

# Session 1. Taking God at his Word

Tim Chester, Keswick Convention 2017

## Reflection #1

Why do people doubt the Bible?  
Why do you doubt the Bible?

## Reflection #2

Read 2 Peter 1:16-21.  
What reasons does Peter give for trusting the Bible?

Evangelical Christians believe the inspiration of the Bible is:

1. Plenary – everything you read (not just prophetic speeches)
2. Verbal – every word counts (not just a window on revelation)
3. Confluent – every author matters (the integrity of both human & divine authors)

## Reflection #3

Why do *you* trust the Bible?

## Reflection #4

Read this extract from John Owen.  
Why did John Owen trust the Bible?

### **John Owen, *The Divine Origins of the Scriptures* (1659)**

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament do abundantly and uncontrollably manifest themselves to be the word of the living God, so that, merely on the account of their own proposal of themselves unto us in the name and majesty of God, as such – without the contribution of help or assistance from tradition, church, or any thing else – we are obliged, upon the penalty of eternal damnation, (as are all to whom by any means they come, or are brought,) to receive them, with that subjection of soul which is due to the word of God. The authority of God shining in them, they afford unto us all the divine evidence of themselves which God is willing to grant unto us.

The Scripture hath all its authority from its Author ...

We do so receive, embrace, believe, and submit unto it, because of the authority of God who speaks it, or gave it forth as his mind and will, evidencing itself by the Spirit in and with that Word, unto our minds and consciences: or, because that the Scriptures, being brought unto us by the good providence of God, in ways of his appointment and preservation, it doth evidence itself infallibly unto our consciences to be the word of the living God.

Light manifest light ... Let the least child bring a candle into a room that before was dark, and it would be madness to go about to prove by substantial witnesses –

men of gravity and authority – that light is brought in ... Now, the Scripture, the Word of God, is light ... It is a light so shining with the majesty of its Author, as that it manifests itself to be his, 'a light shining in a dark place.' (2 Pet. 1.19) ... Light, I confess, of itself, will not remove the defect of the visive faculty. It is not given for that end. Light is not eyes. It suffices that there is nothing wanting on its own part for its discover and revelation ... I do not assert from hence, that wherever the Scripture is brought ... all that read it, or to whom it is read, must instantly of necessity assent unto its divine original. Many men who are not stark blind may have yet so abused their eyes, that when light is brought into a dark place they may not be able to discern it.

Now, this light in the Scripture, for which we contend, is nothing but the beaming of the majesty, truth, holiness, and authority of God, given unto it and left upon it by its authority, the Holy Ghost – an impress it hath of God's excellency upon it, distinguishing it by infallible signs from the product of any creature. By this it dives into the consciences of men, into all the secret recesses of their hearts; guides, teaches, directs, determines, and judges *in* them, *upon* them, in the name, majesty, and authority of God. If men who are blinded by the god of this world, will yet deny this light because they perceive it not, it shall not prejudice them who do. By this self-evidencing light, I say, doth the Scripture make such a proposition of itself as the word of God, that whoever rejects it, doth it at the peril of his eternal ruin; and thereby a bottom or foundation is tendered for that faith which it requireth to repose itself upon.

How know we that the Scripture is the word of God; how may others come to be assured thereof? The Scripture, say we, bears testimony to itself that it is the word of God; that testimony is the witness of God himself, which whoso doth not accept and believe, he doth what in him lies to make God a liar. To give us an infallible assurance that, in receiving this testimony, we are not imposed upon by cunning devised fables, the Scriptures have that glory of light and power accompanying them, as wholly distinguisheth them by infallible sign and evidences from all words and writings not divine; conveying their truth and power into the souls and consciences of men with an infallible certainty.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Reflection #5**

Read 2 Peter 1-3-15.

What does Peter say about God's word (or promises) in these verses?

What are we to 'do' with God's word?

What stops us growing as Christians?

How do we help one another grow as Christians?

**Further Reading:** Tim Chester, *Bible Matters: Meeting God in His Word*, Keswick Foundations Series, IVP, 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> John Owen, *The Divine Origin of the Scriptures*, in *Works*, ed. William Goold, Vol. 16, T&T Clarke, 1862, 307, 309, 318-319, 319-321, 322, 324-325.

## Session 2. Meeting God in His Word

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### Reflection #6

Look at the way Hebrews introduces quotes from the Bible:

- Who is speaking through the Bible?
- When are they are speaking – in the past or in the present?

	Who?	When?
'But there is a place where someone has testified ...' (2:6)		
'So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He says ... And again ... And again he says ...' (2:11-13)		
'So, as the Holy Spirit says ...' (3:7)		
'As has just been said ...' (3:15)		
'... just as God has said ...' (4:3)		
'Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before ...' (4:7)		
'The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says ...' (10:15)		
'And you have completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son: "My son ..."' (12:5)		
'God has said ...' (13:5)		
'So we say with confidence ...' (13:6)		

### **A contemporary word**

- But about the resurrection of the dead – have you not read what God said *to you*, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? (Matthew 22:31-32)
- [Moses] was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received *living words to pass on to us*. (Acts 7:38)
- For everything that was written in the past was *written to teach us*, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)
- These things happened to them as examples and were *written down as warnings for us*, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

The Bible is relational

- Listen for God’s voice
- Have a plan, but don’t make the plan the point
- Pray the word

#### **Reflection #7**

Consider Psalm 23.

Consider Colossians 3.

Brainstorm how you might pray through these passages.

**Further Reading:** Tim Chester, *Bible Matters: Meeting God in His Word*, Keswick Foundations Series, IVP, 2017.

## Session 3. Seeing Jesus in his Word

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### Reflection #8

What's your experience of reading the Old Testament?

What's your experience of hearing the Old Testament preached?

When reading any passage of Scripture, especially Old Testament passages, ask yourself:

1. What aspects of the character of God does the passage reveal and how does Christ exemplify these?
2. What aspects of the identity of humanity does the passage reveal and how does Christ fulfil these?
3. What aspects of the promises of God does the passage reveal and how does Christ complete these?
4. What aspects of the need of humanity does the passage reveal and how does Christ meet these?

There are four key strands to the promise of God:<sup>2</sup>

- *A people who know God:* 'I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.' (Genesis 12:2)
- *A place of rest:* 'The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."' (Genesis 12:7)
- *Blessing to the nations:* 'I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' (Genesis 12:3)
- *A king and a kingdom:* 'I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son.' (2 Samuel 7:11-16)
- The partial *fulfilments* of the promise illustrate the ultimate fulfilment in Christ.
- The *partial* nature of their fulfilment points to the need for Christ fully to fulfil God's promises.

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Chester, *From Creation to New Creation: Understanding the Bible Story*, The Good Book Company, 2nd Ed., 2010.

**Reflection #9**

1. For each of the following passages, use the four questions above to explore how they point to Christ:
  - Exodus 16:1-18.
  - Exodus 17:1-7.
1. Once you have asked each question, look for help in: Matthew 6:11; John 6:25—59; John 7:37-39; 1 Corinthians 10:1-5; Hebrews 3.

**Further Reading:** Tim Chester, *Bible Matters: Meeting God in His Word*, Keswick Foundations Series, IVP, 2017.

## **Session 4. Dying to Read the Bible**

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### **Reflection #10**

Identify three key rules for reading the Bible correctly

### **Six Principles for Reading the Bible**

1. The Bible is intentional so look for the author's intended meaning
2. God spoke Jesus in the Bible so follow the story of God's promises to Jesus
3. God spoke using words so texts make sense in context
4. God spoke using words so texts reflect their genre
5. God speaks in the Bible so identify the implications for today
6. The Bible is good news so look for gospel motives

### **Reflection #11**

Read the following extract from Zwingli. How do Zwingli's 'rules' compare to ours?

I thought it might be good at this point to give some instruction in the way to come to a true understanding of the Word of God and to a personal experience of the fact that you are taught of God. For if we are not versed in Scripture, how are we to tell whether the priest who teaches us is expounding the pure truth unadulterated by his own sinful desires?

First, we must pray inwardly to God, that he will kill off the old man who sets such great store by his own wisdom and ability.

Second, when the old man is killed off and removed, that God will graciously infill us, and in such measure that we believe and trust only in him.

Third, when that is done we shall certainly be greatly refreshed and comforted, and we must constantly repeat the words of the prophet: Lord, God, strengthen that which thou hast wrought in us. For 'let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,' as Paul says.

Fourth, the Word of God does not overlook anyone, and least of all the greatest. For when God called Paul, he said to Ananias: 'He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the princes and kings of the earth.' Again, he says to the disciples (Matt. 10): 'And ye shall be brought before governors and kings, that ye may testify unto them concerning me.'

Fifth, it is the nature and property of the Word to humble the high and mighty and to exalt the lowly. That was the song of the Virgin Mary: 'He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.' And again, John proclaimed concerning Christ (Luke 3): 'By him shall all the hills be brought low, and the valleys filled, etc.'

Sixth, the Word of God always attracts and helps the poor, comforting the comfortless and despairing, but opposing those who trust in themselves, as Christ testifies.

Seventh, it does not seek its own advantage: for that reason Christ commanded his disciples to take neither scrip nor purse.

Eighth, it seeks only that God may be revealed to men, that the obstinate may fear him and the lowly find comfort in God. Those who preach in that manner are undoubtedly right. Those who cautiously beat about the bush for their own advantage, defending the teaching of man instead of holding and expounding the doctrine of God, are false prophets. Know them by their words. They make a fine outcry: The holy Fathers! Is it nothing that man can do? and the like. But for all their complaining they do not complain that the Gospel of Christ is slackly proclaimed.

Ninth, when you find that the Word of God renews you, and begins to be more precious to you than formerly when you heard the doctrines of men, then you may be sure that this is the work of God within you.

Tenth, when you find that it gives you assurance of the grace of God and eternal salvation, it is of God.

Eleventh, when you find that it crushes and destroys you, but magnifies God himself within you, it is a work of God.

Twelfth, when you find that the fear of God begins to give you joy rather than sorrow, it is a sure working of the Word and Spirit of God. May God grant us that Spirit. Amen.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Reflection #12**

What stops people hearing God's word aright?

What enables people to hear God's word aright?

Psalms 14:1; Proverbs 1:7; Isaiah 66:2; Romans 1:18-25; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16

Death and resurrection are what the Bible does to us

Death and resurrection are how we come to the Bible

- We need to come to the Bible in repentance and humility, putting sin to death, examining our prejudices, asking God to expose our selfish desires and pride, submitting our lives to God's will, trembling before God's word.
- We need to come to the Bible in expectancy and prayer, expecting the Spirit to reveal Christ, expecting the word to bring life, listening for God's voice, praying for comfort, assurance and hope.

1. Pray before you read the word
2. Repent as you read the word
3. Prepare to hear the word preached
4. Repent as you hear the word preached
5. Read the Bible in community

**Further Reading:** Tim Chester, *Bible Matters: Meeting God in His Word*, Keswick Foundations Series, IVP, 2017.

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<sup>3</sup> Huldrych Zwingli, 'The Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God,' *Zwingli and Bullinger*, G. W. Bromiley (ed.), Library of Christian Classics, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1953, 93-95.