

Why Can Scripture Be Understood?

Understanding Scripture

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We're here tonight to begin a study that we've titled "Understanding Scripture: Using God's Gifts to Understand God's Word," and the book of Acts describes an evangelistic encounter that Philip had with an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading the book of Isaiah and there a brief dialog gives us a framework to think about and to condition our minds for what we want to study here this evening. Philip asked this eunuch who was a court official for the Ethiopian queen, he was a high ranking man, and he walked up to him and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And you know what the eunuch replied. His words expressed a sense of hunger, "Well, how could I unless someone guides me?" So Philip realized that not everybody who opens a scroll, opens a book of the Bible will necessarily understand it and the Ethiopian eunuch acknowledged a sense of need that, "I need some help here. Help me out to understand what this says that I am reading." And the Scripture goes on and says that that's exactly what Philip did and the Ethiopian eunuch came to Christ and was soon thereafter baptized.

Well, that conversation frames what we want to consider this weekend and I want to kind of dispel any kind of sense that you may have, anyone in our congregation, anyone listening over the internet or in subsequent media, that the Bible is too difficult of a book to understand. That it's too old and there are conflicting opinions and, "How am I going to know what it really means." After we're done with this weekend, we're going to see that that's not true. That that's utterly false and, in fact, that that objection is sometimes offered by people simply as an excuse not to study Scripture at all. I don't believe that to be true of any of you, but our opponents, those who reject Christianity, would mock the Bible or make it something that is so far removed from everyday life that it cannot possibly be understood and therefore why even give the effort to try to do so. Well, we reject all of that. What we believe and what we're going to see tonight very plainly from Scripture is that God has given us a book that can be understood. Not only can it be understood, the whole reason that God gave it was so that it would be understood. What does it say about the love of God and his purposes for redeeming men and women like you and me if we say that he gave us a book that was incomprehensible? That only scholars and experts could understand? That would be a severe blow against the love of God. It would be to accuse him of catering to an elite and leaving the rest of us out of the blessing.

Well listen, beloved, we've been around and we've been together long enough that you know that's not true. You know that God is a God of grace and mercy and as we saw when we were studying the crucifixion just a couple of weeks ago, that God gives this book, not to those who are proud and boastful but he gives it to the humble. He gives it to common people to understand. The New Testament was written in what's called the Koine Greek, "Koine" being the Greek word for "common." It was written in the language of the common man on the street of the first century and all of these things pointing us into the direction, here's the thing, of an expectation that we can come to the Bible and be able to understand its basic teachings.

We make certain presuppositions, we make certain assumptions in what we do here at Truth Community Church that you may not even think about but the very fact that a pastor stands up and opens a Bible and teaches it to people whoever comes in through the door, is based on the assumption that the Bible can be understood and that the people that are in the audience can understand it when it's explained. The principle of the ability to understand the Scripture and that Scripture can be understood is central. It is the fundamental premise of everything we do at Truth Community Church and as I look out on you that are here tonight, I know that every one of you, by God's grace, have the ability to understand God's word. You can open it and read it and understand it for yourself and it's essential for us to do that because to understand Scripture is to understand the mind of God; to understand the mind of the one who existed before time began. There was never a time where he did not exist. The one who, by his power, spoke the worlds and the universe into existence. The one who conceived of a plan of salvation and included you in it. The one who has the power to work all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. The one who causes all things to work according to the counsel of his will. That great God is the one who gave us the Bible and what he has given us is a book that we can understand.

What a privilege. What an opportunity. What a blessing for God to give us a book that reveals his mind in language that we can understand. It's incredible and yet apart from Scripture, think about where we would be without Scripture, we would be doomed. We would be so lost in darkness. So doomed for eternal destruction. And yet if we understand Scripture, we know the way of eternal life and we know and we can know whether we belong to Christ or not. You can know these things. God intends for you to know. 1 John 5:13 says, "These things I have written to you who so that you may know that you have eternal life." Well, the whole premise of everything is that you can understand. The fundamental presupposition is that God has communicated with us in writing in a way that can be understood.

Now, that kind of sets the framework for this question, kind of looking at it from the opposite perspective, I guess: how can you understand Scripture if you're not a scholar or a pastor or at least a person with a lot of time on your hands? I think about that a lot. I know that most of you work busy schedules and you don't have a lot of free time for a lot of extra reading. I understand that and I have designed the the things that we have to say here tonight, this weekend, with those things in mind and what we want to do here, there are 2 things: we want to be really practical on the back end and give you some really

basic things that you can do and resources that you can take advantage of and kind of launch into it if you're someone who doesn't make a pattern of reading Scripture regularly. We're going to be able to change that. But tonight and in the first message tomorrow morning, we really need to lay a biblical basis so that you can understand that to understand Scripture is not only possible, it is the expectation for believers. It is the promise of God to you as a Christian, that you can understand his word. Well, I want you to see tonight why that is the case. What we're laying here tonight, lays forth the entire possibility. It helps us know why it is that Scripture can be understood and we need to start at that point.

Let me just say this: our goal here this weekend is not to fire you up with a bunch of rah rah stuff only so you can fizzle out in a week or 2 and we forget that we ever had this conversation, that we ever discussed these things. I guess I've just been around long enough where the rah rah stuff and setting impossible goals for people to meet just because we're revved up around a topic, that's not even appealing to me. What I want to do here this weekend is to give you something that can last you a lifetime. That the principles that we're going to look at here lay a foundation that you can use for the rest of your life and that you can come back to again and again and have them fuel your desire and fuel your motivation that to seek God in this book is a worthwhile endeavor and not only is it worthwhile, it is something that he will bless and answer and respond to as you do. For you young men that are in the audience, boy, what an opportunity for you to be on the front end of life and to contemplate giving your life over to the word of God and to just devote yourself to serving God's people by serving this word. Wouldn't that be a great way to spend your life?

Well, what we have ahead are 4 very different studies. That's all by way of introduction. What I want to do is put some pieces in place. Very distinct, different pieces in place by tomorrow afternoon so that the whole picture comes together in your mind and so these messages are going to be stand alone and distinct but they are very much related to each other. Tonight, we're going to answer the question: why can Scripture be understood? That's the title of tonight's message. We're going to answer 4 questions this weekend and tonight's question that we want to answer is: why can Scripture be understood? Stated differently: how can you know as a Christian that you have the capacity to understand the Bible? Better stated: how can you know that the Bible was intended to be understood? That's what we want to look at tonight and what we're going to see, the answer to that question, why can Scripture be understood? It's simple, it is a simple, fundamental answer. Why can Scripture be understood? Scripture can be understood because God has given us a clear book in the Bible. He intends for it to be understood.

Now, tomorrow morning, we're going to see what kind of person can understand the Bible. It's not that every sinful rebel who has no desire for God in his heart can open up the Bible and understand it. That's not the case. What kind of person is it that this book is opened up to? We want to see that tomorrow morning and also to give you some interpretive principles to help you understand the Bible for yourself. That will be our third message. Then our last session, tomorrow afternoon after that lunchtime fellowship that we're going to have. Bring your own food because otherwise you'll be hungry. Our

last session will give you practical tools to establish you for a lifetime of understanding God's word. So that's the layout. How can we know? Why can the Bible be understood? What person or who can understand the Bible? How shall we interpret the Bible? And then the final question that we'll answer is: how can we begin to understand God's word? Where do we go from here, in other words? But the basic principle of this weekend is this: the Bible can be understood. God's word can be known because God designed it that way.

Now, let me give you a technical term, one of my favorite words in all of theology. One of the basic truths about the Bible is what is sometimes called by theologians it's perspicuity. Perspicuity. Isn't that a lovely word to say? It's like it keeps on going and then there's that smooth sound at the end, cuity. Perspicuity. What that means is that the Bible is clear. Perspicuity is another word for the clarity of Scripture. The clarity of Scripture is what we're talking about here tonight. Why can the Bible be understood? It's because of its clarity and what this means is, what the doctrine of perspicuity teaches is this: the Bible's main teachings are sufficiently clear to be understood without special expertise or church sanctioned interpretations. We absolutely reject the mindset of the Catholic Church that interpretation is reserved to a college of bishops and whatever they decide in their cloistered bathrobes as they wear them out. We reject that. We mock that. We say that that's not true because that mindset takes the Bible and closes it from people like you and me and puts it on a shelf where it is no longer accessible to us. We reject that. We would spill our blood over that principle that the Scripture is clear and can be understood by regular common people without any special expertise. Absolutely.

Why do we say that? Well, the Bible claims that clarity for itself. Look at Psalm 19:7. We're looking at the perspicuity of Scripture, the clarity of Scripture. Its main teachings are sufficiently clear so that they can be understood without special expertise. People just like you and me can understand the Bible if we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. And why do we believe that? Because the Bible claims that for itself. Look at Psalm 19:7 where it says, "The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple." Isn't that like the greatest verse that you anyone could ever know? You know, say you're just a common laborer or you're a housewife with barely a high school education and there is nothing wrong with that, I'm just trying to pick something that is very common. Those with no expertise. No training. No special education whatsoever. And to realize that the most precious thing in the universe is within your grasp. How gracious of God to give a book like that?

He says, David says as he writes Psalm 19, "The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple." Who is this simple man that he alludes to? The simple man, someone prone to making mistakes. Someone that is perhaps easily deceived. Someone who can be led away by himself because he's just a sheep. And what does Scriptures say? It says even a man like that, even a woman like that in the simplest way and easily confused, maybe that's a better way to say it. Even someone that is otherwise easily confused can come to the Scriptures and the Bible will make them wise. Will give them insight. Will give them understanding. Do you know why someone like that can read and gain wisdom? Do you know why that is possible? It can't be because of human ability because the presupposition of that verse is that we are talking about someone who is simple and easily deceived. No, it's about something that is intrinsic in the very character of Scripture itself. It is clear and it has the power and the capacity to change that person from someone simple into someone with a mature understanding of spiritual truth. Praise God! Hallelujah for a book like that!

So, beloved, the Bible is not surrounded in an impenetrable fog and you need special fog lights to try to get a little bit of clarity and vision going forward. It's not like that. A humble Christian can read the Bible, understand its primary teachings and grow spiritually. Every one of you in here tonight that belong to Christ, this is for you whether you're a new Christian, a young chronologically young Christian, whether you've got a great mind or you're a fairly simple kind of person, Scripture comes and meets you there and promises you that it will develop you spiritually if you just open it up and pay attention to what it says. Awesome, tremendous gift from God.

What we're going to do is we're going to prove this through 4 lines of scriptural testimony. There are certain things that are embedded in Scripture about the Bible that are absolutely premised on this principle of its clarity and I just want to walk you through 4 simple lines of testimony to help you see this because it's just utterly undeniable. First of all, I want to take you to the Old Testament and see the testimony of the Old Testament. The testimony of the Old Testament. That's our first point here this evening. God told the people of Israel to teach his word to their families. Look at Deuteronomy 6 in a very familiar passage. Deuteronomy 6:6, God told the people of Israel, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." In the common, ordinary activity of daily life, God says, talk about my word. Talk about it with your sons. Talk about it with your children. Families with children at their knees, dads with their arms around their little girl, have in the Bible a book that they can talk about. The whole point of this is that even those children can understand what is being said. The New Testament confirms that, that families with children at their knees can impart Scripture to them during daily life. Children, without a high school education. Children, without a college degree. Children, who don't know Greek and Hebrew and all kinds of theology. If a mom and dad can go to tender young minds like that and discuss Scripture in a way that the children benefit from it, understand it and appropriate it.

Well, how can that be? I'll tell you how it can be: it's because Scripture is that clear. Scripture is that precious. Scripture is that available. And the New Testament confirms it. Look at 2 Timothy 3. I know I'm going to the New Testament to prove an Old Testament point but that's okay. 2 Timothy 3:15, actually we'll go to verse 14. Paul, writing to Timothy, his protégé, the next in line to continue on the ministry not as an apostle but as him who would continue in the spirit of the Apostle Paul, Paul writes to him. These are some of Paul's closing final words that we have. Paul would die soon after finishing this letter to Timothy and it's just so precious. He says, "You, however," speaking to Timothy, "You continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Timothy, as a child, would have had the Old Testament in front of him, that's the point, and his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois sat him down and as they were going about daily life, they obviously talked with Timothy about the Scriptures to such an extent that Paul says, "Timothy, from childhood you have known the Scriptures that lead to saving faith in Jesus Christ. That as a young child, it was plain to you, Timothy. You have been convinced of these things all of your life. Don't abandon them now because things have gotten difficult." The simple point for our purposes here this evening is that Scripture again and again says children can understand this word.

It's humbling to the boastful man of the world to think that the most important thing in the universe can be understood by a child, but it's also that which holds out promise to us. It holds out promise to us that this book can be understood. If a child can understand it, then certainly you as a believer with an adult mind can understand it as well, right? There is no barrier. The Bible is not a Gnostic book of secret knowledge that is hidden behind the back, that only a few secret people get initiated into. All of those secret societies, we reject that because Christ came to manifest himself to the world. God gave a book that was open, not to the noble, but to the common man, and so we love him for that.

What else could we see from the Old Testament that would reinforce this idea of the perspicuity of Scripture? The clarity of Scripture? Well, look at the very first Psalm, Psalm 1. This great Psalm which introduces the whole rest of the entire Psalter, the hymn book of the nation of Israel, precious to Christians today, how does it open? It opens with this pronouncement of blessing. Verse 1, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of

scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers." Beloved, watch this, this introductory Psalm, Psalm 1, sitting at the head of one of the greatest books in the Bible if you could compare them that way, it starts with this premise. It starts with this assurance that the one who simply meditates in God's word will see profitable blessing come into his life as a result simply because he reads it; he thinks on it; he applies it to his life; he separates himself from the wicked way of sinners and says, "My mind will be given over to this word. My life will be given over to following it in what it says." And Scripture says, "Blessing upon that man," and does so in a way that is unrestricted. It's open and available to all. Do you realize that most of you have on your lap a book that will make you wise? A book that is making you wise? A gift from God that is within your capacity to understand?

Scripture tells us something else in the Old Testament and I love these verses that we're about to look at because it makes it so plain, so evident that the Bible, the word of God, is not like an exclusive club for scholars and experts. Look at Psalm 119:99-100. Young people, look at these verses and take them to heart. Realize the vast enormous potential that is laid out before you in God's word. The writer of this Psalm could say in verse 98, "Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Your precepts." It almost sounds boastful but that's not the spirit. He's not exalting himself here, he's exalting the magnitude and the power of the word of God to make wise and to give understanding to the one who simply gives his mind over to it so much so that his teachers had nothing on him by way of insight. That those who were chronologically advanced were not superior in their understanding because they had not given themselves to God's word like the writer of this Psalm had. "More insight than all my teachers. Understanding more than the aged." Why? "Because your testimonies are my meditation. Because I have observed your precepts."

Look, look, God's word is the most precious thing in the universe and Scripture is telling us that it's available to you and me. In the words of the hymn, "Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life I'll sow." If I can have God's word and I can understand it and I can, then the most precious thing is within my grasp. The teaching of the word of God is clear. It can be understood. That is the testimony of the Old Testament.

Now, secondly, and by the way, we are just laying this out. Let me just re-emphasize: this isn't for me as the pastor. This isn't just for Dan and Dane as the elders. This is for you. This is for you, the new Christian. The busy mom. The busy man in the workplace. There is room for you. This belongs to you as well. It's the teaching of the Old Testament. Secondly, I want you to see the testimony of Jesus. The testimony of Jesus. You know, the manner of Jesus' interaction with his opponents presupposes the clarity of Scripture. As you read through the Gospels, you see that he gave them no excuse for their ignorance.

Look at Matthew 12. There are a lot of passages we could look at on this, I'm just going to touch on a couple of brief ones. Matthew 12, beginning in verse 1 says, "At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, 'Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.' But He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?'" Twice he says, "Haven't you read the Scripture?" He's not making an esoteric argument to respond to their complaints. He says, "You would not have this difficulty if you simply read the Bible because the Bible is clear on these points which you are objecting on. Haven't you read it? If you would read it, you would see it because it's clear. Your ignorance is therefore culpable." They had no excuse for their ignorance because the Bible could have been read and could have been understood.

Look at one more, Matthew 22:23. I hadn't planned to start this far back but it's okay. Matthew 22:23, "On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him." They were smart alecks. They wanted to set him up with a hypothetical to make the Bible look ridiculous and therefore to make Christ look ridiculous in support of their false doctrine denying the resurrection. So in verse 24,

they said, "Teacher, Moses said, "If a man dies having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up children for his brother." Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh." Lord, you can see where we're going with this one, can't you? "Last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her," the word "married" being supplied there. "They all had married her so what's going to happen if there is a resurrection and there is one woman and seven man that she has been married to? What are you going to do with that?" What did Jesus do? Jesus answered, verse 29, "But Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.'" He says, "Your false understanding is so easily refuted by the clarity of Scripture. You say there is no resurrection? All you have to do is to read about what God said to Moses." He used the present tense when he said, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." He said that to Moses after these men had been dead for several hundred years. Jesus said, "If you had just paid attention to the fact that the present tense is used there, you would understand that they are alive and in the presence of God." It's clear, Sadducees. Verse 33, "When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching." Jesus said, "The teaching is right there. All you have to do is read it."

Thirdly, I'm going to take you to the testimony of the apostles and this point will help you understand a bit about why we do what we do at Truth Community Church. The testimony of the apostles. The epistles, Romans through Jude, were written to congregations or individuals and when they were written to congregations, they were written to a mixed audience. There were men and women in the audience. There were Jews and Gentiles with completely different backgrounds. There were young people like we have with us tonight. There were old people like we have tonight. I was very careful with where I let my eyes go when I said the word "old" because I didn't want to offend anyone with an awkward look. "Why are you looking at me when you say 'old,' pastor?"

Do you know what? When they wrote to these mixed audiences, the apostles wrote a single letter. They wrote one letter that was applicable to the entire church. This is simple but profound: the same letter was given to all. One opening of one letter will be our example. Look at 1 Corinthians 1, writing to the church at Corinth which was a very messed up church. 1 Corinthians 1:1, "Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother," so he identified himself in the letter writing custom of the day. They started by saying who they were as they wrote. "I'm Paul, writing as an apostle, as one sent by the Lord Jesus Christ." And who is he writing to? Verse 2, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." He writes a letter that is for everyone in the church. Everyone who believes was the target of this letter. One letter, clear, authoritative, decisive, for everyone that was in that audience. Do you know what? This may make you laugh when you consider what the publishing world has wreaked on Christianity in the past 50 years. Do you know what? The church of Corinth, they did not need a special youth epistle. They did not need a special letter with women's study notes that were specifically designed for them in their womanness. They didn't need to corner off the youth and say, "Here's a dumbed down version of 1 Corinthians." The whole letter was for the whole body, intended to be read with everyone gathered together. Paul wrote to all the saints in every place.

Here's the point, beloved: a cross section of humanity receives God's word profitably when they receive it with believing hearts. Do you know why we're eager to have children in our services? It's because the Bible is clear and they can understand it. They can pay attention and we believe that in the preaching of the word of God, the Spirit helps even the youngest and perhaps even especially the weakest ones to give them something profitable from the teaching of God's word. That's why we do that in part. In part, it's because we honor the clarity and the perspicuity of God's word as we do it. It's clear enough even for children and, of course, it would be. When Jesus was here on the earth, what did he say to the children? "Don't hinder them from coming to me." He rebuked his disciples and said, "Let them come to me."

I can't tell you how many times I have had little kids come up to me and comment on something that I said in the sermon which told me they were getting it. It's really cool to see. I had one kid say, it was reported to me, he didn't say it directly to me, "Why is Pastor Don yelling at us? Well, I don't know what that means." Now the adults are saying, "Yeah, why does he? I don't get that." I remember one time, I don't even remember the context of which I said it, some of you might, but I made an offhand reference to saying, "I don't know the difference between a hammer and a screwdriver," and I'm speaking to an audience just like this with little kids in the audience. Do you know what happened when I stepped down? I walk down these steps right here and I had a half dozen kids surrounding me saying, "Pastor Don, I can tell you the difference." True story.

The point being, the point being that they hear and they understand and they comprehend it. I'm just talking about the little illustrations there. I get that, but they can grasp it. They can grasp alongside their parents the hearing of the word of God. Why would we separate them out and deny that blessing to them? Why would we do that? That makes no sense at all. Why not say, "Do you know what? We want to cultivate Timothys here," who they hear it from childhood so that 20 years from now someone can say to them, "You have known this from childhood. You have heard this from the very beginning."

One last story. I wasn't preaching this time but this is one of my favorite stories about a kid in a worship service. One of our children, who shall remain nameless, maybe I have told this story. It is one great story. We were at Grace Community Church and the great John MacArthur was preaching and he was talking about children and we had a 2, 3-year-old, we had a 3-year-old, let's say, sitting next to us, my own flesh and blood, and John MacArthur said something about children and he said, "Children are stubborn," in the context of whatever else it was he was saying. That little one sitting next to me perked up and said, "He said I'm stubborn! I'm not listening anymore!" Put her hands over her ears. Pressed them against her ears so that she would not have to hear that. It's hard to say, "Darling, you just made his point."

But children can understand. Children know what God's word is saying. Why? Because it's clear and not just because it's clear, because the Holy Spirit is at work when God's word is preached and is opening up minds for understanding and he is strong enough and powerful enough that he can do that without regard to age. He's not limited so that until they get to high school or junior high it's useless to have them in the service. That's just not true because God's word is clear.

Look at one more testimony from the apostles in a completely different manner. 2 Peter 1:19. You see, beloved, we're on ground here tonight, this is ground that we have to defend. This is ground that the church of Jesus Christ must protect, the clarity of Scripture. Everything else flows from that and Peter said in chapter 1, verse 19 of his second epistle, he said, "We have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention," why would you pay attention? Because you can understand it. "Pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts." Pay attention to the word. It's like a lamp shining in a dark place. It brings light. It brings clarity. It brings understanding. That's what the word does because it is intrinsically clear. Those who know Christ by faith, they get understanding from God's word. That's the testimony of the Old Testament. It's the testimony of Jesus. It's the testimony of the apostles. Scripture is united in its testimony across all manner of genres of literature, testifying, affirming to its clarity.

Now fourthly, this is the last thing for this evening. Why do we know that Scripture is clear? Number 4: it's by the command for discernment. The command for discernment. The New Testament calls common Christians to discernment so that they will not be misled. Look at Matthew 7 where Jesus said toward the end of his Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7 in verses 15 and 16. Jesus speaking to a crowd with a cross-section, again, of humanity in front of him as he taught this Sermon on the Mount in a single time and a single place, not patched together later by a subsequent editor. This is what Jesus said in one place and what did he say to that crowd that was gathered at his feet? He told them, told them all, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit." And so on. He says in verse 20, "You will know them by their fruits."

How could he say that to a crowd of young and old men and women with all manner of different levels of intelligence? How could he tell them all without discriminating, without discrimination or distinction say, "All of you without distinction, you be on guard against wolves in sheep's clothing. You be on guard against false teachers"? How could he do that without giving them something that was impossible to do unless it was actually possible based on his teaching to be able to make the distinction? Unless the content of what he was saying was available and clear for even the simple to understand?

The epistles repeat commands like this. The Apostle John in 1 John 4, you don't need to turn there, said, "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God because many false prophets have gone out into the world." You know, beloved, the fact that there are competing opinions about what Scripture means on some of its teachings, the fact that men try to confuse it, does not diminish the reality of what we're saying here. It testifies to the fact that there is a spiritual battle, that Satan has his minions trying to create smoke and confusion, that there are profit mongering mongrels who want to contradict God's word so that they can get money from you, but that doesn't mean anything about the clarity of Scripture. That doesn't mean that you should close your Bible and walk away and say, "Who can understand these things?" No, no, not at all. God's word invites you. The Lord Jesus Christ commands you, "Come to my word. Read it. Understand it and you will be able to distinguish the true from the false." The power that is embedded in this word to impart understanding to our minds so that we can know what is true. Why is discernment attainable? Because Scripture is clear and intelligible. Because it can be understood. God did not hide his lamp under a table. He expressed it clearly so that we can know him and know what he requires.

Now, just to make sure we don't overstate things here. Some Scripture is difficult. Even the Apostle Peter said that Paul's letters have some things that are hard to understand. That's one of the great verses that demolish the Catholic papacy. Peter was supposedly their first Pope and he looks at Paul's letters and says, "I don't know. Some of this is really kind of tough for me." So some, not all parts are equally accessible. There are some things that are difficult. Scripture itself acknowledges that. Not all things are equally clear but the point of the doctrine of perspicuity is this: the overall content, the main thrust of Scripture is clear, particularly the revelation that tells us what salvation is and what the conditions of salvation are. They are clear. There are obvious. They are evident. You can know them as a child.

RC Sproul says and I quote, "The Bible is basically clear and lucid. Laymen, unskilled in the ancient languages and the fine points of exegesis, may have difficulty with parts of Scripture but the essential content is clear enough to be understood easily." William Tyndale translated the Scriptures because he wanted plow boys to read and understand it. He knew. He believed in the perspicuity of Scripture. He said, "If they just have it in their own language, boys behind a plow in a field can understand it." He gave his neck for that belief, didn't he? William Tyndale was convinced of the Bible's clarity for common people and so am I. So is this church. That's why we do what we do.

Beloved, you should be so encouraged, so motivated to want to know God's word because God has revealed himself in the Scriptures in a clear way that you can understand. You can grasp it. Why can Scripture be understood? Because it's clear and as a child of God, that should motivate you to read it. To hunger after it with – watch this – hunger after it with – are you watching – motivated because of – are you ready – motivated with a confident expectation that it will help you grow in your salvation. It's not a closed book locked with a key to you as a Christian. You can open it and say, "Ah, this is clear. I get it and my life is changing as I understand and appropriate this word for myself." God's word is clear. That's why we teach it. That's what you should read it.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Yes, Father, as the psalmist said, give us understanding so that we may understand your testimony. May you take us from our present level of knowledge to a deeper level of knowledge by the power and help of your Spirit and may you give us confidence in the clarity of this word to believe in its clarity, to believe in its power, to proclaim it, to read it, to understand it, to give our corporate life and our individual lives over to making this clear word known with clarity so that it might accomplish through us all that you desire it to do. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.