar to each other. So what? Inerrant means the *writers* of the Bible got it right, not the translators. Yes?

Actually, we mean the Bible as originally written is more than just correct, it's *absolutely perfect*. Subsequent copies (transcripts) may have minor discrepancies, and none of those discrepancies affects a single major doctrine, but that doesn't change the inerrant nature of the Bible. It's error-free, faultless, flawless, matchless, incomparable, inimitable.

Obviously, Biblical inerrancy is a matter of faith, like the resurrection. But it's no more a leap of faith than trusting an abstract science like mathematics. Math is supported by underlying axioms which cannot be proven and must be taken on faith. Accept these axioms, and math “proves” itself. As mathematician Dr. A.G. Hamilton writes, “Mathematics is a mixture of intuition, analogy and logic.” Interesting. Dr. Hamilton is telling us that mathematics, a precise and exact science, is supported by three abstract disciplines!

Do you see that even trusting in mathematics, that no-nonsense bedrock of so many other sciences, is like trusting in biblical inerrancy? It's a step of faith. Once accepted, it proves reliable. Inerrancy is axiomatic. *Unprovable*, but once accepted it becomes reliably dependable.

So. What are the axioms, the unprovable assumptions of Biblical inerrancy? There are at least three. First, God *can* reveal Himself. Second, God *wants to* reveal Himself. Third, God *has* revealed Himself in a way that we can understand in the Bible.

If those are all true, then the Bible is as dependably trustworthy as anything we

know, and even more so because, given our axioms, the one who guarantees the Bible's reliability is God Himself. Those who say the Bible is full of error are really saying that God has miserably failed in His capability, His desire or His accomplishment. I wouldn't want to be the one saying that to God's face!

Some would say that the only way we know the Bible is absolutely true is because the Bible claims to be absolutely true and the Bible, being absolutely true, is absolutely true when it claims to be absolutely true. This is, of course, a tautology (cool word, huh?), and it's a problem. But it's not a difficult problem. I can't verify if a particular yellow road sign is accurate, even though it looks okay to me, but if I put my trust in it and it proves to be trustworthy, I begin to have faith that the other yellow road signs will prove true and act accordingly.

If someone you know to be free and loose with the truth tells you something, you take it with a grain of salt. But if someone with an unimpeachable reputation for veracity tells you something, you tend to trust it. We can't prove that the Bible is inerrant, it's a matter of faith, but if we put your weight down on the words of the Scriptures, we find that those words are dependable. The Bible has an unimpeachable reputation for truth telling, built over the millennia in the hearts of countless believers who have relied on it and found it completely trustworthy.

Like the wise man who built his house on a rock, we can build our lives on the Bible, and when the storms of life come, our lives will not collapse in ruin, but stand the test and endure.

The copies may be blurred, the translations may be a little out of focus, but the inerrancy of the original Scriptures is God's satisfaction-guarantee to those who approach the Bible with a humble, teachable heart. If we understood the doctrine of inerrancy, we'd trust our own opinions less and rely on God's opinions found in His Holy Word more.

## • THE HOLY SPIRIT

how do we know that we know what we know?

“THE SPIRIT IS THE TRUTH.”

1 JOHN 5:6B

Jesus promised that He'd never leave us, Matthew 28:20. Not long after that, He left us. Surprise! He was taken up into heaven. He'll remain there until the end comes. So what gives? What's happened to His promise? He kept it, of course.

Jesus is with us now as the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. Jesus, limited by His

human body, touched a limited number of people in His earthly ministry. The Holy Spirit can be with everyone, everywhere, all at the same time, all the time. Constantly, no matter where we go or what we do. He leads us into all truth according to John 16:13, and as the passage above says, He is Truth.

We don't discover truth because we're sincere or persistent or smart. Truth discovers us because Truth is hunting us down relentlessly. Truth is a train and we're tied to the track. We're in Truth's crosshairs. On Truth's hit list. Truth loves us and wants us to get to know Him.

And here's the greatest truth: the Spirit of Truth wants us to know that God made us in order that He could have a *relationship* with us. We'll never hear more astounding news. The Master of the Universe created us to share a wonderful friendship with Him. How do we know beyond doubt this is true? Because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts.

There are agnostics and skeptics who blather that nobody can KNOW anything. They try to convince themselves that skepticism is simply realism: to believe in the love of God is like believing in Santa Clause. They laugh at the naiveté of us poor shlubs who have taken a "blind leap" into Christianity. They call us weak-minded, delusional, childish, and impractical. We may be all that, but what about them? Talk about weak minded and all the rest. They've pushed away the truth they know instinctively, according to Romans 1:19: ***"What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them."*** You can close your eyes and say there's no sun, but you'll still get sunburned. Nobody denies God and lives to tell the tale.

The Holy Spirit's modus operandi is to reveal truth to humankind. That's simply what He does. Like a hound dog pointing to a raccoon in a tree, like a map directing a traveller, like the sun lighting up a dark world; the Holy Spirit takes the things of God and makes them known to us. Who can resist the truth? Rephrase that question using what we now know: who can resist the Holy Spirit? Where would be a safe place to hide from the Spirit of God? High up? Deep below? Far away? David posed this question in Psalms 139:7 and concluded that it just couldn't be done: ***"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?"***

Truth is going to run us down and shake our world like a terrifying earthquake. Truth will find us no matter where we hide. We can stuff our fingers in our ears and sing the "Star Spangled Banner" at the top of our lungs, but when we stand before God at the judgment, no one will be able to say they didn't know. That they had no idea that God is the rightful Master. That everyone should obey Him. That we have rebelled and tried to establish our own lower case "k" kingdoms where we're in charge. That we should have lived for His glory and His Kingdom and so entered into His joy.

Everybody knows, nobody doesn't know. God's judgment on the proud and unrepentant will surprise no one at all. We have a mighty witness to the truth who

testifies to each of us: the Holy Spirit.

To a dark and confused world, the Holy Spirit heralds the irresistible, irrefutable, irrepressible truth because truth is who the Holy Spirit is.

## 1 guide need help with the direction of your life?

***"BUT WHEN HE, THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, COMES, HE WILL GUIDE YOU INTO ALL TRUTH. HE WILL NOT SPEAK ON HIS OWN; HE WILL SPEAK ONLY WHAT HE HEARS; HE WILL TELL YOU WHAT IS YET TO COME."***

JOHN 16:13

Would you like to raft down a breathtaking river as it winds through the purple haze of the deepest gorge in North America, feeling the terrifying power of the churning water, passing bighorn sheep, brown bears, and bald eagles while the madness of the everyday world seems far away and insignificant in comparison? Well my friend, take a ride down the Snake River in the great northwest. It doesn't just lazily wind around, it *screams* tortuously, zigging and zagging as it ricochets down the narrow canyon walls. The sluice in which it thunders? It's called Hells Canyon because the rock walls are red and jagged and nearly perpendicular while the river rages deeply down inside. The surface of the river is often smooth, but that's because there is such an enormous quantity of water swiftly flowing over the deadly boulders below. At any point in your journey, you could be thrown from your raft and the inexorable pull of the water would drag you down, beating you against the hidden rocks below and pouring water into your lungs.

Ummm . . . You should probably take a guide.

Come to think of it, life is like Hells Canyon. At any point, while admiring the scenery, we could be tossed overboard and powerful currents might drag us down and beat the life out of us. There's no question that our lives need a Guide! We've been freely given the very Guide we need—the Holy Spirit of God.

We have to remember that Galatians 4:6 and other passages clearly teach that the Holy Spirit is Jesus Himself. Don't think on that too hard because your mind can't get it, just believe it! It's true. The Holy Spirit knows exactly what we're going through because Jesus has gone through exactly what we're going through. And more. Loneliness? Jesus was deserted by His home town, His family, His closest friends and the leaders of the synagogues and the Sanhedrin. Hunger? Jesus went 40 days without food. Sadness? Jesus is called by the prophet Isaiah, "A man of sorrows, familiar with suffering." Hebrews talks about the loud groans that were often the prayers of Jesus. Pain? Isaiah 52:14 tells us that Jesus was beaten so badly