



The Triune God

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The Truth of God

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WITH A HOUSE FULL OF KIDS, we read a number of children's books. You may be familiar with some of the classics. We have various favorites; sometimes my wife and I disagree on what are the best ones. She is a big fan of *Goodnight Moon*.

My wife and my two-year-old also like *Good Night, Gorilla*. There's not a lot of dialogue; it's pretty much a gorilla taking the zookeeper's keys, releasing all the animals, following the zookeeper to his house, and climbing in bed. You have to suspend your disbelief and make up things because each page just has a few pictures.

One of the books someone gave us is called *What Is God's Name?*¹ It says on the inside back cover, "Endorsed by Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Buddhist religious leaders," so that makes you a little nervous—it's a multicultural, non-denominational, nonsectarian book. In the book, God creates

1. Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, *What Is God's Name?* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 1999).

the world. All living things have a name, but no one knows the name for God, so people have to make up a name for God themselves: a shepherd calls God *Shepherd*, a nurse calls God *Healer*, and so on. They all think they have the best name for God until one day they come together to kneel by a lake, where they see their own faces and the faces of the people around them reflected in the water. They realize they have all come up with good names for God, so together they call God *One*, and God is pleased.

I had to order an extra copy of this book because I had thrown away the copy that was given to me. Then I thought, “I’m going to use this with some sermons.”

Your first reaction may be, “That book could really use some theology.” But upon closer inspection you realize, no, this little kids’ book is chock-full of theology. Think of some of the theological “truths” that undergird that little story.

The book tells us, for instance, that religion is a process of discovery, not revelation—each person is trying to determine what he thinks God ought to be called, so religion is a journey of finding based upon our own discovery. We see that our knowledge of God cannot escape our own culture, our own needs, our own personality. Each person thinks of God in terms of his own experience and need—whether he needs a shepherd or a father or a mother.

We see too that God is whatever we call him, because he transcends all definition. So the last part says, “And they all called God ‘One,’” which may mean there is only one God, though I doubt that’s what the book is saying. It may mean God is a unifying God. It may mean that God is one with everything and everyone.

The point is, there is a lot of theology packed into this very bad book.

Truth . . . Indispensible to Christianity

Truth is indispensable to Christianity. Paul shows us just how important truth is to the gospel in 2 Timothy 1. In verse 11, Paul calls himself a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher, so his role is not just to be an active listener, one who comes and puts an arm around you and hugs you, but part of it is to communicate something: to preach, to teach. According to verse 12, he is willing to suffer for his message. He is not ashamed. Indeed, he is most likely about to face death; he knows that the time is coming soon and that he is facing his imminent departure because of his stand for the truth of the gospel.

Verse 13 notes that we are to follow a pattern of sound words. Verse 14 describes it as a “good deposit.” So Christianity is fundamentally conservative. By that I simply mean that we believe there is something to be conserved, something to be preserved—there is a truth that is not meant to be reshaped and reimagined and reinvented in each generation, but there is a pattern that you must follow. There is a good deposit. There is an apostolic message that we must embrace and adhere to. Truth is indispensable to Christianity.

I think people actually still believe in truth. You say, “No, they don’t. I meet people all the time who say, ‘You have your truth, and I have my truth, and all truth is relative.’” But I think people actually believe in truth. Think again about *What Is God’s Name?* Its author believes a number of things to be true: she believes that God is one, that God is pleased when the people of the world get along, that God likes to be called Father, Mother, Friend, Shepherd, or whatever else people want to call God. The author believes in truth.

People around you believe in truth; they just may be selective about it. The events concerning former Penn State football coach

Joe Paterno confirm that. I don't want to get into what should have happened or what you should think about JoePa; he is a great hero and still has a wonderful legacy in many ways. But when I listened to sports commentary as the story broke about the events concerning Jerry Sandusky and how the situation was handled, everyone had opinions. People may have disagreed about this, that, and the other thing, but every single person agreed that the allegations of abuse and molestation, if proved true, were a heinous and despicable thing. That was not up for debate with anyone.

Where did all the relativists suddenly go? Where was everyone who says, "Your truth is your truth, and whatever makes you feel good is fine for you"? Suddenly people had very strong opinions about truth and wanted with all their might to see truth upheld. It wasn't enough to merely go by the book; suddenly everyone determined that we have moral responsibilities.

People may say, "There's no such thing as truth" or "I don't believe in absolute truth," but I think we all do. The issue is not so much a matter of philosophy, as in "Is there truth or not?" For your average person in the world, I think the issue is epistemology, the study of how we know what we know. The question isn't whether there is a category of truth; philosophers might debate that, but not normal people. Normal people live their lives believing in right and wrong. You pick anybody's pocket, take the money out of his wallet, steal his iPhone, and suddenly he is a firm believer in truth. Something is wrong.

The question then is "How do we know truth?" Because the world believes there is a God. In the United States most people believe that there is a God, but that we should not speak too confidently about him, her, or it, because no one can fully ascertain the truth about this god or about his, her, or its ways. People think there is a God and that we can be very sure of some

things, but that we cannot be very sure about God because no one can really ascertain his, her, or its ways or what he, she, or it is like.

I want to give you three misconceptions about truth that we must combat and one vital truth that we must remember.

Misconception: Sincerity Is the Measure of Truth

We must combat the misconception that sincerity is the measure of truth. I went to one of our denomination's colleges, a Christian college, but you could find anyone there: evangelicals, liberals, atheists, everyone. It was a time when I grew a lot in my faith, but also—as often happens to college students—there were seasons of doubt and exploration and wondering, “What do I really believe, and how do I know it's really true?”

I would see classmates who said they were Christians, but Christianity didn't seem to matter much to them. Instinctively, without realizing it, I began to believe that what I believed was true and had to be true because I really believed it. A lot of my classmates were surface level in their faith, kind of faking, going through the motions, but I *knew*. I really believed these things of the faith, and I was cutting my teeth on John Calvin and David Wells and Martyn Lloyd-Jones and the Puritans and Reformed people. I knew this was true.

Then I began having conversations with a friend of mine who was Catholic, and lo and behold, she was also very certain and very sincere in what she believed. One time she told me (how's this for an insult masquerading as a compliment?), “You're too smart, Kevin, not to become Catholic someday.” We would have good conversations. It wasn't that any of her arguments for the Pope or indulgences or whatever were particularly challenging.

It wasn't that I thought, "Well, that's an argument I've never heard before." What rattled me a little bit was that she was so sincere. She was very sure. Her beliefs were as important to her as my beliefs were to me. So what did I do with that? I had to realize that sincerity itself cannot be the measure of truth.

What Paul writes in Philippians 1 turns some of our culture's notions of truth on their heads.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. (Phil. 1:15–18)

When I went to college and a number of professors were out-and-out hostile to Christianity, people would often say, "But he's a very nice man. He has students over to his home, and we have sloppy joes together. He's such a nice man. He's so earnest and sincere." But Paul moves in the opposite direction. He says, "I'm here in prison. I know there are some people who preach the gospel who are sincere and really mean it, and then there are some people who just want to get me in trouble, and they're doing it out of rivalry. They want to afflict me in my imprisonment, to draw more attention to me and my gospel." Paul says, "I'm just happy the gospel's getting out."

I know this is not the sort of blueprint for your pastoral search committee, but it does show us something. What matters to us and our culture is, "Well, at least he's really sincere." Paul says, "I know some of them aren't even sincere. I'm just happy objectively that the truth is being told, that the gospel is going out."

So sincerity cannot be the measure of truth. Conveniently in *What Is God's Name?* the author finds a soldier who is tired and calls God *Bringer of Peace*. What if the soldier wasn't tired and called God *Warrior*? That's actually biblical imagery, but it didn't make it into that book. What about the rich man who called God *Money*? What about the sex-crazed man who called God *Prostitute*? Or the racist man who called God *Aryan*? Or the bitter woman who called God *Revenge*? Is God still happy with all the names, or is there a limit? Is it really true that whatever you think God to be, he's happy with it? What is the basis for believing, feeling, and thinking as you do?

It is not enough to just say, "I think it ought to be so." You need more than your own sincere opinions of the truth, and if people would stop to think about it, no one really wants a world where sincerely held beliefs must be true beliefs. September 11, 2001, was a day when many people were acting on their incredibly sincere beliefs about their god. They were very mistaken beliefs too.

Misconception: Humility Entails Uncertainty

In our world, you can believe almost anything you want as long as you don't really believe it—as long as you don't think that what you believe is actually objectively true and that other people ought to recognize it. Religion in our world has become personalized, psychologized, and pragmatized so that religion is what makes you happy, what makes you feel good, what helps you cope in life. As long as you think of religion in those terms, you're okay.

People are always asking, "You Christians, why can't you just accept me for my beliefs? Why do you have to be so exclusive?"

What people are actually asking you to do, though they don't realize it and you may not realize it, is to embrace their worldview and abandon your own. Their worldview says God is not objectively real but helps us cope with life's problems and makes us feel good. They're asking, "Why can't your Jesus be like that?"

You must say in response, "He can't be like that, because my Jesus actually lived, died, and rose again, and he is even now Lord. He's not a territorial Lord; he is Lord over all. He's not just my Lord; he's also your Lord, whether you will acknowledge him or not."

It is said in our day that humility is inconsistent with certainty. This is perhaps one of the reasons why so many of us, especially young people, have forgotten how to speak like, you know, whatever. We have these little verbal hiccups because we're afraid to say, like, something with, like, authority.

A few years ago, I took my kids to see the *Curious George* movie and I thought, "The music here is really fun." It's by an artist named Jack Johnson, who's a Hawaiian with a really chill sort of acoustic sound. I've gotten some of his CDs, and he's fun to listen to. He has a song called "Never Know."² It's a really fun song, and it makes you feel like surfing—until you pay attention to the words. In an interview, Johnson said he was trying to combat this idea that there's one right way to God—people are killing each other over their own metaphors of what God is like, but all any of us have are different expressions for the same thing.

He was very influenced, he said, by the Joseph Campbell book called *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*,³ which was also

2. Jack Johnson, "Never Know," *In Between Dreams*, released March 1, 2005, Brushfire B0004149-02, compact disc.

3. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Bollingen Foundation, 1949).

very influential with George Lucas as he made the *Star Wars* movies. Campbell's book suggested that there's a hero with a thousand faces and that every culture and religion is just retelling the same primeval story with its own metaphors, so you can't really be sure that your version is the correct version. In fact, if you're sure, that sureness probably leads you to fanaticism and killing. Any assurance of religious belief is seen as arrogance; confidence is seen as cockiness.

A century ago, G. K. Chesterton said, "What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed."⁴ He said we are making a race of men too meager to believe in the multiplication tables: "Five times five is twenty-five if that works for you, but you may be different."

I had a philosophy class in college, and we had to do deductive logic and work with symbols. It's very much like math. We would go through our homework in class, and there were right or wrong answers. The professor would say, "No, that's not right," and the philosophy majors would go crazy, saying, "No, no, no. I think this is true." The professor would say, "I know you think it is, and you ain't thinking right about it." It was just mind-boggling that there might be a wrong answer. You can be certain about something and still be humble.

John the Baptist did not call people to a conversation; he called people to repent. The apostles did not go into the Roman world inviting people on a journey of discovery; they told people who Jesus was, what he did, and what his life, atoning death,

4. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 31–32.

and resurrection accomplished. J. Gresham Machen would say that the gospel is historical fact plus theological interpretation—something happened, and here’s what it means. You need to help your neighbors and your churches see that Christianity is irreducibly historical. It isn’t just a way of dealing with life’s problems; we’re declaring something that actually happened in history. Paul did not tell Timothy to dialogue the Word but to preach it.

Of course, every pastor knows there’s a time in ministry when you’re talking with a junior high school student who’s really struggling. When that happens, you don’t put on your best preacher voice and say, “Repent!” Instead you say, “Really? Tell me about it. What’s hard for you?” You ask a lot of questions. We understand that. But there is a time in the ministry of the church, not simply for dialogue or journeying together, but for heralding. That’s what Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:11: “I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher.” *Didaskalos* is the word for teacher. The word for preacher is *kerus*, a herald—a man who will stand in the pulpit and say, “Hear ye, hear ye, I have a message from King Jesus.” That’s what needs to happen on Sunday morning.

When I was candidating at the church where I’m now serving, a literature major working on his PhD came up to me and asked, “If you become the pastor here, are you going to continue with these linear, modernistic, narrow, rigid, antiquated forms of communication? Are you open to more postmodern, dialogical, conversational modes of communication?” I said, “If you mean ‘Are you going to stand up and talk for forty-five minutes and we’ll listen,’ yes, that’s what I’m going to do.” He left, which was probably good for him and good for me.

When we tell the truth to people, we don’t have to say everything. Sometimes we get ourselves in trouble by doing that. Somebody comes up to you and says, “Isn’t it a beautiful

day?” You answer, “You know what? God created this day, and he also chooses and reprobates people.” The person’s stunned: “Where did that come from?” But you’re just getting started. “Have you ever heard of Herman Bavinck? Well, you will now.”

You don’t have to say everything. Say something. Greg Koukl refers to it as putting a stone in someone’s shoe.⁵ That’s what you’re doing: just putting pebbles in people’s shoes so that after they walk away from the conversation with you, while they haven’t changed their minds, they go through the rest of the day saying, “Man, I’ve got something in my shoe”—just an idea, just a thought rattling around that they can’t quite get out.

This certainly does not mean that you must be haughty when you share the truth. I think many people will listen to us even if we say hard things about heaven, hell, sexuality, and so on—they will listen if we show not anger or righteous indignation but brokenheartedness.

Paul went to Athens and was overcome with grief, agitated and distressed to see a city full of idols. But when he went to the statue of an unknown god, he did not say, “Hey, you worship an unknown god. This is going to be easy. I worship an unknown god. I don’t know who he is either.” No, Paul said, “What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). He knew something. He was certain.

This doesn’t mean we can’t be winsome, respectful, wise, or brokenhearted. We can, but along with that we can also be certain. We can do better than to preach our doubts and our questions, though we will all go through seasons of doubts and questions. Luther reminded Erasmus, “The Holy Spirit is no skeptic, and the things He has written in our hearts are not

5. Greg Koukl, “A Stone in His Shoe,” *Stand to Reason*, accessed November 26, 2013, www.str.org/articles/a-stone-in-his-shoe.

doubts or opinions, but assertions—surer and more certain than sense and life itself.”⁶ Humility does not entail uncertainty.

Misconception: All We Have Are Interpretations

We have to combat the notion that all we have are interpretations. We hear this all the time even from other Christians or from people who want to cast aspersions on Christianity. They say that Christians have a Bible and ten thousand different denominations and that no one agrees on anything. All we have are interpretations. Scripture is just a wax nose; you make of it what you want. How can we really know what the truth is?

This is a huge subject and space limitations won’t allow me to unpack all of it. It gets to the issue of the perspicuity of Scripture. *Perspicuity* means clarity. People may not use that language, but that is the doctrine that is under attack in our day.

I did a lengthy review on my blog of a new book by Christian Smith.⁷ Many of us have benefited from Smith’s sociological work; his book *Soul Searching*, which talked about the religious lives of American teenagers, was very helpful to many. He has since become Catholic and has a new book called *The Bible Made Impossible* on what he calls “biblicism.”⁸ He gives a scholarly name to the problem he underlines in that book: “pervasive interpretive pluralism,” which simply means there are many different interpretations. If the Bible is what we say it

6. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), 70.

7. Kevin DeYoung, “Christian Smith Makes the Bible Impossible,” *DeYoung, Restless, and Reformed* (blog), *The Gospel Coalition*, August 2, 2011, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2011/08/02/christian-smith-makes-the-bible-impossible/>.

8. Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2012).

is, how come there are all these books on Five Views of Church Government, and Three Views of Baptism, and Four Views of the End Times? Why can't we agree on what the Bible teaches? That's a huge question.

We might approach the subject of interpretive pluralism in a number of different ways. We might show how disagreement is often less than meets the eye—Christians often do agree on the essential matters. We might establish guidelines for interpreting Scripture. We might test our conclusions against tradition and confessions. We might distinguish between the meaning of Scripture and its significance; for example, someone might preach about the woman at the well in Samaria and make it a message about evangelism, while someone else preaches the same text and makes it a message about how Jesus knows our hearts. Does that mean they disagree on the passage? No, they're giving it a different significance. We need to be careful not to say more than Scripture says. Some of us get into problems because we get into issues God isn't addressing: "God tells you what diet you should be on. He's telling you how to lose weight. You can't eat carbs. No, no, no, eat the fat of the land. God says he wants us to eat Twinkies. That's what he wants for us."

This problem of interpretive pluralism is not a Protestant problem; it's a human problem. If you ever read Catholic writings, you realize they have the same issue, except they're disagreeing not about how to interpret Scripture but about how to interpret encyclicals or papal declarations. It's the same thing. At its heart, this is an issue about the fallibility of the human mind.

Another argument people use against the perspicuity of Scripture is the insistence that human language is too feeble to be an instrument of the divine. Sometimes people who are more sophisticated really stop you in your tracks by saying things like, "You think God can be put in a box? You think God can be

confined to our little puny words that speak about him?” You say, “Wow, I don’t want to put God in a box.”

I once met an anthropology professor at Michigan State whose PhD was on evangelical Bible studies. His current research was on the emerging church, and he knew I had written a book on that subject, so he sought me out. We talked, and he invited me to a lecture he was giving on campus. Picture the scene: a lecture at Michigan State, an anthropology professor, thirty different people—grad students, professors, people from the department who have gathered for this lunchtime seminar at a Big Ten university. In explaining the traditional view of language versus the emergent view of language, he presented audio clips from John Piper and John MacArthur. It was fascinating—discouraging, but fascinating—to be a fly on the wall. Any time either John MacArthur or John Piper shared his view of language, there was audible laughing, scoffing, and disinterest from the audience. There weren’t any believers as far as I could tell, but those present certainly gravitated more toward the emergent view that language is incapable of communicating truth.

The professor didn’t come to any conclusions, but I thought he did describe a problem that has opened a fissure in some parts of Christianity. What is human language? John Piper and John MacArthur were saying that language is a gift of God by which he communicates to us. The others were saying, “No, language is so imperfect and frail that it can never really communicate to us the things of God.”

I would argue, not surprisingly, for the former: God gives us language as a gift. Think about it. God’s speaking is even prior to our human speaking. He said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. He spoke, and light came into existence. God shows himself to be a speaking God, and he imparts to us this

same ability. Part of being made in the image of God is that we can communicate with human language.

Do you remember how, in Exodus 4, Moses says, “I can’t speak, and I can’t go to the people”? God says, “I’m going to give you the words to say.” Moses says, “No, I still can’t do it. I’m no good. I stammer and lisp.” Then God says, “I’ll give you what to say, then you’ll say it to Aaron, and then Aaron will speak my words to the people.” At one point God says, “And you shall be as God to him” (v. 16). There’s a transfer. God will speak his words to Moses, Moses will speak his words to Aaron, Aaron will speak Moses’ words to the people, and those words will be from God, because God gives us the gift of human language and he can communicate his truth in it.

Think about how Jesus uses the Bible. It’s always a good idea to have the same view of Scripture that Jesus had. He believed the Old Testament was understandable and accessible, so he claimed he was fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. He referred to the Old Testament as evidence for the truthfulness of his teaching. At other times, he chided the Jewish leaders for not understanding the Old Testament. Jesus could do that only if he worked with the assumption that there is an understandable meaning in the text that he recognized and that you should recognize. The apostles approached the Old Testament in the same way.

A few years ago I was participating in a panel discussion, back when the emerging church was really a big deal. Someone came up to me afterward and was very agitated, throwing out accusations like, “You’re a Cartesian, and you worship at the throne of Descartes.” I’m thinking, “Man, I don’t even remember who you’re talking about here.” He was saying I was bound to reason, so I tried to explain. I quoted some Scripture. I said, “Paul reasoned in the hall of Tyrannus and in the synagogue. Reason is not a bad thing.” Immediately he stopped me: “No!

You're just using the Bible as a trump card." I said, "Yes. That's what it's for." I was getting agitated and upset because he kept pushing back, and anytime I'd use Scripture, he'd say, "That's *your* interpretation of Scripture. You can't use the Bible. That's a trump card." I finally said, "Brother, then we've got nothing left. We can't even have a meaningful conversation."

You see Paul constantly making reference to the Old Testament, arguing that it has a meaning, that it has a shared set of values and interpretive borders. Even though we are centuries removed from the original text, there is still a meaning. When the book of the law was rediscovered in Josiah's day and the people read it, they understood it and knew what to do. Ezra read the book of the law to the exiles who returned to Jerusalem. It says in Nehemiah that the priests gave the meaning of the text so people could understand it (Neh. 8:8). The text was written years earlier, yet the leaders gave the meaning of it. The Bible doesn't say, "They gave an interpretation, all they had were interpretations, and there were many other interpretations." No, they gave the meaning of it, to which the people must respond, repent, and obey.

None of this is to suggest that the Bible is equally clear in all its parts. No Reformed confession, in talking about the clarity of Scripture, has ever said that. There are things that are hard to understand. Peter wrote that some things in Paul's writings are hard to understand. You get to that and say, "Thank you, Peter. There *are* some things in Paul that are hard to understand." But as you read on, Peter says, "There are some things in [Paul's letters] that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16). Peter is recognizing that it's not a free-for-all. Paul's writings are hard to understand, but the understanding Peter is addressing is

ignorant and unstable and twists God's intended meaning. There is a meaning even in hard texts.

Not everything is equally plain in Scripture, but the plain things are the main things and the main things are the plain things. The doctrines of Christ and salvation and what happened on the cross and how we are to be saved—these are the things that are given to us with clarity. God gives us the Spirit to illumine our minds and open the Scriptures, and God gets what he wants.

A Vital Truth to Remember

Let me conclude with one vital truth to remember: our God speaks.

Maybe you have run across the little poem about an elephant and six blind men.⁹ If you haven't read it, you've probably heard allusions to it. The six blind men each touch a different part of the elephant. One feels its torso and says, "Bless me, it seems the elephant is very like a wall." Another pulls on the elephant's ear and says, "It's a fan." Another grabs his trunk and says, "It's a rope." The moral of the little poem is that we are all like that with God and religion. We're groping for things that we can't really see or understand. Each person has a little part of the truth, but we don't really know the truth. On a popular level, that's what many people think. We're blind men trying to touch an elephant.

The analogy breaks down, however, if the elephant can talk—if the elephant says, "I am an elephant." The blind men say, "No, you're a paradox." "No, I'm pretty sure I'm an elephant." At

9. Editor's note: The poem is known as "The Blind Men and the Elephant" and was written by John Godfrey Saxe.

that point, if the elephant speaks and you refuse to believe it, is it because you are so humble or is it because you refuse to listen?

What Is God's Name? gives a view of religion that is one of self-discovery, not revelation. The people in the world are saying, "Who is God? What's his name?" "I don't know. What's your experience? What do you think?" You never get the idea that God might say something to them.

That's why D. A. Carson wrote the book, *The Gagging of God*. That's what our world does, sounding very humble. "I'm just a human, and human language is so frail and imperfect. I could never know the truth about God. I could never really know." The super brainy people will use this kind of language: "You need to have a chastened epistemology; you need to have a hermeneutical humility." You come away convinced that, yes, you should. But so many of these terms effectively put a gag on God. God is speaking. He wants to be known, to say something to us.

Perspicuity is a crucial doctrine, not just because our understanding of the Bible is at stake but also because the doctrine is intimately connected to our understanding of God. Often when we talk about the doctrine of Scripture or truth, we don't connect the dots. We don't say, "What does this have to do with God?" Doctrines seem abstract and peripheral: "Well, I think the Bible is inspired." Yes, but how is it connected to your view of God?

One author says, "In short, a confession of the clarity of Scripture is an aspect of faith and a generous God who is willing and able to make himself and his purposes known."¹⁰ The doctrine of Scripture starts with the doctrine of God, that there is a God who wants to be known and who speaks to us. He uses historical events, he uses inspired language and prophets, and he uses words written on a page. He finally shows himself

10. Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 170.

in the person of his Son. Before we think we have nothing but interpretations, we must remember that we also have a God who wants to be interpreted correctly. Look at Jesus and the apostles and see how they handled the Old Testament before you say, “We must have a chastened epistemology” or “I submit myself to the feet of your French philosophers.” Let’s not forget that God has something to say and he is very good at saying it.

Martin Luther said, “In a word: if Scripture is obscure or equivocal, why need it have been brought down to us by act of God? Surely we have enough obscurity and uncertainty within ourself, without our obscurity and uncertainty and darkness being augmented from heaven!”¹¹ God’s Word is not beyond us, because God gave us his Word that we might know him. He wants to be known by the great ones and the small ones, by the brilliant and the unlearned, by the educated and the uneducated, by the kings and the princes, and by the plowboy, William Tyndale said.¹² God wants to be known, and so he is speaking.

R. C. Sproul says, “What kind of God would reveal his love and redemption in terms so technical, concepts so profound that only an elite core of professional scholars could understand them?”¹³ We must remember that ultimately we are talking about the truth of God, and in doing so are talking about God himself. Is God wise enough to make himself known? Is he good enough to make himself accessible? Is he gracious enough to communicate in ways that even the simplest among us can understand?

11. Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 128

12. William Tyndale declared that “if God spared him life, ere many years he would cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than [the pope] did.” John Foxe, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, ed. William Byron Forbush (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 178.

13. R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1977), 16.

Or does God give us commands and a self-revelation that reveals as many questions as answers?

Perhaps our problem is not so much with God speaking but with our hearing or our willingness to hear. I met a man who owned different clubs and had different cool, trendy folk bands come in. I would ask him, “What was the group like? What did you learn?” I’ll never forget what he said: “I saw all these people come in, all these bands, all these artists. . . . I found that almost everyone was searching for truth and no one was willing to find it.”

That is a description of our day. Everyone’s searching. It’s not that they aren’t finding but that they don’t want to find. God is an incessantly speaking God, but his creatures are not very good listeners. Think of all the language in Scripture. “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb. 3:15). The parable of the Sower and the seed asks what kind of ear you have to receive the Word of God. Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice” (John 10:27). He is speaking; some are listening.

I started with a kids’ book, and I’ll end with a kids’ book. You may have read the book or seen the movie *Horton Hears a Who!*¹⁴ It’s the story of an elephant called Horton who hears a voice. The voice belongs to the Mayor of Whoville, a microscopic, unseen world on a speck of dust. A mean kangaroo comes along and gets the speck of dust on a clover. The kangaroo mocks Horton and wants to get rid of the speck. Horton is chased by a bird, who takes the clover with Whoville on it and drops it in a whole patch of clover. Sinister monkeys lock Horton in a cage and are going to boil the speck in beezlenut oil. Everyone is mocking and scorning him because he claims to have heard

14. Dr. Seuss [Theodor Seuss Geisel], *Horton Hears a Who!* (New York: Random House, 1954).

an invisible voice—until the end, finally, when all the people of Whoville speak. Then everyone hears.

The great difference is this: we have a God who is not so microscopically small that we can't hear him, but we are such sinful, rebellious creatures that we refuse to hear him. There is still a parallel. In *Horton Hears a Who!* there is an invisible voice, belonging to someone you cannot see, speaking of a world you do not see—a reality that is just as real as everything in front of you, yet invisible to you. Will you listen to the voice?

God is speaking. There are unseen things that are as true and as real as we are, and a voice from that world is speaking to us, telling you about himself, telling you how to be saved, telling you how to live, telling you the truth. The problem isn't the voice; the problem isn't the reality or the clarity of the message. The problem is that we are not listening. So Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 11:15).

One God. Three persons. Our triune God.

While the workings of the Trinity challenge our understanding, Bible-believing Christians cannot let themselves downplay the Trinity or ignore it. We find the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each present throughout the pages of Scripture—and each equally deserving of our love and reverence.

This book, while not attempting to define or explain the Trinity, dedicates equal space to examining the qualities and roles of each member as we find them in the Bible, to help us grow in our knowledge and understanding. To do so, the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals has gathered essays from leading pastors and preachers on:

GOD THE FATHER

Bryan Chapell

Richard D. Phillips

Kevin DeYoung

The Greatness of God • The Love of God

The Holiness of God • The Wrath of God

The Truth of God

GOD THE SON

D. A. Carson

Joel R. Beeke

Iain M. Duguid

The Glory of the Son • Our Risen Savior

The Incarnate Word • The Cross of Christ

The Life and Ministry of Jesus

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

D. A. Carson

Michael S. Horton

Philip Graham Ryken

Hywel Jones

R. C. Sproul

Streams of Living Water

The Age of the Spirit

Born of the Spirit

Life in the Spirit

Holy Spirit, Counselor

These addresses will make us more familiar with each person of the Trinity and will show us how to rightly respond to each one. The more we know how to relate to the Trinity, the more we can enrich our love for our triune God.

XX

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ALLIANCE[®]
OF CONFESSING EVANGELICALS



PUBLISHING

THEOLOGY / GENERAL

ISBN: 978-1-59638-981-6

