

It's God's Coherent Revelation to Us

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Date: 04 October 2020

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[0 : 0 0] But we're going to turn now to our Bible readings for today and we're going to be reading in two places. First of all, in Luke's Gospel, the very last chapter, chapter 24, and then a bit further on in the book of Acts, which of course is the second volume of Luke's two-part work, beginning with Luke's Gospel, then the Acts of the Apostles.

Luke 24 and then Acts chapter 10. So stick your finger in Acts chapter 10 and we're going to read, first of all, Luke chapter 24 and verse 36.

And so here we are on the road to Emmaus with two disciples whom Jesus has appeared with and started talking to them, although they didn't know who he was.

And then following that, Jesus appears once again to his disciples, comes into their midst, and he speaks to them here at verse 36.

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and he said to them, Peace to you. But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.

[1 : 1 1] Then he said to them, Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see.

For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. When he had said this, he showed him his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, Have you anything here to eat?

And they gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it before them. And then he said to them, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you.

That everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. And then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

And he said to them, Thus it's written, that the Christ must suffer and on the third day rise from the dead. And that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

[2 : 2 2] And you are witnesses of these things. And behold, I'm sending the promise of my father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

Turn over now to Acts chapter 10. And we are going to read a few verses beginning at verse 39 of Acts chapter 10. Where we read some of the fulfillment of that command, that great commission of Jesus.

His apostles going out into the world to proclaim God's word, the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations. Here's Peter in the household of Cornelius. And Cornelius has asked him, What was it that Jesus commanded you to go and preach?

Well, verse 39 here, Peter says, We are witnesses of all that Jesus did, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree.

But God raised him up on the third day. Made him to appear, not to all the people, but to us, who had been chosen by God as witnesses.

[3 : 29] Who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people. And to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

To him all the prophets bear witness. That everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, do turn with me in your Bibles to Luke chapter 24.

We will look there a little bit. But we're on a thematic series asking the question, Why we treasure the Bible. And we're asking it because this is the book that we call the Word of God written.

The scriptures that are the supreme rule of our faith and our life. That's our confession. And so it's a very important question to know what it is that we're talking about.

[4 : 43] Now, first of all, we've seen that the Bible is, above all, God's covenant revelation. That is, it's a word of personal revelation. And it calls people into relationship with God.

A relationship can't begin. It can't be sustained, can it, without words, without communication. It's our words that reveal ourselves to other people. It's our words that elicit responses from each other.

And so God speaks to us, first of all, so that we may know him, so that we might love him. And in the Bible, God's word written, we have this covenant revelation written to us and written for us.

It's a unique, the unique, personal revelation of God, which is given to lead us into proper relationship with him through Jesus Christ, the Son.

Now then, last week, we noticed also, very importantly, that the Bible is a clear revelation to us. It's an accessible word. So it can give, and it does give, divine light to all people.

[5 : 47] God's revelation is understandable to us. Because it comes to us ready interpreted. It's not shrouded in mystery. God's words are clear.

The unfolding of your word gives light to our path. It gives understanding to our minds, says the psalmist in Psalm 119. But today, I want to think about another very important aspect of God's written word.

Because it has a very big impact on how we actually handle the Bible in our hands. And that's so important. Because we have to recognize that it is possible to mishandle the Bible.

In ways that are very demeaning to God. And indeed, in ways that are very dangerous to us and to other people. And it is possible to misuse the Bible, not just with bad motives.

Many people who dislike the Bible and want to dishonor it will do that. But it is also possible to misuse the Bible and mishandle it, even with the best of intentions.

[6 : 50] You can love God's word, and yet you can mishandle it. And therefore, you are unwittingly doing harm to the gospel, to your own life, and maybe to other people's lives.

That's very serious. And that's why Paul talks about that to Timothy, one of his trainees in ministry. That's why he tells him you need to strive to be an unashamed workman of God. One who rightly handles the word of truth.

And he tells him, because if you wrongly handle the Bible, it can lead to all kinds of trouble. All sorts of pointless arguments that will ruin people. It can lead people, even says Paul, to lead people to swerve completely away from the truth.

Well, that's very serious, isn't it? It's very dangerous. And some very dangerous movements in history have come about through misuse of the Bible, through abuse of it. To the extent that the Bible has been used sometimes to say things and to do things that are in fact totally unbiblical.

How can that happen? Well, it happens often because of a failure to grasp this important reality that I want to focus on today. That the Bible is God's coherent revelation to us.

[8 : 06] So we must read it and study it seriously in its completeness and in its context. If we're going to properly understand what it teaches us about God and about ourselves, about the whole world.

And indeed, above all, about the world to come. The Bible, you see, is a comprehensive revelation that reveals to us everything that we need to know about God and his salvation.

Everything that we need to know about his will and purpose for our lives and for the world. But in order to know that, we need to know the whole counsel of God. Not just a few texts here and there that we might pull out and memorize.

Well, of course, memorizing texts of the Bible is a very good thing. Don't let me put you off that. But God's word is a whole word. It's indivisible truth.

It's a coherent revelation in its totality. And we need both the totality and we need to understand every part in proper relation to the totality.

[9 : 09] Sometimes theologians use the phrase *tota scriptura* in this context by all scripture. I actually prefer Edwards' phrase *totus porcus*, the whole hog.

We need the Bible, the whole hog, the whole thing. But anyway, all scripture is the point. That is our standard. Remember, Jesus says, man does not live by bread alone, but by every word, everything that comes from the mouth of God.

And every word of God is joined to every other word of God in a coherent whole. The truth is indivisible. Teaching in every part a coherent, comprehensive understanding of God and of his salvation and of the world and of our lives under his rule.

And so we have to recognize that coherence. And we have to take the Bible very seriously. We mustn't just treat it in a slapdash way. And so we must approach the Bible seriously.

We must learn to read it and understand it properly. We must grapple with the way that it teaches us and informs us. Coherently, comprehensively. Or else, if we don't do that, we will very easily find ourselves just abusing the Bible.

[10 : 25] Treating it like, well, like nothing different to a sort of Christian horoscope. And actually, friends, we have to be honest, that is the way that many Christians, many Bible-believing Christians often do treat their Bibles.

Dipping in to sort of find a random verse for today that will give me a word from God for whatever problem I'm facing, whatever guidance that I need. Older generations will maybe remember things called promise boxes.

Boxes with little laps of paper with Bible texts on it. And you would put your hand in and pull one out and read it. This is God's promise for you today. But often people do something very similar, don't they?

Close your eyes, open the Bible, and seek a word from the Lord. Whatever your eye falls on, that's the verse that God is going to use to speak to you today.

Now, that's not only demeaning to the Scriptures and to God himself, but it can actually be very dangerous. Imagine if you're a rather cast-down and depressed student, incarcerated in the halls of residence at the moment.

[11 : 31] You're away from home for the first time. You're thoroughly miserable, and you're depressed. But you're a Christian, and so you're praying, what should I do, Lord? Well, you open your Bible, and you say, Lord, give me a word.

And you immediately open your eyes, and you find yourself looking at Matthew 27, verse 5. Judas went out and hanged himself. Oh, my goodness. Better shut that. Let's try again. Luke 10, verse 37.

You go and do likewise. Oh, dear. Try a third time. John 13, verse 27. What you're going to do, do quickly.

Now, you see, that's funny, isn't it? But it makes a very serious point. There are many Christians who actually treat their Bible as always just a sort of incoherent and random book of verses, verses that will speak to you in that sort of way.

So the Bible was really just all about me and my little problems in life and my little need for guidance. So it was written directly to me for today's particular agenda.

[12 : 37] Lots of Bible study notes, actually, that people have used that can treat the Bible like that. It's the sort of questions that they ask.

Read this passage. How does it make you feel? Who do you identify with in this passage? What do you think was going on with this person? And so on. All that sort of subjective stuff. No, no, no.

That's all back to front. Because the Bible isn't about you and it's not about me, first of all. It's about God. It's about telling us who he is.

It's a coherent revelation of God that's there to teach us about him, about who he is, about what he's done, about what he commands, about how we're to relate to him and see the world in relation.

It's a comprehensive, coherent revelation. And it's given us, not to give us snippets day by day, but to transform our minds more and more day by day.

[13 : 33] So that every day we will see the world more clearly. We will understand more about God and about ourselves with a coherent biblical view of everything.

When I was a young student, there was a book that we were all encouraged to read by Oliver Barclay called Developing a Christian Mind. And that is saying that the Bible is a coherent book that is to teach us to develop a coherent view of the world and everything.

But you see, that means that reading the Bible demands work. It demands effort. My father often used to quote a phrase, the scriptures will not yield their treasures to chance inquiry.

They wouldn't take any other book, would you, and just sort of open it up and randomly read a few words here or there and think you've got the story. Just a paragraph in the middle and then maybe the next day another little bit at the end. Of course you wouldn't.

If you've got a storybook, you read from the beginning right through to the end. That's what you do. It's a reference book, maybe a book about gardening or something. That's not the way you read it. You go to a particular section.

[14 : 42] You look for the bit that you're understanding. But understanding and you, having looked at the index and found the subject, you'll read everything to do with that. I was doing it just the other day, trying to find out what's wrong with my raspberry plants. I've got a dilemma.

If there's any raspberry experts here, you can help me. I've narrowed it down to spur blight or cane blight. But there's a very helpful couple of pages in my encyclopedia all about raspberry diseases and the symptoms and the signs and so on.

If you've got a textbook, that's what you do, isn't it? You might take different sections in order and you'll gradually build up your grasp of the whole thing, whether it's maths or biochemistry or whatever it is that you're trying to study.

In other words, you read whatever you're reading in its context. You take note of what kind of a book it is, the place you're in and so on, because you recognize that that book is coherent.

It's a whole. It hangs together. It's not just random sentences here and there. Well, friends, it's exactly the same with the Bible. It's a coherent revelation.

[15 : 42] And if you take any particular text in the Bible without any regard to the context, then very, very easily it will just become a pretext. And very often a pretext for misuse and abuse.

The most egregious example of this I ever came across was some years ago when I decided to explore God TV.

You've really got to be very careful, let me tell you, when you watch some of the things that are broadcast under the name of Christianity on satellite television. I turned it on and there was a TV evangelist speaking about their mission week.

So I thought, well, this might be quite good to at least see what they're concerned with in terms of gospel mission. But actually what I discovered was mission week. The mission was getting as much money from the subscribers and the watchers sent into the TV station as possible.

That was the mission, getting your money. And this chap came on and he said, now, many of you may have already given generously to our mission. But I have a word from God for you today.

[16 : 48] And it's Luke chapter 19, verse 31. It's the verse where Jesus sends the disciples on into Jerusalem and say that they'll find a colt and they've to untie it. And if the master, if the owner of the colt says, what are you doing?

You say to him, oh, well, the master has need of it. And he took that text and he said, you may have already given all that you can out of your pay to our station.

But like that man who had an ox tied up, you might have fixed assets tied up, like your car or your house. That you could untie and untangle and sell and realize the money and give to our mission.

Now that's not just an outrageous abuse of the Bible. It's bordering on criminal. And it's grist to the mill, isn't it? For the people like Richard Dawkins and others who want to just mock Christians and their use of the scriptures.

That is being an absolutely shameful workman. The antithesis of an unashamed workman who needs not be ashamed, who rightly handles the word of truth.

[18 : 00] So if we are not going to be shameful like that, but if we are going to be unashamed, people who rightly handle the word of truth. Let me just briefly mention three contexts that we have to always bear in mind as we read the Bible.

Just because it is a coherent revelation from God to us. When we think of what the Bible teaches as a whole, and when we read any particular part of the Bible, we need to think of it as being a coherent revelation in three chief ways.

First of all, in terms of doctrine. That is, whatever it teaches about any particular subject. Which is not going to be inconsistent, but consistent and coherent. Then we need to think about it in terms of the unfolding story of redemption.

How the story unfolds in a single overarching whole. And then thirdly, whenever we are in any part of the Bible, we need to think about its literary integrity. That is how any book of the Bible, any section of scripture, how it has a purposeful message which was clearly articulated by the human author with meaning for the readers.

If you want the theological terminology, what that means is we have to give attention to systematic theology or doctrine. We have to give attention to biblical theology and to literary exegesis.

[19 : 22] But let me try and use three headings in a bit more normal words. First, the Bible is a coherent revelation of God as sovereign. Then it's a coherent and climactic revelation of salvation story.

And thirdly, it's a coherent and creaturely revelation in our human speech. So it's a coherent revelation of God our sovereign saving story in our speech.

God our sovereign saving story in our speech. First, the Bible is a coherent and complete revelation of God our sovereign.

That is, the Bible is from God. It's about God. About his worth. About his ways. About what he does. About what he wants from us. Deuteronomy 29 verse 29 sums this up beautifully.

The secret things, Moses says, belong to the Lord our God. But the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever. So that we may do all the words of this law.

[20 : 29] We have all the words that God wants us to have so that we can live before God. Knowing that through these words, everything that God wants us to know of him, he has revealed to us.

That is, we have a complete and a coherent revelation of God. Of his nature, his working, his ways, his desires and his demands from us.

That means that we are not left with mystery about anything that God wants us to know. We can know his mind and his will clearly and truly. Without contradiction, without error.

Everything that God wants us to know. That God is coherent. He is not self-contradictory. And that means that we can assimilate what we call doctrine.

That is a whole picture of what God reveals about any area of his being. Who he is, what he's done, what he thinks and so on. Or any area of ethics for that matter. Any area of morality.

[21 : 29] Everything that flows out from who God is. All his commands for us as human beings. So for example, take the doctrine of marriage. Well, we need to think about it with a coherent whole.

We need to look first of all at Genesis 1 and 2. That teaches all about the foundation of marriage. We need to look in the Decalogue in Exodus. The Ten Commandments that forbid adultery.

We need to look all through the law of Moses. And it's teaching on sexual fidelity. On sexual prohibitions. It's teaching about divorce and so on. We need to look at Jesus' words about these things.

We need to look at the apostolic commands in the letters of the New Testament. That teach us specifically more things. And of course we need to think about the proverbs and wisdom.

That have something to say on these things. Think about the Song of Songs. And so on. And together all of these things will give us a coherent theology.

[22 : 28] A doctrine of marriage and sex. According to the Bible. If you want to read an excellent book that has taken all of those things together. And gives us a very, very fine doctrine of Christian marriage.

I would recommend Christopher Ashe's book, Marriage. The big one. Sex and the Service of God. He's taken all of that together. And given us the coherent biblical doctrine of marriage.

And all of that you see flows from the coherence of the mind of God himself. We should expect God's words. In all different situations in scripture.

To cohere and to be coherent. And that would be the same for any other area of life that we want to look at. What does the Bible teach about honesty? About property ownership. About work.

About leisure. About self-control. Anything you can think of. Wherever you meet one text about a specific issue. You need to give light to the whole Bible context.

[23 : 26] Everything that God has revealed about that area. In other words, we need to assimilate doctrine. Develop a Christian mind. In the way we think about these things.

That's what we call systematic theology or doctrine. And you read a book of systematic theology. It will bring together everything the Bible teaches. About God's grace. About our sin.

About holiness. About all of these different things. Because the Bible is a coherent revelation of God. It's the whole counsel of God. Everything that we need to know about God.

And salvation. And faith. And life. As our confession of faith. The Westminster Confession says. Everything we need to know is either. Expressly sent down in scripture. Or by good and necessary consequence.

May be deduced from scripture. So we can have a coherent morality. A coherent ethics. Because we have a coherent revelation of God.

[24 : 27] So that's the first context of coherence. The second thing we need to take note of. Is that the Bible is a coherent and a climactic revelation of salvation. And its story.

The story of salvation. That is the whole Bible has a storyline. Not just a reference book. It's not just a theology textbook. About all sorts of different subjects.

It's a history. Of God's plan of salvation unfolding. From the very beginning. It tells the story. And it annotates. And it explains the story.

As it goes along. Remember we said the events. Plus the explanation of those events. Is what gives us the revelation of God. It begins with creation.

And then man's rebellion. In Genesis 3. And then God's promises way back then. Of the reversal of that curse. Through the promised seed. And then all the way through. That unfolding story of the Old Testament.

[25 : 23] To the fulfillment. At last. In the coming of the person. Of the Messiah. Jesus Christ. And in the gospels. Witness to him. And in the apostolic witness to him.

In the New Testament. That's what we're reading about there. In Luke chapter 24. And in Acts chapter 10. Jesus opened their minds. So they could understand. The scriptures.

That all the law. And all the prophets. And all the psalms. Spoke of Jesus. And that unfolding story. Had come at last. To fulfillment in him. That's what Peter said to Cornelius.

That Jesus. Had commanded them. To preach the story. Of God's salvation. That Jesus. Is the appointed one. To judge. The living and the dead.

That's the New Testament. Apostolic witness. And that Jesus. Is the savior. Who was promised. All the way through. The unfolding story. Of the prophets. Of the old. And whatever text.

[26 : 20] That we're reading. In the Bible. Wherever it is. From the beginning. To the end. It lies. Somewhere. In that unfolding story. Of salvation. So we mustn't read the Bible. As if it was flat. As if it didn't matter.

Whether this text. Was in Genesis. Or Isaiah. Or Romans. Or wherever. Now we need to see. The coherence. In the unfolding. Story.

Because. As the story of God. Unfolds. The revelation. That we have of God. Accumulates. And increases. So we need to ask that question.

Always. Where in the story. Are we? So what's normal. And normative. In Genesis chapter 1 and 2. Prior. To man's rebellion. Is not the same.

As what's normative. Afterwards. And as the story progresses. As I've said. God's revelation. Accumulates. So that we have more. And more. Of God's word. And his promises. Sometimes people speak about that.

[27 : 17] As being. Progressive. Revelation. I think it's better to say. That redemption. The story of God's redemption. Unfolds. And progresses. And the revelation.

Therefore. Increases. And accumulates. So. We need to remember. That above all. There's a huge difference. Isn't there? Between the whole era. Of promise. That is before Christ came.

And the era. Of fulfillment. After Christ's death. And resurrection. And ascension. In the New Testament. That's why we don't treat. A text in Leviticus. In exactly the same way.

As we. Treat. A text say. From Ephesians. Written to the New Testament church. But we treat both of them. As authoritative. And as valuable. Nonetheless. But we need to ask.

Don't we? Well. What's changed. In this part of the story. Now that Christ has come. And what's not changed. And what's become clearer. Because we know more. So for example.

[28 : 12] Certain foods. Were forbidden. Weren't they? To the ancient Israelites. Back in the Old Testament laws. And the chief purpose. Of those food laws. Was to keep God's people. Distinct. Separate.

From all the rest. Until the Messiah came. But in Mark chapter 7. Jesus himself. Declares that all foods. Are now clean. And the reason for that. Is spelt out very clearly.

To Peter. And he talks about it there. In Acts chapter 10. As we were reading. Because now. God said to him. We're in the time of fulfillment. Now we're no longer. Keeping Jews and Gentiles apart.

But Jews and Gentiles. Are being brought together. By the gospel of Jesus Christ. One family of faith. And so in the same way. Circumcision is now.

No longer a sign. To divide Jew and Gentile. But baptism. Is the thing that unites. All. In the family. Of faith. In Jesus Christ. So we need to understand.

[29 : 06] Those Old Testament commands. In the light. Of their New Testament. Fulfillment. But of course. God's people. Are still. A people. Who are called. To be holy to the Lord.

To be pure in their life. That hasn't changed. In fact. God is still interested. In how. And what. His people eat and drink. And when. We're not just to eat and drink.

As we please. But as God has always commanded. We're to eat and drink. So as to please God. In fact. Example. Paul talks a lot about that. In two. Three chapters. When he writes the Corinthians.

In 2nd Corinthians 8 to 10. And he ends up saying. Doesn't he. Whatever you do. Whether you eat or drink. Do all. To the glory of God. Well that's always been God's command.

He's saying. And it still is God's command. And Paul points to his own practice. And what that means. And to the example of Jesus. But it's different.

[30 : 00] To the way it was in the beginning. In Genesis 1 and 2. God gave men a command. About what to eat. And how. You can eat from all the trees in the garden. Except.

That one. Why. Why all these ones. And not that one. Well we're not told. We're not given any other reason. Other than. That's the way that you glorify God.

By eating. Then later on. In Deuteronomy 14. For example. In other places. God says. You can eat all these animals and birds. But not those ones.

And again. And we're not told any particular rationality for that. Except. The same thing. God wants his people to eat under his direction. And for his glory. Not to do as they please.

And still. It's the same today. All the specific food regulations. Have been set aside by Jesus. As I said. Because those things belong to a former age. And all people everywhere. Are now called to embrace Jesus Christ.

[30 : 58] And bow to his lordship. And. Therefore to eat and drink. And do everything. In life. To serve him. And to serve his glory. And his gospel. Not to serve themselves. The God's command is still.

For us to love him. And to live for him. In all of our life. God's command is coherent. But the story of his salvation. Has now come to its climax. In Christ. So by its very nature.

The age of promises past. And those things that belong to the former age. That were part of separating Jew and Gentile. Well inevitably. They must have faded away. But God's command.

On our life. On our life. To live for him. Is no less. Decisive. For our holiness. For our true humanity. It's not diminished. It's strengthened. In fact.

It's heightened. That's why Paul gives several chapters. To talking about these things. And that's why also. The Old Testament commands. About things like marriage. And sexual purity. Are never set aside.

[31 : 58] In the New Testament. Like those specific examples. Of the food laws are. Quite the reverse. They're made more explicit. Aren't they? They're made far more searching. So it's made absolutely clear.

That it's not just. Acts of sexual immorality. That are wrong. As Jesus says. It's our innermost thoughts. It's our desires. Which are wrong. And sinful. And incur guilt before God.

That's very very explicit. Isn't it? In the Sermon on the Mount. It's implicit. In everything Moses says. But Jesus makes it even clearer. So we need to see.

The coherence. Of God's unfolding story. And of the. Unchanging sovereignty. That he has over us. Both of those things. If we can understand. The Bible properly. So when people.

Don't read the Bible. Seriously. Like that. That you can have. These sort of. Fissile. Comments. Oh well. You see. If gay sex is wrong.

[32 : 54] Why can you eat prawns. As a Christian. Ha ha ha. But you see. The answer to that. Kind of comment is. You need to grow up. A little bit. And learn to read properly. You need to read the Bible. Seriously.

Not frivolously. You say. That sort of thing. You're actually betraying. A childish ignorance. Of basic comprehension. Basic understanding. So those two contexts.

Are very important. But there's a third context. And this is also. Very important. If we're going to take. The Bible seriously. And it's the literary context. Because the Bible. Is a coherent. And a creaturely.

Revelation. In our own. Human speech. That is. It's written in our language. The Bible is God's words. It's his words. But it comes to us.

As humans. In fully human words. Peter says. In 2nd Peter 1. Men spoke from God. As they were driven along. By the Holy Spirit.

- [33 : 49] Well we'll look at the whole. Understanding of the inspiration. Of scripture another time. But suffice to say. That the Bible was not. Dropped out of heaven.
- Ready formed by an angel. Into our hands. That's how. Some religions. Like to think of their. Their holy scriptures. As far as I understand it. That's largely how.
- How Muslims treat. The Quran. But that is not. How we think of. The scripture. Because God spoke. Through. Human authors. And those human authors.
- Spoke purposefully. To convey. Exactly what they meant. To say. And that means that. We have to approach the Bible. Not. Just as a fully divine book.
- But also. As a fully human book. Now there's no conflict in that. Don't worry about that. There's no more conflict in that. Than there is in seeing. Jesus Christ.
- [34 : 45] As fully divine. And fully human. The Bible is a fully human book. And that means that. We are to study the Bible. Yes. With faith. But also.
- With using all the normal. Human tools. Of analysis. Just as we would. Study any other. Human writing. Because God hasn't made it hard. For us. He's made it easy.
- To know his word. He's used our own words. Our own ways. To talk to us. And we honor him. When we acknowledge that. And when we read the Bible.
- Intelligently. As a coherent message for us. Not as some sort of strange. Mysterious thing. That is there for all sorts of. Fanciful. Interpretations. And secret codes. It's not a Dan Brown.
- Approach to the Bible. If we do that sort of thing. We actually dishonor the Bible. Let me. Let me. Recommend to you. Another of.
- [35 : 41] Christopher Asch's excellent books. Called Hearing the Spirit. Where he. Has a very very helpful chapter. Called Understanding the Bible. Because. It's when we understand the Bible. That we actually do hear. God's Holy Spirit.
- Speaking to us. The Holy Spirit. Is the author of Scripture. If you want to be led. Clearly. By the words of the Spirit. You need to read his words. In Scripture. But he's written it.
- Clearly. For us. So that there's no doubt. When we are hearing. His Spirit's word. It's in the clear words. Of Scripture. And.
- Christopher Asch points out. That because the Bible. Is written for us. In our human speech. It means we need to give. Attention. To three things. When we read. Any portion of Scripture. We need to think about. The language.
- The genre. And the canon of Scripture. Let me put it another way. We need to think clearly. About the kind of words. That are being used. The kind of writing. That it is. And that relationship.
- [36 : 35] To the whole message. Of the Bible. And we've already been talking. About that last one. The whole revelation. Of God as sovereign. The whole. Unfolding of the story. Of salvation. That's what we've been.
- Speaking about. But the kind of words. We read. And the kind of writing. That we're dealing with. In any particular place. In Scripture. Also is a very important. Consideration. Think about the words.
- In the context. Of the words. It's very basic. Isn't it? We need to know. The language. And the idiom. If we're going to understand. The message. We need to know. The context. If you see a shop.
- Walk past a shop. And. They are advertising. P-A-I-N. Then it will depend. A very great deal. Upon when you're seeing. That shop.

Whether you're in the country. Of France. Or the country. Of Britain. One is telling you. They've got bread. Which you might want to buy. The other one. Is they're selling you pain. Which you definitely don't want. It's the same thing.

[37 : 32] If you see a sign. With the letter. With the number 60. And a circle around it. On the road. You need to know. What country you're in. And whether it's talking about. Miles per hour. Or kilometers per hour.

If you're going to be able. To drive within. The limits. The context. Gives you a very great deal. About the meaning. Doesn't it? Similarly. If somebody says. Forty love.

There's a very big difference. In meaning. Depending on. Whether that's. An answer to a question. How old are you? Forty love. Forty one next birthday. Whether somebody's asking.

What's the score. In a tennis match. Forty love. Very different. We do it instinctively. Don't we? There's a very big difference. If you're talking about. Bowling a maiden over. Where the context.

Is a love story. Or a game of cricket. Sometimes the word order. Can help there. Because bowling a maiden over. Is very different. From bowling over a maiden. But. If you see that.

[38 : 26] In the context. Of a story. Or a cricket match. You know the difference. Don't you? You see. When we use words. We assume. A very great deal. Of meaning. And we assume.

That that meaning. Will be obvious. In the context. But that can be difficult. Sometimes. If. If. We're in a second language. For example. If we don't grasp the idiom. That's why we need. Bible translators.

That's why translations. Differ and vary. Because they're trying to help us. To understand the idiom. And the context. Christ. And so we don't make mistakes. That's why Bible scholars. And commentaries. Can be helpful. In that regard.

And Bible words. Have Bible meanings. The usage. And the context. Will tell us. What those words mean. In the Bible. To believe. Never.

Ever. Ever. Means. To try and conjure up faith. In something. For which there's no evidence. As so many people. Often use. That word. Oh. It's just your belief. Is that it's based on no evidence.

[39 : 22] In the Bible. The word believe. Always means. To trust and obey. God's clear. Trustworthy revelation. About him. On the basis of evidence.

The opposite. Of to believe. In the Bible. Unbelief. Is the irrational thing. Is the foolish thing. Is the leaping into the dark. So the context of the words.

Is very very important for us. As also. Is the convention. Of the writing. That's what we sometimes call. The genre of a text. We need to know. What kind of thing. We're reading. Whether it's a letter.

Whether it's a poem. Whether it's a proverb. Whether it's a story. Whatever it is. Now we do that naturally. In life. Don't we? You don't read. The Beano comic. Comic.

And expect. To read the same sort of things. As you'll find. In The Economist. You don't pick up. The Sun newspaper. And expect it to be. Exactly the same. As the Financial Times. You use the context.

[40 : 19] You understand. The kind of headlines. There's a big difference. Between reading. A Jeffrey Archer novel. And reading. The Oxford English Dictionary. Although there was. The Irishman.

Who said. Of the Oxford English Dictionary. I didn't think. Much of the story. But at least. It did explain. The words. As you went along. But that's not really. The right way. To read the dictionary. Is it? But it's surprising.

How often. People. Don't pay attention. To the convention. Of the writing. When we're reading. The Bible. If you. Don't do that.

You'll get into. All sorts of trouble. If you take. The words. Of Job's comforters. Exactly. The same way. As you take. Jesus words. Well. You're going to get. Into difficulty. If you read.

The Song of Songs. And you see. That it's full of. Language. About plants. And trees. And think. It's a gardening man. Well. You're really. Going to get it wrong. So. We need to approach. Any text.

[41 : 13] Of the Bible. Asking. Sensible. Human questions. About the human. Written form. What does it. Actually say. That's the most. Important question. It's amazing. How often.

We just assume. It says. What we thought. It said. Why is it. Actually written. Here. At this point. Why is the writer. Saying this here. At this point. In the letter.

And not before now. Or. The big question. Well. What is this. Whole book of the Bible. Really all about. What's. What's its main focus. If it's one of Paul's letters. For example.

What does he keep going on about. What's the argument. Why is it. Often. There's a very clear theme. That. Once. We get to see that. That once we see. How it runs through.

A whole portion of scripture. Well. It all begins to make sense. We sometimes call it. At Cornhill. The melodic line. It's like a bit of music. Where you have a constantly. Repeating theme. Once you get that. In your head. You begin to understand it.

[42 : 07] So Luke and Acts. That we've read. For example. We need to know. First of all. It's two parts. Of Luke's message. That's very important. Because. The first four verses. Of Luke's gospel. Sets.

The pace. And the tone. For the whole thing. All the way through. He says. Right at the beginning. That what he's giving us. Is. First hand evidence. Eyewitness. Evidence. From servants of the word.

Those who have served. The gospel. Since the very beginning. So that you can be certain. That everything. That you believed. Is true. And then Luke's gospel.

He tells us. What Jesus. Began to do. And teach. Through his powerful words. And then in the book of Acts. We see that very same work. Of that very same word. Going on.

To completion. The word of God. Continued to grow. And to increase. Is the little snippet. You get all the way through. Luke's. Acts of the apostles. What Jesus began. He is. Completing.

[43 : 01] And he will complete. In his kingdom forever. You can be certain. Same in John's gospel. At the end. In chapter 20. He gives us. His melodic line.

He says. Everything I've written here. Is these signs. There are millions of them. But I've selected these. This evidence. Of Jesus' work. So that you may believe. And find life.

In his name. And so all through John's gospel. You'll find that same pattern. John giving us evidence. Testimony about Jesus. Which leads to belief. Or unbelief.

Which leads to life. Or if it's rejected to loss. Evidence. Faith. And life. That's the theme tune. Of John's gospel. Well there's lots more.

That we could say about this. But we've run out of time. But come to. Release the word. Come to your growth groups. That's what we're doing. In these things. That's our focus. Helping one another. To become.

[43 : 56] Unashamed workmen. Who rightly handle. The word of truth. Not mishandling the bible. And to do that. We need to be clear. About how the bible is.

A coherent. Revelation. It teaches us. The whole truth. About God our sovereign. And everything that means. For life. Teaches us the whole story.

The story of salvation. That comes to a climax. In Christ. And it does so. Wholly. In our speech. Using our human words. And our conventions.

Of writing. So that everything. That God has revealed. May be ours. And our children's. Forever. So that we can know. So that we can do. All that God wants us to do.

By way of response. In loving him. With all our heart. And soul. And mind. And strength. Through the gospel. Of Jesus Christ his son. So friends. Let us. Be determined.

[44 : 52] To help one another. As brothers and sisters. In Christ. Never to be those. Who demean scripture. Not to treat it. With contempt. By reading it.

Just by. By chance inquiry. But rather. To be people. Who honor it. Who take it seriously. As a coherent whole. And who study.

Therefore. The whole word of God. So that we can. Rightly apply it. To the whole wide world. Well let's pray together. Our father.

We thank you. That you have given us. Words. Of clarity. Words of truth. And words of coherence. A whole. That tells us.

All of you. For all. That we will ever need. For life. And godliness. We thank you. Lord. For the great story. That has come to its climax.

[45 : 45] In Jesus Christ. Your son. Who died. And who rose again. And who is seated. At the right hand. Of the majesty on high. And we thank you. Lord. That you have given us.

Words that we can understand. Words that we can treasure. Words that will go on. Teaching us. More. More. About Jesus. All the days of our lives. To help us.

To help one another. To treasure. This book. The word of God. Written. Through Jesus Christ. Our Lord. Amen.

Amen. Amen.