

# Pursuing Scriptural Orthodoxy in a Culture of Ideological Idolatry

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at [ChristChurchEastBay.org](http://ChristChurchEastBay.org). Today's scripture reading is from Psalm 19, verses 1-14, Luke 24, verses 44-45, and Hebrews 4, verse 12, as printed in your liturgy.

A reading from the Psalms. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech. Night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words. No sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes a circuit to the other. Nothing is deprived of its warmth.

[ 1 : 13 ] The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. And the commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold. And they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

By them your servant is warned. In keeping them there is great reward. But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins.

May they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent, of great transgression. May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight. Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

The grass withers and the flowers fall. The word of our God stands forever. A reading from the gospel according to Luke. He said to them, this is what I told you when I was still with you.

[ 2 : 12 ] Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the laws of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. He then opened their minds so that they could understand the scriptures. This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Christ. A reading from the letter to the Hebrews. For the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. This is the word of the Lord. Good morning, Christ Church. Let's be really clear up front. There's two things we're not going to talk about today.

We're not going to talk about the game. And it's more emotionally healthy just to repress your negative emotions and pain. I read that in a book somewhere. So we're not going to talk about that. We're not going to talk about the heat. And we're just going to quietly sweat it out today, okay? And just remember, I'm hotter up here than you are in the pew, all right? So we're in the sixth week of this sermon series.

[ 3 : 11 ] And I just want to be a little bit more explicit about the big picture of what we're trying to do. And so we've got some fancy slides we're going to pull up here, hopefully. And slide number one, let's say you're a physician, and I come to you for my annual exam.

And you say to me, Jonathan, how's your physical health and well-being? And you'd probably start with a standard checklist of diagnostics and say, you know, how's your sleeping? How's your eating?

How's your exercising? And how are you doing, like, avoiding all that harmful stuff you know you probably shouldn't be doing? And I answer you, I say, you know, honestly, I could probably use some work in all four of those areas.

Like, I could probably get off of my screens earlier, put myself to bed with a book, and probably get more and better sleep than I really need. You know, to be honest, I could eat more vegetables, kind of reduce my portion sizes and not eat after 8 o'clock.

That would be helpful. And, you know, if I'm really honest, I love alcohol, and I love sugar. And those are harmful for me. I should probably do a better job and make more of an effort of avoiding those things.

[ 4 : 19 ] But what I'd really like to talk to you about today is my exercise, because I got injured back in May, and I haven't been able to run since then. And you say, okay, great, let's customize a personal plan to help you get healthy.

And one of the things that you do is you send me off to a physical therapist. Now, this brings me to my next slide. This is my actual flow sheet for G Sports Physical Therapy.

I don't know if you can see it, but it says patient Jonathan B. St. Clair. It says that I started on August the 2nd. It says that my diagnosis is a strained right Achilles tendon.

And, yes, I'm 46 years old, so that kind of makes sense for where I'm at in life. And my physical therapist's name is Guadalupe. And she says, listen, I want you to come meet with me two times a week, and I want you to do these exercises at home every single day.

And she looks in my eyes, she says, if you're serious about getting well, if you're serious about having this injury healed, you've got to invest your time coming to meet with me.

[ 5 : 26 ] We're going to do some stretching, some massage, some electrical stimulation. And you've got to invest your time and your energy at home doing these towel scrunches and these eccentric heel raises and these windshield wipers and all these different things that you probably would rather be doing something else, right?

Well, fast forward two months, and I'm really glad to report to you, my church family, that I've made some progress. And I'm now doing some weight-bearing dynamic exercise.

Thank you. Thank you. You're so kind to acknowledge that I just said that. Appreciate that. Now, my physical therapist at this point has kind of become my physical trainer.

This comes to slide three. This is from Runner's World magazine. It's their plan for how to move from the couch to a 5K. So you're not running at all.

You're on the couch. This is how you get to running a 5K. Now, my physical therapist has basically said, okay, I want you to run every other day. I want you to go run for two minutes and walk for one minute.

[ 6 : 33 ] I want you to do that for 20 minutes. Take a day of rest. And slowly but surely, we're going to work you up to 30 minutes at a time and 40 minutes at a time. Now, it doesn't matter what I ran, how fast I ran, how far I ran five years ago, how fast or far I ran 10 years ago.

What matters is, can I even do a 5K today? And the answer is, unfortunately, no. I can't. I can't do it safely. I can't do it without injury. But I'm going to get there.

Right? That's my goal if I keep working on it every day. Now, you're wondering at this point, like, I came for a sermon. I don't know why he's telling me all this stuff. And this brings me to slide number four.

Because if I sat down with a doctor of the soul, and this doctor of the soul said to me, Jonathan, how's your spiritual health and well-being these days? They would probably run through a standard checklist of diagnostics.

And they would say to me, you know, how are you doing with the Sabbath? How are you doing with solitude? How are you doing with scripture and prayer and fasting and community and generosity and service and witness?

[ 7 : 42 ] And I would sit there and say to this doctor of the soul, I would say, you know, honestly, I could use some work in all nine of those areas. And they would say to me, great, let's create a customized, personalized plan to help you get spiritually healthy.

And that's what this sermon series is all about. It's about giving you a plan for your spiritual health and well-being. If you saw, you got a handout today. And on one side of that, it's name tag Sunday and handout Sunday and slide Sunday.

Okay? And this never happens. This has never happened in the history of Christchurch that all three of these things came together. But that handout says on one side, how can we be a countercultural community of grace through these biblical practices to be different than the way that everything in our culture is going, which isn't necessarily super great.

And then the backside of that handout says, how can I, how can you be countercultural individuals of grace through these biblical practices? And what we want to do is equip you with a plan to intentionally and deliberately structure your time.

To give you a schedule and to give you a blueprint for how to invest your time and your energy daily, weekly, and monthly so that you can grow in the grace of God, in these habits of grace.

[ 9 : 05 ] Does that make sense why we're doing this sermon series? Some of you are like, I'm just sweating right now and trying really hard to pay attention. So, good job so far. This is what we're doing in this sermon series.

And today we're going to come back to this theme of Scripture where we left off last week. And we're giving two weeks of this because it's so vital. Like, of all these different practices, this one is vital to your spiritual health.

And we're going to look at Psalm 19 and we're going to talk about the written word, the perfect word, and the redeeming word. Okay, the written word, the perfect word, and the redeeming word. First of all, the written word. If you look at Psalm 19, verse 1, it says, The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of His hands.

Why do the sun and the moon and the stars, why do the mountains and the oceans move us at the depths of our being the way that we're moved by a great piece of art? And the answer is because the stars and the sun and the mountains and the ocean, they are great works of art.

[ 10 : 10 ] God is revealing His glory through these works of His hands. And so the psalmist says in verse 2, The psalmist delights in God's wordless declaration in the universe, God's nonverbal eloquence in nature.

And he says each day, each night is pouring forth with this irrepressible, unending variety that's flowing out of the infinite mind of our maker.

And it's showing us the craft and the artistry of our creator and giving us a glimpse into the beauty of our God. And the psalmist says the creation is not only adoring its creator as it was made to do, but it's also providing a testimony to the human community, to all people, without audible words, this nonverbal communication that there is a God.

And that the world is not an accidental collocation of molecules, but rather it's this meaningful work of this all-knowing, all-powerful artist.

And that all people at some level, they know about God. Because everywhere they look, within their own heart and out into the world, everywhere they look, they see something of the truth and the meaning and the wisdom and the beauty of God.

[ 11 : 55 ] Even if they suppress that knowledge, even if they ignore and neglect that knowledge, everybody knows, says the psalmist. And then he shifts the focus of his meditation to the sun.

And he says this in verse 4. He says, In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other. Nothing is deprived of its warmth. See, he paints this unforgettable scene of the horizon at dawn that's exploding with this radiant sunrise.

And then the sun is just dashing across the ceiling of the world. And he says, When you look at the sun, the sun is like a bridegroom at his wedding when he sees his bride.

It is radiant with joy and wonder. He says, When you look at the sun, it's like an athlete that runs his course with unflagging energy. The sun is just shining with an enduring kind of power and strength.

[ 13 : 01 ] The psalmist says, Look at it all. Isn't it glorious? Isn't it amazing? But, the psalmist says, He says, This wordless revelation of God, It's not enough.

It's not enough. The scientific study of God's wordless creation cannot answer the deeper questions of our human existence. It cannot reveal to us God's plans and his purposes for human life and human history and human salvation.

He says, We need something more. We need something better. And so, he moves from the starry sky at night and the sunshine in the morning to what he calls in verse 7, The law of the Lord, which is perfect.

And what's his point in telling us this? He's saying that, look, nature tells us all about God's reality and God's power. But it does not tell us about God's covenant love and his saving grace.

And so, the Lord has spoken to us. He's spoken to us verbally. He's spoken to us directly in his written word.

[ 14 : 11 ] And follow the logic here. He's saying, look, just as the sun's light and the sun's warmth is essential for all of life, so God's self-revelation in his written word is essential for giving us his light and his life and his love.

And so, the question the psalmist is asking us to consider today is, How would your life look different than it does now if God's written word became the sun of your soul?

Right? How would your life look different than it does today if your time and your energy and your attention orbited around and depended upon the sun of the scriptures?

How would your life look different than it did yesterday if the first thing you did tomorrow morning was that you woke up looking for that sunrise of God's written word, filling your soul with God's light and life and love?

That's the question the psalmist wants us to consider today. So, he's talking about the written word of God. You with me so far? The written word of God? But then he moves from talking about the written word of God to talking about the perfect word of God.

[ 15 : 29 ] The perfect word of God. In verses 7 through 11, he's not talking anymore about the soundless word of God that comes to us through the natural world, but he's talking about the perfect word of God that comes to us through the scriptures.

You see, he starts with the general revelation of our creator God that he gives to all humanity, to all people, but then he moves to that special revelation of Israel's covenant-keeping Lord that he gives only to his people.

And he says, let's think about that for a minute. Let's think about the benefits of scripture step by step. He says the first step in verse 7 is that the Lord, the God who revealed himself at the burning bush to Moses as, I am who I am and I will be who I will be.

That Lord who delivered his people from their bondage in Egypt, the Lord gave his law, the Lord gave his Torah, his teaching. The Lord has given us these foundational stories.

He's given us this framework of doctrines and ethics in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And he's expounded upon that through the prophets and through the Psalms.

[ 16 : 42 ] And he says, the Lord who's given us those scriptures, those scriptures he gave us, they're perfect. They are complete. They are flawless.

They are an integrated whole. And then he says, he says, the most basic benefit of all people who go and they spend time meditating on that flawless written word of the Lord.

You know what happens to them when they do that? Their soul is refreshed. Their vitality is renewed.

Their liveliness is restored. They become a people who are revived when they sit with that flawless word of God.

He says, the word has power in it to make you who you were really made to be. Nature can't do that. The sunrise, as amazing as it is, cannot do that.

[ 17 : 48 ] Only the word of God can really, truly, deeply refresh your soul. And then that's step one, okay? You ready to go to step two?

Step two, he says in verse seven, he says, the law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. And you see, he escalates here from reviving our life to making wise people who are otherwise simple.

That is kind of dull. And how does that work? How do we change from being people who are unwise to people who have understanding and self-mastery and skills to live well?

Well, the psalmist says, well, it's because the statutes of the Lord, they're unlike all the other words out there. The statutes of the Lord are unlike all the words that are coming at you constantly through your screen.

And they're unlike all the other words that are coming at you constantly through your AirPods. Because these words don't have a human origin. Right?

[ 18 : 58 ] These words are not AI generated. These words are not fake news. What does the psalmist say? He says, these words are trustworthy. These words are words that you can build upon like a building a house upon a strong foundation.

And he says, not only does this word, this flawless word of God, revive our life and make us wise. He says in verse 8, The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure, and all of them are righteous.

Literally in the Hebrew, he says, the precepts of the Lord are straight-edged. Which is to say, they are a standard by which you can measure all other truth claims.

And he says, all the decrees of the Lord are righteous. Not most of the decrees or some of the decrees. And then the rest of them we just move past and we've gotten beyond and we've caught up with the times.

[ 20 : 07 ] No, he says, all the commands of the Lord are righteous. And think about the Ten Commandments for a second. You know, when the Ten Commandments say, You should have no other gods and no other priorities before the living God.

That you shouldn't take the things that aren't yours. You shouldn't say the things that aren't true. You shouldn't engage in non-marital sex and on and on and on. He says, all those decrees, they reveal how we're to live in a right relationship with God.

And with each other. And he says, listen, if you would submit yourself to these decrees. He says, they have such incredible power. That if you would live by God's word.

If you would live by God's truth. It has the power to cause your heart to overflow with joy on the inside.

So much so that your eyes would begin to sparkle on the outside. And the psalmist is saying to us, don't you want that kind of power of God operating in your life?

[ 21 : 14 ] Anybody here want a little more joy in your life? Anybody here want your eyes to be a little bit enlivened and sparkling? Why, the psalmist says, wouldn't you want that power to be unleashed within you?

And what he's trying to do is change our motivational structure. At the very depth of our being. From one of engaging God's word as a sense of duty.

To having a sense of delight. Right? And this is why he goes on in verse 10. And he says, they, God's words are more precious than gold. Than much pure gold.

They're sweeter than honey. Than honey from the honeycomb. He says, here are two different philosophies of life. Two different approaches to life. A materialist desires money.

And a hedonist craves pleasure. And you can go after that. You can spend the best years of your life filling up your bank account with more gold and desirable wealth.

[ 22 : 14 ] Or you can spend the best years of your life, you know, satisfying your palates with more honey and desirable pleasures. But he says, you know what's even better?

What's even better than that is finding your delight in God. It's finding your delight in the word of God. And the covenants of God. And the promises of God. That are never going to fail you.

In the way that your portfolio and your pleasures are eventually going to fail you. He says, investing your time in this more satisfying reward is so precious, he says.

It's so sweet. But here's the thing. I want to do a little bit of application for those of you who are still with me. I want to do a little bit of application because you can have a very high view of your gym membership.

But never go and exercise. And you can also have a very high view of scripture like Psalm 19. Which I hope that all of us here will adopt. But you can have a very low engagement with the preciousness and the sweetness of scripture in your daily life.

[ 23 : 26 ] Which makes your high view of scripture completely worthless. Does that make sense? So as your pastor, as your doctor of your soul, as sort of your spiritual therapist and your spiritual trainer.

I'm just going to get super practical and super prescriptive for a minute. You okay with that? So when we're talking about the habits of God's grace, we're not trying to earn God's grace. God's grace is just something that he freely gives to us.

But what we're trying to do is respond to his grace. We're trying to put ourselves in a position where we could actually receive and experience more of his grace.

And so what we're giving you, it's not busy work. It's not because we want you to go like be miserable. It's because we want you to be well. And so here's some practical things that you need to know.

You need a daily time and place to meet with God through his word. And if you don't have that in your schedule, you are not going to grow spiritually, period, full stop.

[ 24 : 29 ] Amen? You need, secondly, a Bible reading plan. And if you don't have one, here's a beginner plan. A beginner plan, I've got a handout at the end.

I can give it to you. It's called the Essential 100 Plan. It's 50 readings from the Old Testament, 50 readings from the New Testament, five days a week, one-ish chapters of the Bible per day.

And it's an amazing plan. And our youth, it's definitely something that our youth, our middle schoolers, our high schoolers can do. And parents, it's something that if you're looking to read Scripture around your dinner table at home, I encourage you to start with that beginner plan.

An intermediate plan, a step up from that, is to read one gospel a day, one chapter of the Psalms a day, and one chapter of a New Testament letter a day.

And you can just get three bookmarks, put it in the Psalms, put it in the Gospels, put it in the letters, and just pick up where you left off the day before. An advanced plan. This is your pastor's plan, right? This is what Pastor Andrew and I do.

[ 25 : 28 ] You would hope that we do something more advanced, right? Not at the beginner level. If you want to join us, it's called the McShane Plan. It's four chapters of the Bible a day. It takes you, it's every day of the week.

And if you do it over the course of the year, you read the Old Testament in the year, and you read the New Testament and the Psalms twice in the year. Now, I don't recommend you use apps because if your phone is in the same room, even if it's turned off, it's screaming at you, look at me. Don't look at the Bible. So don't do a Bible reading app, please. That said, I use a daily Bible reading app, and it enables me to hear with my ears this Zambian pastor named Conrad Mabewe. He's got an amazing accent. He reads the McShane Plan, and I read along with my eyes, and I find that hearing and that seeing really helps me. But whatever you do, pick a plan today, tell a friend, tell a group, and say, will you help me read this plan?

Can I keep going? I'm kind of, I'm kind of, I'm hot up here, and I'm sweating, so I'm on fire, right?

Number three, you need some tools to help you read Scripture.

[ 26 : 38 ] Because what we want to do is read not just the what, but the who. Not just for information, but for relationship. Not just to know more about the Bible, but to enjoy a deeper relationship with the God of the Bible.

We want to move beyond just reading mere words on the page to listening to the voice of God in our hearts and responding to Him by faith. And so, again, I have two tools, two handouts.

If no one's ever taught you how to do an inductive Bible study, I would be privileged to be the first person to teach you how to do that. And I can teach you in five minutes, and you can do it tomorrow morning.

Come talk to me after the service. We'll sweat it out up here up front. The fourth thing you need to do is you need to read the Scripture as a grand story. The Bible is not an encyclopedia of facts about history.

It's not an almanac of tidbits of moral guidance. It's not a spiritual reference manual. It's this epic narrative. It's this grand six-act play from creation to fall to Israel to Christ to church to new creation that frames all of our little stories and all of our smaller dramas in this larger cosmic drama.

[ 27 : 53 ] And if you don't know much about that, I've got two recommendations for you. I'm not going to tell you now. You've got to come up and ask me after the service. A pastor in Oxford, he's written a book that our middle schoolers could understand.

And there's a professor at Oxford who's written a children's book that our children can understand. And I would love to tell you about these books, and you can learn how to read Scripture as a grand story.

I've got more suggestions, but I'm going to pause here and just summarize that all I'm trying to do is give you a couch to 5K plan. But only you can do something with that plan.

A gym membership and a personal trainer is completely worthless if you don't exercise. And all that I've just recommended to you is completely worthless unless you make changes in your daily routine to engage with God in His Word.

And here's the question the psalmist puts to us. He says, And why would we settle for cheap, soul-sucking, soul-destroying substitutes?

[ 29 : 31 ] Amen? I'd be failing you as a pastor if I didn't get kind of fired up about this. Because there are things that are destroying your souls. And this is the thing that will restore and refresh your soul.

It's the written Word of God. It's the perfect Word of God. And the last thing I want to say is it's the redeeming Word of God. The psalm starts with the heavens, but as you notice, he ends with the heart.

Right? The psalmist has this person-to-person encounter with the living God. Through His beautiful and beneficial Word that orders and restores the lives of His servants. And as he's drawn close to the Lord through His Word, the nearness of the Lord and the presence of the Lord and the holiness of the Lord is causing the psalmist to feel what?

It's causing him to feel unworthy. It's causing him to do some heart-searching. And friends, you know that you've actually read your Bible when it leads you to do some heart-searching.

Just as the psalmist says, Nothing is deprived from the sun's warmth. Amen? Nothing is hidden from the sun's heat. Just as the physical light of the sun exposes everything that's hidden in the shadows, so the spiritual light of God's perfect, flawless, written Word, it exposes everything that's hidden in our hearts.

[ 31 : 02 ] And this is why the psalmist says in verse 12, Who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins.

May they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. He says, Oh Lord, there are these willful sins that want to rule over me.

And I need you to keep me from all of those deliberate offenses that are so easily committed in those unwatchful, heat of the moment kind of situations.

But he says also there are all these indiscernible errors in myself that I cannot see. There are all these hidden faults that are lurking in my blind spots that are trying to lure me away and cause me to depart from your design for my life.

And so the psalmist says, Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. He says, If you do not come, Lord, and forgive me my faults, and if you do not come, Lord, and keep me from my sins, then I will not be able to dwell in your most holy presence.

[ 32 : 10 ] Unless you save me, unless you pardon me, unless you preserve me, not only from all that stuff that I'm thinking and saying and doing wrong, but from all that stuff I'm not thinking and not saying and not doing right, if you don't come and equip me and clear me of all my guilt, the psalmist says, I will be helpless and I will be hopeless in my sin.

And friends, if we're reading our Bible and it doesn't lead us to say that, then again, we're not reading our Bible. But notice where he ends up at this incredible word of hope at the end.

He says, Lord, you are my rock and you are my salvation. Lord, it's only if you show up with your rock-solid mercy and your redeeming grace do I have any hope of being purified and made whole. And it's only you, if you purify me and make me whole, then I can join in with all the sun and the stars, all the mountains and the oceans to do what I was made to do, which is to declare and to proclaim your glory.

And friends, the Bible is a signpost that's pointing us the whole time on every page to what the psalmist calls our rock and our redeemer, which is Jesus.

[ 33 : 28 ] Right? The same God who orders the cosmos, he came and he took on flesh. The word became flesh. And he intervened as our redeemer to save us from our sins.

Jesus came as a servant who delighted in the perfect law of God completely. Right? When Satan tempted him, he answered with Scripture. When his opponents accused him, he said, Is it not written and have you not heard?

When he was on the cross, Jesus is quoting the Psalms. This guy is saturated with Scripture. And notice that in verse 11 it says, In keeping God's word there is great reward.

But also in not keeping God's word there is great punishment. And what we see in Jesus, what we see in Jesus on his cross, is here is the only servant of God who kept all of God's words completely and so earned the reward of God.

And here he is on the cross taking all of our punishment for our indiscernible errors and our hidden faults and our willful sins so that he could give us the reward that he earned.

[ 34 : 40 ] He takes the punishment and we get his reward. Friends, Jesus is our merciful rock. He's our gracious redeemer. He's the one who forgives us with his cleansing blood.

He's the one who covers us and makes us blameless and innocent. He's the one who covers us with his perfect righteousness. And if that is who Jesus is for you, if that is what Jesus has done for you, then the question the psalmist is asking us is, don't you want everything you are and everything you do to be pleasing in his sight?

Don't you want the words of your mouth and all your outward expressions? Don't you want the meditations of your heart and all of your inward dispositions? Don't you want your daily life and your daily time and your daily energy and priorities and habits and attention to be pleasing in the sight of your rock and your redeemer?

He says, don't you want to join in this great wordless hymn of creation? This great anthem of the life-giving word of the scriptures, this great song that became enfleshed in the word of Jesus Christ, our redeemer?

Don't you want to add your voice and add your life to this never-ending chorus of praise? And that's why the psalmist says, oh Lord, may the words of my mouth and may the meditations of my heart be pleasing and be acceptable in your sight.

[ 36 : 11 ] Oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.