

A Firm Foundation 3

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[0 : 00] you communicate that the people that aren't here yet are more important than the people that have been diligent to be here on time. So I don't want to do that. I got my room. Okay.

Well, if any are just joining us, though I don't think that that's the case, we are in a series on Scripture. And when we were together last, we observed that the Bible is at the heart of our faith, yet also at the center of much controversy.

Specifically, it is controversial in its claim, believed and heralded by Christians, to be God's Word. And as such, authoritative in all that it tells us.

True and trustworthy in all that it proclaims. Last time, we took the entire time, and we were yet pressed, to set out what we described as strong grounds for affirming this confidence in Scripture's authority.

For those of you then with us, you will recall that we reflected upon the Trinitarian ontology of Scripture.

[1 : 28] That is, how the Father, Son, and Spirit are personally involved in the production of Scripture.

And what entailments this bears for the character of Scripture. And we concluded that the Trinity is so profoundly involved in the being of Scripture, that the character of Scripture is invested with the divine character.

Strong grounds, it seems to me at least, for maintaining the divine authority of Scripture. And warrant for responding to the Bible just as we would to God Himself.

And yet, we acknowledge that at many points, the Bible is not the world's obvious candidate for divine authority. True and trustworthy in all that it affirms.

Indeed, if we're honest, it's not always the obvious candidate for such status in Christian impression. There are many a dear brother and sister in the Lord who struggle with no small anguish and confusion.

[2 : 51] Who are familiar with the strong grounds for affirming the Bible's divine character. Yet, at points, struggle to reconcile this conviction with what they find in its pages.

Perhaps at points where Scripture does not seem to comport with the confident pronouncements of modern science.

Or the assured results of critical historical scholarship. Or perhaps with some of our most dogged moral sensibilities.

Or perhaps that, in parts, Scripture seem out of step with current, adamantly held, social norms. Well, it is chiefly to those of us for whom such gnawing difficulties remain a reality that I want to direct some comments this morning.

[3 : 56] And specifically, to offer some considerations which, while acknowledging that problems will remain, I hope will render any persisting problems just a little less problematic.

That's my hope. And really, what I want to offer this morning is a single consideration for our reflection.

Again, time will prevent much more than suggestiveness, but hopefully this line of thought will, like a pinch of yeast for your own reflections.

Just stick with you. Here's the thought. I want to suggest that what we find true of the incarnation, God coming down in the flesh, what we find true of the incarnation, we should expect also to find true of inscripturation.

Okay? Because it is a parallel case at the relevant point. Corbyn can't miss this, so I'm going to repeat. This is my thesis, okay?

[5 : 15] I want to suggest that what we find true of the incarnation, we should expect also to find true of inscripturation.

Because it is a parallel case at the relevant point. Okay? So, let's first consider the incarnation. There is a paradox at the heart of the incarnation. God coming in the flesh. For God coming in the flesh was simultaneously a revealing and a concealing.

It was a revelation of God. John 1, 14. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory.

Revelation. John 14, 9. Remember when Philip queried Jesus, show us the Father and it's enough. He said, oh, Philip, how long have you been with me?

[6 : 25] And yet do you ask, show us the Father. For he who has seen me has seen the Father. Revelation. Revealing.

But precisely because the incarnation involved a revelation of God in human flesh, it was also a veiling.

For it disguised, so to speak, deity in the garb of humanity. It involved the humiliation of the Son. That is, assuming the humble estate of humanity. This was a stooping with respect to God's splendor.

As Philippians 2, 7 tells us, he, speaking of Jesus, the Word, the Son, he emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant.

[7 : 27] Being made in the likeness of men and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself. So he emptied himself, not of his deity.

He remained God. If one is God, one cannot cease to be God. It's just not even possible for God to cease to be God.

He didn't empty himself of his deity, but rather he emptied himself of the visible manifest marks of his glory, which would have drawn conspicuous attention to his deity.

That had been laid aside. And he looked forward to its restoration in heaven, where his disciples would see it fully manifest again.

As he said in John 17, 24, Father, in his prayer, high priestly prayer, Father, I desire that they also, my disciples here with me, us subsequently, Father, I desire that they also be with me where I am in order that they may then behold my glory.

[8 : 47] So there would be a time when his glory would be manifest. But while in the flesh, the glory of the Godhead was concealed. As Isaiah the prophet foretold, he has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to him.

He was despised, and we esteemed him not. Isaiah 53, 2 and 3. Thus, and this is the point, it was easy to miss of the revelation because of the veiling.

It was easy when God came in flesh to see only the flesh. You remember the comments from those around him?

Is this not the carpenter's son? The son of Mary? Are not his brothers and sisters among us?

And they took offense at him. Mark 6, 3. They missed it. They could not see beyond this Nazarene.

[10 : 04] Acts 6, 14. That was those who contended with Stephen, how they dismissed Jesus.

This Nazarene. As John writes, he came to his own, and they received him not. John 1, 11. When revelation came in flesh, they saw simply the flesh, and nothing more, and were scandalized at the suggestion that it was anything more.

Indeed, even for his closest disciples, his life of humiliation, culminating in the cross, the bottom rung of his humiliation, as Philippians 2 tells us, created such an excruciating sense of incongruity that the status of Jesus as God's anointed was given up.

We had hoped that it was he. Remember those on the road to Emmaus? We had hoped that it was he.

Notice the tense. Their hope was in the past. Luke 24, 21. Others thought the claim that Christ was God's anointed, appearing as he did, was so abhorrent that it made a mockery of God's very nature, and was blasphemy worthy of death.

[11 : 45] This was Saul of Tarsus' position, and many with him. Such was the veiling, even as God was being revealed.

So, so it was with the incarnation. All right. Well, how about the parallel case of inscripturation? Inscripturation. How about the parallel case of inscripturation? As inscripturation, that is, the word of God becoming written language.

Inscription. Making it into, yes. Yep. So, good. Helpful clarification. Elizabeth, thank you. As with the word incarnate, so with the word inscriptured.

Both involve the same sort of humiliation, the same sort of emptying, the kenosis, the emptying, the self-emptying.

[13:00] Just as in the incarnation, God's word became human flesh. So, in scripture, God's word comes in human words.

Thus, the Bible is, like the incarnation, deity in the garb of humanity. It is the voice of deity in the voice of humanity.

Just as God came in the flesh, embedded in the culturally and historically situated, okay, Jesus resembled Mary.

Oh, I see it. Yes. He spoke in a Galilean accent, okay, culturally and historically situated, et cetera. We could go on and describe all these things. So, God comes in his word, embedded in the culturally, historically situated, okay, spoken through the culture and in the accent of a first century fisherman, Peter, and an eighth century B.C.

[14:21] fig picker, Amos, and all the scripture writers. Do you see the parallel case here? And this parallel results in a similar paradox.

While God's words are revealed in scripture, they are simultaneously concealed, for they are disguised.

They come in the garb of, manifestly, human words. And it should come as no surprise that just as many only saw the humanity of Jesus and did not see it as the vehicle for deity and were scandalized at the suggestion that it could be, so many see only the humanity of scripture and myths of the deity.

It appears to them simply human, all too human to be any candidate for divine revelation. It does not come to us with the appearance of the divine.

It has no form or comeliness and we esteem it not. Indeed, there has been an impulse even among those who honor it to deny that it can be lackluster at any point and argue that at such points its luminosity needs to be preserved through some means, usually seeking a deeper allegorical meaning.

[16:17] meaning. So, for example, a meaning that would be worthy of divinity. So, for example, origin, probably the, certainly the greatest first theologian that tries to put together and actually creates a systematic theology, first one in the church after the apostles, let's say after Paul.

He just thought, you know, as I read scripture, some parts of it just seem utterly unimpressive. Even banal. And this was just utterly incongruous. I can't reconcile this with this being God's word. So, I have to, I have to find some other way to understand it. So, let me just understand it allegorically. There must be a meaning that's utterly profound.

Here, how about this one? So, you can, you can see the impulse and it derives from the tension of just, just the, the, the pressure to somehow find God's word at every point luminous.

[17:32] Okay? Did he passprate himself? He did, yes, thank you. I, I would have completely missed mentioning that had you not reminded me. Thank you. Origins is a remarkable story and you've just heard the sneak preview of the remarkable nature of it.

Yes, he did. But, he, yeah, he, well, no, I won't get into that. Well, recall Augustine, okay?

Recall Augustine's barrier to considering scripture as God's word because he found them, as he puts it, unworthy in comparison with the dignity of Cicero.

Now, remember, Augustine was trained as a rhetorician and Cicero's some pretty fine Latin and when he first encountered the scriptures not yet converted, he looked at that and he said, oh, you've got to be kidding me, you Christians.

This is the best God can do? It doesn't even match the elegancies of Cicero. You must be joking. And he stumbled at it.

[18:53] Interestingly, the only way that he was able to get over that was following the cue of Milan, of Ambrose of Milan, who said, oh, no, no, Augustine, no, no, no, no, no, that's just on the surface.

You need following origin. Just here, here's the allegorical meaning. So ironically, what actually got Augustine over the hump of being able to accept scripture was what I think is probably a problematic view of scripture and one that he at least refined.

If he didn't completely abandon later in life, he at least came to a deeper appreciation of scripture. But interesting, this was a real problem for Augustine.

That was a quote from Confessions 3.5.9 for those of you who are looking. Jerome was the same. I mean, this is really common in the early church. Jerome was just so committed to Cicero.

He just loved the Latin that he didn't even bother to read his Bible very much, even as a Christian. He said, it's not really literary. Then he had this terrible dream where he died and went to heaven and he tried to get in and he said, oh no, you're not a Christian, you're a Ciceronian.

[20 : 11] So that's Jerome's story. But I mean, we could go on and on and on, lots of examples of people kind of being scandalized at the plainness, the banality, the lack of luminosity of scripture.

But the scripture is involved in the same emptying as the sun. Again, empties itself not of divinity, rather the visible manifest marks of its glory.

And to appreciate this is to expect the veiling, to not expect the scriptures to be perpetually transfigured, gleaming with the evident marks of glory, shimmering and radiant in manifest deity. It was only rarely so with the word made human flesh. Think of Jesus' earthly career. One brief moment on the Mount of Transfiguration, there, then the resurrection, a couple of hints, moments, this remarkable instant, perhaps a momentary unveiling.

Remember when he was about to be taken captive in the Garden of Gethsemane? I am he. Boom. Fall over backwards. Every once in a while, you get this lightning bolt that comes out and shows you.

[21 : 46] But for the most part, it's hidden. As with hidden in the word made human flesh, should we expect otherwise with the word made human words?

It is no accident that the precursor of the written word, the scriptures, the spoken and preached word of the apostles, heralded by the apostles who gave us the written word, evoked the same reaction as the incarnate word.

Scandal. As Paul writes, foolishness to the Greeks and a scandal to the Jews. 1 Corinthians 1.23 It did not conform to their associations and expectations of divinity.

It proclaimed a God who stoops, not struts. A king, but one whose crown was of thorns.

Lifted high, but not upon a throne. rather upon a cross. Triumphant, not over the Roman occupiers, but over our spiritual occupiers.

[23 : 13] Sin, death, the devil. Such a word did not impress. It did not conform to their prior judgments of how it ought to be.

No, no, we know the marks of divinity and that's not it. They would, it seems, have him always transfigured.

They did not see the glory of God hidden in his countenance. They stumbled at the scandal. It is revealing that when Paul came to Corinth, many were utterly unimpressed with him as word bearer. They thought such a word bearer incongruous with a divine message. Surely that should come in Ciceronian prose when it comes.

The medium did not fit their expectations of a divine message. But the apostle knew that God conveyed his, you remember the phrase, wonderful, isn't it?

[24 : 32] Conveyed his treasure in earthen vessels. That is, common pots of unimpressive clay.

Just the common house stuff you keep in the garden. 2 Corinthians 4, 7. And he, Paul knew, ironically, that the weakness, fear, and much trembling in which he came to them, 1 Corinthians 2, 3, the weakness, fear, much trembling of the medium, in his case, himself as the messenger, actually did comport with the message.

For both were cruciform. And this is the point that Paul makes again and again in 2 Corinthians. No, no, no, you think that the medium of the message is supposed to be all this magnificent, you know, lovely Grecian phrases of rhetoric.

But no, it's cruciform, just like the message itself. The medium bears the same marks of the message. It's cruciform, both involved and emptying.

In God's wisdom, he has chosen to use the foolish things, really those apparently foolish to us, apparently foolish.

[26 : 05] He has put his treasure in earthen vessels. the gospel in the words of fig pickers and fishermen.

That's what he's chosen to do. A stumbling block to those scandalized. Yet, as he tells us, the power of God unto salvation to them that believe.

Romans 1.16, 1 Corinthians 1.18. So, in some, if we appreciate the parallel features of incarnation and inscription, the word made flesh and the word made words, and grasp some of the implications of the emptying involved, while this does not clear up all the problems, it helps us understand why we might expect them, why we would expect scripture's divinity to be veiled in its humanity.

So, will we be led astray by misguided expectations? let us not, with respect to scripture, be as those who looked for Messiah in a mold quite foreign to God's purpose and Christ's reality. Let us not be among those scandalized by the jarring contrast of the Christ with their conceptions of what the Christ should surely be.

[27 : 55] eke homo, behold the man, there he was, deity verily though veiled, eke logos, behold the word, deity verily though veiled, same case.

well, let me pause there and throw it open for any questions, comments, clarifications, maybe cavils, who knows, that's fine too, that's fine too, and to make sure that we're on the same page here, or at least see these pages, and then after a little time we'll continue on considering some other practicals of what happens if we still have problems, what are some stances that we want to take.

So any comments or questions or clarifying, does this make any sense? what you're saying makes a lot of sense to me because I really struggle with when you know the glory of God, I mean in your head you know the glory of God, but you don't feel the glory of God, even this week I've been struggling with that all week long, it's like, why do I know how magnificent God is as much as I think?

But how does it not translate into my soul as well as it should? And I think this is why, so I'm really glad. Yeah, yeah, okay, good, yes. He did this on purpose so that we could come to him, yet bring himself down to our terms, which is wonderful and beautiful that he did, but it helps me understand that my soul wants to get more.

Yes, yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And again, it's probably vital, it's probably necessary that something, you have to be careful about talking about necessity when it comes to God, better to say fitting, it seems very fitting and maybe necessary.

[30 : 22] Think again of the parallel case of the incarnation. So many, many, many people will talk about, what they call the scandal of particularity.

They'll say, wait, you Christians are, you point to something so local and you suggest it's of universal significance.

You're talking about some person who's a Galilean, you know, a long time ago, in a place far away, and how can something so particular be of universal significance?

it's what philosophers call the scandal of particular. But if you understand what is actually being done, it's critical that Jesus became a true, that the Son became a true human person. person. And in order to do that, you have to be particular, because there's no such thing as a generic, universal person.

[31 : 34] There just isn't. People only come in particular cases. So insofar as God wants to become a person, it has to have all the particularities of what people do.

he had to be from somewhere, so he was from Galilee. He had to be a gender, so he was male. He had to speak some language, culture, so he had accent.

He had body odor. He had all these things. But in order for him to identify with us as humanity, he had to be that. so it had to be some place that seemed so parochial.

So the claim that this thing so parochial actually has universal significance is hard to swallow. But if you figure out, it had to be that way. What do you Enlightenment people want?

What is a generic person? Exactly.

[32 : 46] He didn't pay the debt to God. Yes. Because we couldn't do it. Exactly. Exactly. Not Ambrose, but Anselm. I suffer from depression and I pray or we were on a ride yesterday and we talk godly talk and I gotta tell you, after our walk and after our lunch, I still felt like garbage.

Gotta find a better friend, Raul, who can I don't feel good all that. Sometimes I go to church and I leave flat.

That's God working in that sanctification. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Oh, let me just notice the incarnation, the particularity, but again, in scripturation, if you're gonna put it in a human language, it's gotta go into, we don't have generic language, you know, what's an angelic language, how is an

angelic language gonna go, you know, I don't, what, what, what, what, it's gotta go into something that is, that is particular.

It's gonna be in some sort of cultural, historical, you know, limitations of fig pickers and fishermen, or, you know, that's the, it's gotta be in some, so that's gonna scandal, it's gonna scandal everybody coming from some vantage point, and that's the way, if you're gonna put it in human words, those are human words, you know, so, I won't forget you, but, oops, sorry, once, once I get Matt, you were just beaten out by Susie here, but I'll come back to you as a second Matt, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

So, you talked about how both in incarnation and scripturation, God's glory, that God removed the visible marks of his glory, but isn't it kind of paradoxical when he also removes his marks of glory, but also, I guess, asks us, or requires us to fear God and re-fear God's glory.

[34 : 47] Like, yeah, I was just wondering how can we then fear God when God is... Yeah, yeah, yeah. Right.

Well, it is not that we have no access to his glory, but that becomes this progressive process that his spirit works.

So if you were... A good passage maybe to look at would be in 2 Corinthians 3 where he talks about how the spirit removes the veil.

Remember? And a veil is over... And it's talking about when reading Scripture or seeing Jesus. It's actually in this context. And that the Holy Spirit removes a veil.

So what is actually there but has been concealed becomes more manifest to us. And then he uses this image. He says, it is as if we gaze at Christ as in a mirror.

[35 : 53] And we take on that image of glory from one degree of glory to the next. So that as we behold his glory, we become more and more like that as we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

So there is this progressive revealing to us. And some of it, again, it's an unveiling. Maybe we didn't see any glory in the cross. I mean, how could you?

It's not evident how that would be glorious. But as we come to appreciate and the spirit actually takes the veils off our eyes and we see that that actually, the cross.

When Jesus says in John 17, 3, he says, Father, glorify me now. He's actually talking about the cross. Not that after the cross, I'm going to get through that and that's not going to be very glorious. Then I'll be glorified. But the cross is actually the apogee, the high point of his glory. That's the most concentrated manifestation of what God is like.

[37 : 04] But we wouldn't see that as glorious at first, certainly not in the culture in which it happened. You wouldn't even speak of crucifixion in polite company. But as the spirit gives us eyes to see, kind of like he did Saul of Tarsus, and that thing that was so contemptible and horrid and even blasphemous at the suggestion became something in which he gloried in.

Glory alone in the cross of Christ. So that's kind of how that works. Matt, you had one. Your class so far has reminded me of a type of stumbling block for some people.

Oh, scripture just seems so banal or mundane or doesn't relate to anything I care about. And somebody might point, for example, to a lot of the book of Leviticus.

Do this with the liver. Yeah, yeah, yeah. How can this be the word of God? Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I appreciate that. Though that's not what I typically think about.

I, you know, wrestle in this regard more with, I'll use an example of Genesis 1, which is I look at it, oh, you know, very beautiful poem or a piece of literature, you know, that Cicero, you know.

[38 : 27] Yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't have any problem with the formula like I do with Leviticus. My problem is with the context. Right, right, right, right. How can this be the word of God? So I think of those as two different stumbling blocks that different people might have.

Right. And again, content, I mean, form and content. Some of the things that Jesus said were scandalous. There's the content, too, not just his appearance.

Appearance is the total. You know, so I don't want to, I don't think that these principles ignore content at all. I think that they take up content also.

But let me just pick up a couple more points. Within this framework, how might we respond when we encounter difficulties?

In other words, when Scripture seems not at all divine, but merely human, all too human, how do we respond when we find ourselves there?

[39 : 28] Well, I want to propose that we respond with, first, faith. Trust him, even in the midst of unanswered questions.

May our attitude be as the anguished father of the demon-possessed boy. I believe, Lord. Help me overcome my unbelief.

Mark 9, 24. And there is a way to question within a framework of faith, as with Mary to the angel at the Annunciation.

Remember? Remember? How can these things be? She said, Luke 1, 34. Full of faith, despite honest questions. How can these things be?

It's interesting. Virtually the same question was uttered by Sarah, Abraham and Sarah, Sarah, in Genesis 18. Remember? You will bear a child.

[40 : 32] Ha ha, she laughs. That's never going to happen. Or Zachariah. Remember when it's revealed that Elizabeth is going to bear a child.

And they're reproved for their attitude. So there is a way that you can ask questions within a framework of faith. And then there's a way that is different from that.

So when the... So do you think that in Luke, Zachariah asked the angel along the way, and then Mary did it the right way?

Yes. Because he was made mute, but she wasn't. Yes. And both of them questioned what was happening. Yes. And they never understood that. Yeah, yeah. It's a different attitude.

One comes from faith. A faith. And again, with Sarah, hey, hey, whoa, whoa, whoa, Sarah, nothing's impossible with God. So...

[41 : 31] And I think Mary knew that and trusted if you read the Magnificat, you know, what she says, it becomes clear. But she just said, okay, how? What am I supposed to do?

I mean, I am a virgin. So, yeah, very different attitude. So we can ask our questions, but within a framework of faith. And, you know, when the Bible seems nothing but human and we can't see the divine, don't be scandalized and stumble.

As Jesus says, blessed is he who does not stumble at me. Matthew 11, 6. So when we find ourselves standing in a fog that we can't see through, let's remember ourselves that we stand upon rock.

His word to us. Matthew 7, what is it? 22. You know, his words. That's the rock. And remember, in his case, the verily amen was not uttered by his hearers in judgment.

That judgment he has already rendered. Remember, Jesus often says, contrary to the custom, verily amen, surely, assuredly, I say to you, and we all, you know, and then he'd make a statement.

[42 : 58] Usually somebody would make a statement, and if people, you know, we kind of do this now, and if people thought, yeah, that seems right, amen, verily, it's true. Jesus does it differently. He just starts his statement, verily amen, and then just says it.

You know, the judgment's already been rendered, and we just need to remember that. Let's trust him, the one so worthy of our trust. Surely, Peter's response is well adapted to this question, too. To whom would we go instead? Who's more worthy of our trust? For he alone has the words of life. John 6, 68. So, in our doubt-ridden quandaries, respond in faith.

But also, let's respond in hope. Hope. Remember the eschatological reality of where we are.

Now, we see through a glass darkly, 1 Corinthians 13, 12. We see darkly.

[44 : 04] Realize that our problems are a calendar issue. They will one day be resolved. Don't demand that all be revealed and unveiled now.

Don't demand that the Bible be transfigured. its glory made manifest now. That, remember, that was Satan's temptation to Jesus at the temple top.

Remember, unveil yourself now. But Jesus kept God's calendar. Kept God's calendar. And sometimes we can show the Corinthian immaturity.

Can we not? They thought it was time of glory, not suffering. Have what theologians call an over-realized eschatology.

And we can have over-realized expectations about the word. It, the word, is in its sojourn of suffering.

[45 : 14] It's kenosis. It will have its vindication. It will have its exaltation. When it will be truly glorified. But that is not yet.

So let's wait in hope. Abide till I come, Jesus says. And suffer now. That's right. As Jesus told his disciples, what I am doing, what I am doing, you do not now understand.

But afterwards, you will understand. John 13, 7. And might we not equally, at times, say, what you have written, I don't now understand.

But let's, at such times, remember the but afterward. But afterward. Afterward. An afterward of full understanding to come.

And be patient, awaiting that coming day. We can do that. So, we respond in faith, and in hope, but also, in love.

[46 : 25] We got problems with the Bible. We got issues. Okay, that's fine. We all do. Busy yourself, loving God, and neighbor. This is the best environment for truth to prevail and get rooted in your life.

certainly, it doesn't happen by obsessing over the problem. 2 Timothy 1, 13 is relevant here, where he says, retain the standard of sound words, he's talking about truth, in, in, in, the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

In other words, the sphere or the environment in which truth is nourished is the community of faith where mutual love is at work.

And part of this, I think, is that there we will be constantly witnessing the power of the faith and love born of the gospel word that keeps transforming lives all around us.

And that helps to give us confidence in that word, even where we, we don't quite understand or have problems with it. And this, seeing how the word just dramatically changed people's lives.

[47 : 51] It's, it's, it's a prophetic vindication. In other words, it's a, it's a little vindication in advance of the final invocation. It's kind of a sneak preview of the vindication that the word will have.

little, little transfigurations where the divine shows through the human in advance of the great unveiling.

In, in the days when biblical criticism was harrowing the faith of many a Yale student and questions were many and urgent and answers were few and pretty slow of arrival, Henry B. Wright, after whom Wright Hall is, is named.

He's kind of a minister on campus godly man. He observed that amidst all this solvents to their faith, what most kept the faith of Yale students intact was their involvement in Yale Hope Mission.

Yale Hope Mission was where they busied themselves in reaching out in loving service and gospel witness to the down and outers as they called them then.

[49 : 02] We would say the underprivileged. Okay? Many of whose lives were dramatically transformed, just wonderfully reclaimed. And in the process, the faith of the witness bearers was fortified.

And it gave them some ballast and staying power amidst all this German higher criticism that was coming in like a flood and dislodging their footing. It was kind of like the man more blind.

He's asked all these questions by the cross examination. I don't know, but I do know this. I once was blind and now I see.

And that gives you some pretty good ballast in the midst of unanswered questions. And if we see that more and more as we're busy about loving others and God and the transformation that that brings, it'll give us some ballast.

So, love. So, faith, hope, love, and finally, humility. Our judgments, I mean, we were born yesterday.

[50 : 13] I always tell my daughters, what do you know? You were born yesterday. Listen to your father. But, you know, our judgments and they roll their own, oh, gee. Our judgments are finite and fallible and deeply dyed by our sinfulness.

Accordingly, epistemic humility becomes us. Humility about what we can know and how we know things. It becomes us. I can't see how to solve this particular question.

But, why would I think that I should be able to? You know, okay, I guess, God, I don't need to know, at least right now. You know? And, realize that part of our frustration may come from presumption.

I was just talking to you the other day and, you know, we were talking about the problem of evil. You know? He said, I can see no good reason why God would act or speak in this way.

therefore, he must have none. Therefore, he must have none. I tried to gently point this out. But, note how breathtaking is the hidden premise there.

[51 : 32] God could have no good reasons for anything that I would not be acquainted with. That's the hidden premise. you think, that really is breathtaking an assumption, a premise.

So, sisters and brothers, surely in these matters, as in most matters, humility becomes us. Humility becomes us. As David reflected, oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up.

My eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But, what I can do, I can't do those things, but what I can do, I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

Psalm 131. So, these four qualities befit us as soul vesture. when we encounter difficulties, stumbling blocks in scripture, which puzzle, perplex, perhaps even pain us, put on faith, hope, love, and humility.

But, quickly, there may be some in our company for whom an additional response might be fitting. that of stewardship.

[53 : 09] Stewardship. For, there may be some among us whom God has gifted to grapple with these conundra, who, like Odysseus, have the strength and skill to string the bow, pulling together the limbs of that bow, word and world, harmonizing the books of scripture and nature, unifying doctrine and data, which seem disparate.

One thinks of an Augustine, an Aquinas, an Edwards, or a Sayers, Dorothy Sayers. Those among God's people who have taken up these haunting questions, disturbing questions, so difficult, and applied themselves with patient thoughtfulness to answering them.

A favorite image of mine is Botticelli's Augustine in his study. I wonder if you've seen it. Go back and Google it. Some Google images. It's a great one. Brow furled and thought.

He's bent over his desk, pen in hand, ready pen. The floor around him, this is my favorite bit, the floor around him strewn with crumpled bits of paper, the discarded relics of his cogitations as he keeps upgrading them.

It's a fantastic image. Could yours, I wonder, be a similar stewardship of kingdom thinker?

[54 : 50] I think of a previous student of the college hard buy, who as an undergrad resolved, this is resolution number 11, I think he had 72 of them, when I think of any difficulty in divinity to be solved, in other words, a problem, immediately to do what I can towards solving it.

He was just a young teen at the time, Jonathan Edwards. There is a sense of stewardship, of a gifting, and calling, to apply oneself to engaging these difficulties, and stumbling blocks, and so blessing and bearing the burdens of the people of God.

The sheep that are so harrowed by these wolves. Well, some of you can go after these. Some of you can do this. Might be your calling. Okay, so this might be a stewardship. And finally, a closing word to those who perhaps do not themselves deal with doubts, but who may deal with those who do deal with doubts.

Jude tells us, have mercy on those who doubt. Jude 22, have mercy on those who doubt.

Let us as Christians not be an army that shoots our wounded. And this is going to be really, really important if they're going to be that previous group who take it on the stewardship to try to wrestle with these questions, and sometimes you fall over on one side of the horse and then the other trying to work these things out.

[56 : 46] And if it's troubling to try to work these things out, we need to be very compassionate toward these people who waded into the depths of these problems and challenges.

Don't shoot our wounded. We should not react to them with horror or shun them. And I fear some are lost by harshness who might be reconciled by gentleness.

And it is right that we show mercy for we recognize that we all are the recipients of mercy as believers in Christ. And it is mercy that we all await.

The very next, no, it's the verse right above where Jude says, have mercy on those who doubt. He talks about all of us awaiting that mercy from Christ our Lord. Well, let me, that would be a good way to conclude with Jude's benediction.

If we struggle with doubts, don't be afraid, little flock. Don't be afraid. The good shepherd has you well in hand.

[58 : 04] And his hand is in the Father's hand, we're told in John 10. And no one shall pluck us out of the Father's hand. Those tender almighty hands.

So as Jude puts it, and we'll finish with this, now unto him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever.

Amen. Amen. Well, God's God is ■ ■ God is