

A Firm Foundation 6

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Date: 16 October 2022

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[0 : 00] Ian, I'll try to remember to end with a super Martin Luther quote, so don't let me forget, that's why my phone is right here. I'm not like checking my stocks, which I don't have anyway.

So, none of those. Okay, oh thank you. Okay. Well, our topic this morning is the clarity of Scripture. We are, as you know, because you've all been coming faithfully in a series on Scripture, so we take up the topic of the clarity of Scripture. And within the Reformation tradition, that is the tradition in which we would largely see ourselves in this church, the Reformation tradition, a belief in the clarity of Scripture, has always been affirmed and considered important.

And rightly so, for whatever allegiance that we might give to the authority of Scripture, it could never really function as authority in our lives, if, due to its obscurity, its message were inaccessible or impenetrable.

I mean, we might well be ready and willing to receive and act on the directives from the high command, but if the radio transmitter can't give us a clear signal, we're at a loss.

[1 : 31] Are we supposed to take the bridge or sit tight and wait for air support? You know, what are we supposed to do? I don't know. I couldn't make it out.

Too much static, no clear reception. Well, that will never work. Few believers are willing to deny in principle the authority of the Bible, but often Scriptures are functionally denied the final word because it is alleged that its meaning is not plain.

Who's to know what it means? The effect is to have its authority blunted, if not altogether abrogated.

And whether its supposed lack of clarity results in a confusion that is lamented or perhaps even convenient, who knows?

It's intriguing that the stratagem of the serpent was to raise in the mind of Eve doubt as to what God had said.

[2 : 45] Did God really say? For confusion makes defection more likely, even seemingly legitimate.

So, clarity, it would seem, is vital for the effective functioning of God's authority.

But is the clarity of Scripture actually sustainable? It would seem to be a highly problematic claim.

Some would even say utterly implausible. What? Scripture clear? You must be joking. So, consider first what is typically alleged against the claim of clarity for Scripture.

So, the implausibility of clarity. And while the presumption of the Bible's clarity has been a functioning presupposition among the people of God, or at least as long as they have had Bibles or their precursors, the writings of the apostles, it has often indeed regularly been challenged.

[4 : 00] What have been some of the arguments or observations against clarity? Against clarity.

So, first let's consider some of the traditional arguments.

There is, for one, what we might call the challenge of mystery. The challenge of mystery. That is to say that the claim of clarity fails to account for the mysterious transcendent subject matter of Scripture.

This was Erasmus' objection against Luther. I should have had pictures of these folks. Erasmus is a great, we've got some great woodcuts of Erasmus.

He's always wearing an enormous hat. Because Erasmus, his head was so tiny relative to the rest of his body, he feared that in public, that would make his high intelligence look unlikely.

So, he would buy these enormous stuffed hats that would bring his head up to a normal... I don't know why I said that. This is completely off topic, but just an interesting historical thing. Erasmus of Rotterdam.

[5 : 13] And this was Erasmus' objection against Luther. However, inevitably, parts of the Bible will be opaque because of the very grandeur of their subject matter.

There's so alleged Erasmus. God's ways and purposes are so exalted. How could we hope to comprehend them? And Erasmus appealed here to Romans 11.33 as an example. Oh, the depths of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments. How inscrutable his ways. See, Luther? Or, again, he would appeal in the same vein to Isaiah 40, verse 13. Who has measured the spirit of the Lord? Or what man shows him his counsel? You know, these things are inaccessible to us. The claim that we may have clarity on such matters is hubris. [6 : 18] Who were we to scan the bosom of the Almighty? Why, says Erasmus, as Deuteronomy 29.29 says, the secret of the Lord remains with the Lord.

To think we can have God unveiled, clearly disclosed before us, is to reduce God to distorting dimensions of human comprehension. Okay? So, you see the force of that. See the force of that. So, there's the challenge from mystery. A second would be the challenge from multiplicity. The challenge from multiplicity. That is, the claim of clarity fails in practice. Given the reality of the irreducible multiplicity of all of the interpretations that we have of Scripture. I mean, surely it's self-evident. How can anyone have the chutzpah to claim the Scriptures are clear when nobody can agree on what they say? This was Robert Bellarmine. [7 : 35] You know, the great hammer of the Reformers. And he pointedly taunted the Reformers who claimed clarity for Scripture. You Protestants can't even agree amongst yourselves.

Look at all of your in-house squabbles over your understanding of even just those simplest words of institution.

This is my body. Oh, come on. Lutherans say one thing. The Zwinglians say another. Calvin offers a third option.

Ah! The profusion of interpretations is dizzying. And who can deny that it is so? Look at the proliferation of denominations who understand the Scriptures sufficiently differently to warrant in their minds gathering up into their own group.

And you tell me, who's the eye of Romans 7? Or who's the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2?

[8 : 44] Or what's meant by the baptism for the dead in 1 Corinthians 15? Or preaching to the spirits in prison in 1 Peter 3? And we could go on, as you well know.

This is a real potent and puissant challenge. Finally, it would seem that the claim to clarity is simply misguided.

It fails by its own criterion, as Scripture itself confesses its own obscurity. To claim clarity for Scripture is not simply to claim more for Scripture than it does for itself.

But it is to claim what Scripture explicitly denies. How is it that David in Psalm 119 prays for understanding?

Verse 18, open my eyes. Verse 27, let me understand. Verse 34, give me understanding. Verse 73, give me understanding again.

[9 : 56] Verse 125, give me discernment that I might understand. Again and again and again asking, I have to be granted some discernment or else it's impossible for me to understand.

Or the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24, they were at a loss as to how to understand the Old Testament. Or the Ethiopian in his chariot was baffled by the Isaiah scroll.

In Acts 8, to Philip's question, remember Philip asked him, do you understand what you were reading? Do you remember what his answer was?

I need somebody to... Exactly. How can I? Unless there's somebody to explain it to me. How could I possibly understand? If Scripture's meaning were clear and accessible, such would be unnecessary, surely.

And then there's Peter's clear testimony that Paul's epistles contain, quote, some things very hard to understand.

[11 : 09] 2 Peter 3.16. So these are some of the longstanding challenges. And they're pretty forceful.

Pretty forceful. And supplementing these traditional arguments that we've kind of had going on for a long time against clarity are those of more recent pedigree, which seem merely to compound the problem for any who would make a claim to Scripture's clarity.

So, the contemporary intensification. Consider the challenge of what we might call the limitations of language.

The limitations of language. The claim that Scripture is clear stumbles and falls because the vehicle in which it's communicated, human language, is notoriously frail and feeble.

We all know how prone language is to misconvey intended meaning. Just ask newlyweds. Is it not clear that communication is completely elusive?

[12 : 25] For that matter, ask those celebrating their diamond anniversary. Language is really easy to get garbled. To think that clarity is a possible attribute of language is to expect more than it can deliver.

As theologian Carl Barthes expresses it, human words need interpretation because, as such, as human words, they are ambiguous.

Not usually, of course, in the intention of those who speak, but always for those who hear. So, human words are always ambiguous for those who hear.

And then, when you throw in the vagaries of translation, I mean, most of us are not reading out of the Greek or the Hebrew. Well, how much is invariably lost?

As the Italian proverb insists, translation is treason. Easy for polyglots to say. What are we supposed to do, though? And then, there is the darker, modern claim that assertion of clarity in language is to suppress inherent equivocation and ambiguity.

[13 : 59] Ambiguity. It represents, quote, linguistic cleansing. If you say there's just one clear meaning to this, ah, you're a linguistic cleanser.

Akin to the ethnic cleansing of megalomaniacs who try to cleanse races. This is Derrida you're probably recognizing. And reflects a neurotic fear of, quote, the proliferation of meaning.

This is Foucault, as you probably recognize. Are you talking about logical positivism? No, no, no, that's another. This is the notion that language in itself is a playful, is a very, a playful dynamic thing.

And if we try to fix meaning of language to one, kind of tack it down like a dead butterfly, you killed the thing. No, no, no, no, no. So, there always need to be multiplicity of meanings, a playfulness.

And if you are trying to reduce it to one and insist that it just has one clear meaning, you're a linguistic cleanser. You're trying to cleanse that thing and polish it up in a way, which, you know, it's an evocative term.

[15 : 13] Is it not a linguistic cleanser? You don't want to, you know, good grief. You know, I'd be in the party of those, you know, that's like ethnic cleansers linguistically. You don't want to do that.

And, you know, who wants to fear, kind of sounds exciting, the proliferation of meaning.

Who wants to be scaredy cat about that? Well, maybe we do. So, yeah, it's pretty, it doesn't just cast you, really, as ignorant.

This sort of challenge casts you as an evil person. What you're doing is dangerous. It's dangerous to insist that language is clear.

That's what dictators employ this as a stick to beat people with, how language is always clear. And compounding these limitations of language are certain realities of the reader.

Any hope for a clear apprehension by the reader is scuttled by the inevitable subjectivity of the reception.

[16 : 25] What we imagine to be a clarity is nothing more than our own construal. That's how I see it. The meaning of any text is never simply and clearly given in the text.

It is ever only and self-servingly graven. We make it out to what we want it to be. This you'll recognize, you know, this is the echoes of Nietzsche.

Language is used as an instrument of power. Power over another. As Gadamer, the German philosopher, extremely influential in the universities, as Gadamer emphasizes, are our presuppositions and the situatedness of our horizon as readers.

In other words, where we are, what we're like as people, the concerns, the interests that we have, our abilities. These all shape the event of understanding.

You know, when you come to understand a text, you're bringing all of this freight from who you are and what you can do, what you're interested in, and that's going to affect the interpretation that you give.

[17 : 45] To imagine we have access to some pristine, clear, and distinct meaning in the text is really to remain in the thrall of an outdated and discredited modernist model that somehow our brains just can mirror the realities there.

No, no, no, no. We're active and we're constructionist in our engagement with reality and in our engagement with the text. We're constructing it. We're not just absorbing it. So, to make such a claim is to be in the strong grip of an illusion as to realities. So, there you have it. And these are strong currents, particularly in the academic sensibility that if you're up at the university, you'll hear all these things.

To insist upon the Bible's clarity in the teeth of these objections and in the temper of these times seems either quaint, insane, insane, or reactionary.

An affirmation doomed to derision. But, before we consign clarity to the dustbin of theological atavisms, things going the way of the dinosaur, let's pause not for a moment of respectful silence at its passing, rather pause for a moment of reflection and re-evaluation.

[19 : 28] For, there are a few things to be said on its behalf, which may stay the executioner's hand.

So, in defense of clarity. muse with me for a moment upon first, and perhaps decisively, God's purpose and ability.

God's purpose and ability. Consider that the Bible is God's revelation and flows from his, God's, determination to disclose himself.

It is God's desire to be known and responded to by his creatures and to do so through the vehicle of his word, the Bible.

To claim that his word is hopelessly obscure is to assert God's failure in attaining his object.

[20 : 51] It is to cast him, God, as an ineffectual communicator. But surely, this is absurd.

Surely, God's word succeeds in its purpose. As God states, Isaiah 55, 10 and 11, For as the rain and snow come down from heaven, and does not my, and does not return there without watering the earth, and making it bare and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, so shall my word be, which goes forth from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

Furthermore, it is the assumption throughout the Bible that its words are comprehensible, and as such, entail the moral responsibility to be heeded.

He doesn't just utter to no point. He expects that we hear and heed him. Deuteronomy 30, Deuteronomy 30, 11-14.

[22 : 36] Deuteronomy 30, 11-14. For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off.

It is not in heaven that you should say, who will ascend to heaven for us to bring it down to us, that we may hear it and do it, neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it.

But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it. As Luther remarks, Christ has not so enlightened us as deliberately to leave some part of his word obscure, commanding us to give heed to it, for he commands us in vain to give heed if he does not give light. Get that? That's from bondage of the will. Again, Luther provocatively asks, and he's asking Erasmus at this point, who we cited for obscurity, if scripture, Erasmus, is obscure and equivocal, why need it have been brought down to us by an act of God?

Surely we have enough obscurity and uncertainty within ourselves without our obscurity and uncertainty and darkness being augmented by heaven.

[24 : 20] Yeah, I mean, if the Bible's completely obscure, how is that going to help us? How is that going to bring redemption and salvation? So, consider again the purpose and the ability of God.

Think that that has decisive bearing on this topic. At least help us to try to work through some of the tension here. Consider also the testimony of scripture. And of course, the critical test for any doctrine is whether it accords with or better is taught by scripture.

And relevant here would be numerous characterizations as the scripture as light. Light. Think of that metaphor. Psalm 119, 105, thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Psalm 119, verse 130, the unfolding of thy words give light. It gives understanding to the simple.

Psalm 36, 9, in thy light we see light. 2 Peter 119 speaks of scripture as a lamp shining in a dark place.

[25 : 39] And such characterizations are impossible on the premise that the word itself is dark, shadowy, and failing of illumination.

Surely there can be no better image for clarity than light which illumines our darkness. At Deuteronomy 29, 29, that Erasmus had cited, the secret of the Lord remains with the Lord. But notice that the secret of the Lord is contrasted with the word that he has given to us. For the verse goes on, but, so the secret of the Lord remains with the Lord, but, what he has revealed, that is for us, that we may observe all of his works. words, sorry, that we may observe all of his words. Again, there is no reasonable expectation for us to observe what is fundamentally opaque.

[26 : 52] And as to the contentions about language as an unsuitable medium, it would seem we have reason to think that the opposite is true.

consider the suitability of language. Assertions of language as a barrier to God's successful revelation seem to assume that our language is simply a creaturely phenomenon, simply a human achievement in construction.

But this is not so. language is a divine gift. And since this is so, it becomes a bridge, not a barrier. In giving us this gift, God has made us fit speech partners with him. He's wired us for understanding.

Remember, God is the first, in the scriptures, God is the first to speak in what would later be considered human words.

[28 : 08] God is the first speaker. Words are not something alien to God. It's not as if God must somehow commandeer something which is in and of itself unsuitable to the task of communication.

and so the allegation as Barth puts it that human language is not a suitable but an unsuitable medium for God's self presentation should it seems be rejected.

Further, God the Son in taking human form as part of the incarnation took human language as his medium of disclosure.

Why should God's self communication be any more distorted by its expression in human words than his compassion is distorted by its expression in human flesh?

There's never a hint of a lisp when Jesus speaks about himself or the Father's purpose. It's never Jesus this is so frustrating to me I just can't explain it human words are so limited never never there's never a whisper of anything like that.

[29 : 44] When people fail to understand it is always accounted for in other ways. Not that oh this language thing it's such a blunt instrument.

No it's accounted for by hard hearts the malice of Satan unbelief but never the failure of his words. this reality takes us to another relevant consideration. It's all good and well to speak of languages originally a gift of God rendering it a fit and fruitful vehicle for communication but what about the fall what about the fall if God wired us for understanding has not sin messed with the circuitry?

Yes it has. The effect of sin upon the understanding is this in our sinful rebellion and self centeredness we do not always like the words we hear.

this hardness of heart or stiff neckedness if you would call it that I guess affects our ability to understand the words which echo in our ears are resisted and so our understanding is darkened so it does affect our understanding usually yeah yeah we become Christians an unbeliever suppresses the truth and unrighteousness do Christians do that and they do the Christian walk we still do that because we have so habituated that tendency that even when God's spirit when we're united with Christ and God's spirit comes to dwell with us and begins to produce new desires an affection for what

[32 : 10] God has said a conviction that this is for our good for our flourishing but remember it's still a little sprout so we don't spring from our spiritual womb fully blown like Venus on a half shell she's complete but it takes a while for it to grow so like sanctification would be the growth in those holy desires and in many of the qualities like humility submission patience that will help us to appropriate and we'll get to some of those themes but very apropos yes so yes we've argued that our hardness of heart or our stiff neckedness stiff neckedness affects our ability to understand so the words which echo in our ears are resisted and so our understanding is darkened usually we don't get it because we don't want to get it was it man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest was that

Bob Dylan I guess I try so hard to get these contemporary cultural I guess is he alive still okay yeah all right I got one contemporary culture reference man I'm doing I'm doing okay this morning human desire deeply affects human understanding tainted human desires correspondingly taint human understanding so this reality does not count against the clarity of scripture for the problem is not

with the text it's with the reader the problem is not with the word but with the hearer do you see and to argue for clarity we're talking about a quality of the word so if we you know throw dirt on things or if we close our eyes oh the text isn't clear anymore you closed your eyes deliberately and how often have you heard the testimony you know

I never understood a word of the Bible but then I gave my life to Christ and its meaning wonderfully opened up to me before I couldn't have even been bothered now I devour it surely you've heard some testimonies perhaps even experienced that sort of thing do you see the transformation you know ah sudden clarity what changed not the text not the text but the reader the reader but even if the barrier is not obscurity but unresponsiveness this is not an insuperable barrier to almighty power God is not stymied in his purpose to communicate his word even by our rebellious resistance which darkens our understanding because

God exerts effectual power through the spirit's illumination yeah for the spirit's illumination happily in understanding his word God does not leave us to our own compromised devices God is present by his spirit as revealer so it's not just text he shows up in person in his holy spirit as revealer such that understanding becomes more than a creaturely activity it is the spirit's action upon us the process of understanding repeats the basic motif of Christian existence which is being drawn out of darkness of sin and turned to the light of the gospel so being drawn out of the darkness of sin and being turned to the light of the gospel there's the fundamental biblical motif scripture is clear but because what it presents is that to which we must be reconciled we can discern its clarity only if our darkness is first illuminated so understanding is therefore not first of all an act of clarification of the text but an event of being ourselves clarified by the spirit okay that's a little complex maybe the wording let me repeat that slowly understanding is not first of all an act of clarification of the text but an event of being ourselves clarified by the spirit you remember in 2nd

Corinthians 3 but to this day Paul writes whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts isn't that interesting the veil is over their hearts remember what did the heart indicate in Hebrew or biblical idiom so they're not saying that they're witless but they're wanton okay it's not chiefly an intellectual issue but a moral issue the heart the affections where we direct our affections and the veil is there that's the problem that's what needs to be unveiled well yes and in that case they the knowledge that God has given them have that they have turned their backs upon they have spurned it he has been yelling it in their ear again the prophets he sends prophets again and again and again and they kill the prophets and then he sends his son they say ha look it's the son let's kill him so in the end they are without this knowledge that

[39 : 34] God has sent again and again and again why did God not send it did God not offer it did not give it did God not say hey it's not up in heaven that you have to climb there it's not across the sea that you have to swim there it's right here and you killed him and you killed him you killed me so similar sort of thing yeah they're without knowledge but why you know I can't hear you I can't hear you so yes you're right to bring that up but that's not a different phenomenon really than what we're discussing remember the and he goes on illumination really repeats the miracle of creation remember in 2 Corinthians 4 when he's speaking now of illumination and he says the light has shown in your hearts in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of

God the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ here how so he's describing basically illumination or regeneration and that that's in 2 Corinthians 3 15 and you hear the echoes it's creation let there be light same sort of thing so and and Ezekiel too I mean we could go on there there there so many things affords another example here notice language is not the barrier Ezekiel Ezekiel 3 4 through 7 this is in Ezekiel's commission here language is not the barrier not a matter of unintelligible speech or a difficult language rather not willing to listen stubborn obstinate see if you can catch it let me just read a couple of catch these themes so

Ezekiel 3 4 through 7 and he God said and he said to me son of man this is God this is the sending Ezekiel's call okay son of man Ezekiel go to the house of Israel and speak my words to them for you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language but to the house of Israel not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language whose words you cannot understand surely if I send you to such they would listen to you but the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you for they are not willing to listen to me because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart the theme goes on but again hey we don't have a language we don't have a language barrier here not a language problem we got a heart problem here so so summing up because of the purpose and ability of

God himself to communicate and the testimony and presumption of scripture it doesn't communicate to no point you can respond and the prevailing sorry and the suitability of the language of language as God's chosen means and the prevailing illumination of the spirit doesn't leave us to our own devices to overcome the obstacles of our unresponsiveness clarity is a conviction that we do bring to scripture we come to scripture confident of its ability successfully to communicate because of God's ability okay so that's I want to affirm that that is I think a biblical conviction that we can have I think that's solid but some clarifications are in order sorry about that must be my stock so clarity some clarifications first clarity when we affirm and our tradition is affirm the clarity of scripture when we affirm that we are not saying we are not claiming that exposition or interpretation is unnecessary indeed exposition okay or exit is only possible on the assumption that a meaning is accessible think of the situation of the

Ethiopian you know in Acts 8 that we referenced the fact that Philip instructed him does not imply he was as one has put it commenting on this passage lost in a sea of possibilities because of the text obscurity no his the Ethiopians was a confession of personal inadequacy to be remedied by someone with a better grasp of scripture's content not an assertion of the essential obscurity of the subject matter I mean really if you look at it the problem was one of reference who is this person that's spoken of here who is he speaking of and God has also supplied teachers gifted in exposition which are among the means available to us to help us to understand as the

[46 : 12] Westminster confession expresses clear quote scripture being clear in the due use of ordinary means that is there needs to be the due use of certain means that God provides that are ordinary that are at hand for us to use like reading like reading like looking at a commentary like coming to a class like all of these ordinary means talking to one another study reflection meditation these are the ordinary means that are at hand for us all if we apply ourselves so they would they you know Westminster confession affirms clear the Bible is clear in the due use of ordinary means and those ordinary means include exposition Bible study personal and corporate engagement of that word so so that clarification second clarity does not imply uniform simplicity or transparency of every text of scripture sometimes scripture's clarity is hard won hard won the results in part of diligent labor second

Timothy 2 7 enjoins Paul's telling Timothy think hard about these things that I say are right to you for the Lord will give you understanding in everything we ought to be careful to imagine that if the Lord gives me understanding that he's going to give you understanding independently of thinking hard about these things probably his gift of understanding is a sustaining diligence for you to keep your nose on the page and work at it it's not going to be probably some zap or wand thing but he will sustain these diligent fruits of the spirit with diligent application to help you to understand if you go off scripture in your mind the spirit will exactly exactly you have to be in tune with scripture to know what's in scripture so when you're thinking away from scripture it brings you back to the scripture absolutely yeah doctrine reproof correction instruction instruction of righteousness doctrine what the path is reproof showing you if you've gotten off it correction putting you back on the path and instruction and righteousness how to stay on that path so excellent yeah excellent could you say john in the psalms david's imploring god to give understanding to give insight really more not an intellectual quest but a desire for intimacy well i'm sure i'm sure that that's part of it and he and he realizes that there's this there's this wonderful dialectic of our longing to his longing to understand god's word was not just to try to gather up and get his precepts so he can put more of a store away more of his precepts it was the person behind the precepts so you're right to connect some of our motive with a desire for intimacy with god who are you what are you like what do you want so yes it very much does so we want to press through the precepts to the person so absolutely absolutely so think hard timothy your understanding will require hard work it's why he tells timothy a few verses later be diligent that you may handle accurately the word of truth 2nd timothy 2 15 so it's in this context that we might consider peter's remark about paul's writings remember in 2nd peter 3 16 speaking of our good brother paul's writings there are some things in them hard to understand peter says that paul now peter is not saying that their meaning cannot be discerned simply that at certain points it will take concentrated effort and i think that that's what some of us have found is that like the difference between a doctor who goes to high school college medical school a residency and a fellowship and a person that just reads a first aid book yeah you know a lot of times and you're you're going to realize that's right and the expectation that he would be able to arrive at insight in his diagnosis or skill in his operation is going to be much more than you know a walk on

you know i don't want to walk on doing my heart open heart surgery you know it's just not absolute there you go you didn't act that think that way for a doctor now think about eternal things yeah your pastor your teachers your elders i mean they give us really important information it has to do with eternal life yeah yeah and not just you know yeah that that's i think why some of the qualifications for these offices like elder aren't flippant flip it they're they're they're pretty they're pretty deliberate and thoughtful and a lot of it has to do with that what is distinct of the qualification of the elder versus say a deacon you know isn't well the deacon can get drunk a few times and the elder just a little bit less you know you know but capable as titus says capable of exhorting in sound doctrine and refuting those who contradict having a firm grasp of the mysteries firm grasp so that's yes you're absolutely right those those are the qualifications notice that peter's remarks here also assume that a proper meaning can be identified and contrasted with distortions put forward by the untaught and the unstable because in this very passage some things are difficult to understand of paul's writings which perverse men distort to their own destruction there'd be no meaningful way to define or distinguish distortion from understanding if there were not some sort of clarity about understanding you know you you couldn't you couldn't have that so the fact is that clarity is often hard won through diligence and that doesn't mean that there's no clarity doesn't mean that there's no clarity and you know think about

Jesus's you know when he tells the Pharisees maybe there was somebody in Matthew 9 yeah where he says go and learn what this means I desire mercy not sacrifice so they knew that stuff he said go and learn in other words think about it work through this you haven't got it yet something missing go think about this and sometimes in the scripture this is this is a heuristic device where a device that helps us to actually gain understanding okay sometimes things are put forward that just right on the surface they seem to be incompatible how did how could this work okay it their clarity is not immediately evident but that's the whole point to get you to puzzle and go deeper so for example wisdom literature does this all the time in

Proverbs 26 verses 4 and 5 you know answer not a fool according to his folly lest you be like him yourself and then in the very next verse answer a fool according to his folly lest he be wise in his own eyes you think oh good good far from it being clear this is this is manifestly contradictory look the bible's not no no the point is to not just glide over this thing at 30 thousand feet what's going on here ah then you're actually really engaging with the word yeah yeah Tyler I think about God's transcendence in the scripture like he's a king above all authority and exalted but then he says God is near to the broken heart wonderful flight great example yeah yeah there you go that's by definition that is absolutely true that's right and yet isn't it it's an invitation some of these things don't throw up your hands this is impenetrable no it's an invitation come come in deeper come up higher it's an invitation third clarity does not imply that every text will always be familiar to us that will immediately go I

[56 : 36] I get what's going on here there there there there's some things that just may seem really really strange I remember as a little boy you know reading through acts and you know Paul cutting his hair and taking a vow thinking what's up with that I was puzzling over that for a while I think I had to ask my dad it just seemed really strange I didn't know what the custom was what he was doing you know you take a vow when you cut your hair should have gone back to the Nazarenes I could have done it if I would have stuck with scripture a little bit more I could have probably clarified some of these things but yeah a lot of it's strange and God's word will not simply affirm or confirm all that we already intuitively know and feel it will radically change and challenge our perspectives and so it may at first strike at first strike us as a very alien word for it does not simply echo our own perspectives and cultural preoccupations but this does not count against its clarity it simply attests to our conceptual and moral distance from God and our desperate need to be surprised and corrected and tuned by it yeah some of the strange stuff

I remember there was a little boy reading Isaiah where it talks about all these partiers and revelers and then this is the jaws of hell open up and down they go to chants of praise to God and to me you know I could smell the sulfur and it just seems so grisly an image and think this is to the praise of the glory of God yep yep to the praise of his justice to the praise of his goodness well just because that felt alien you know to a six year old doesn't mean that the scripture is not clear it was clear about that it just seemed alien I needed I needed to be retuned I needed to adjust my sensibilities bring them in line with what God revealed for me it was for I am a jealous God 28 years ago I said how could God feel jealousy is bad that's right and then I had to be straightened out that's right you

got married and you thought ooh

I know what this feels like this is a good thing boundaries in place that's right yeah indeed its strangeness is actually part of its clarity because its strangeness again is clarifying us it has a clarifying function for us to remove our cloudiness so it's not an obstacle to overcome so fourth and so and this one's a really important insight I mean this is really helpful to me clarity does not imply that our comprehension is the only outcome okay we might think that if it's clear that the only outcome should be my comprehension if I don't comprehend you know finally that means it wasn't clear no clarity does not imply that our comprehension is the only outcome it is not the sole function of God's word to bring illumination it also at times can operate as an instrument of judgment it was so with God's word spoken to Isaiah

Isaiah 6 9-10 go go and tell this people keep on listening but do not perceive keep on looking but do not understand render the hearts of this people insensitive their ears dull their eyes dim lest they see with their eyes hear with their ears understand with their hearts and return and be healed now Jesus took this very passage upon his lips in Mark 4 4 12 and applied it to how his words Jesus' words functioned for some hearers to the hard hearted marked by unbelief his words bring judgment they produce their effect not being understood and heeded so sometimes the words function it functions as an instrument of life sometimes they are death dealing that is they seal rebellion that is already present and culpably present they seal a rebellion that's culpably already present as Paul would write of the words of the gospel in 2nd corinthians 2 16 to one an aroma of death to death to another an aroma from life to life but again these clear life giving words become the occasion for confusion and incomprehension not because the words lack clarity or lack light but rather because the wicked heart preference for darkness and this is the judgment that the light light has come into the world but men love darkness rather than the light for their deeds were evil John 3 19 it's not that it's not light the light comes in but the light ends up being judgmental for all that that step into the turn their back on it and step into the darkness they want to remain in the darkness and the word was so effectual does that make sense I know it sounds a little odd that sometimes the aim is not really comprehension the aim is to seal judgment and the word is still clear and effectual and finally clarity does not imply plenary perspicuity it doesn't mean that every last bit of scripture is easy to grasp that doesn't imply that it's it's it's it's neither the case nor the claim of clarity that all things in scripture are clear in themselves an absolute claim we're not making an absolute claim that reformers never were an absolute claim leaving no room for real and persistent difficulty with particular passages none of the reformers ever meant it that way no clarity affirm that we affirm that the reformers affirmed is not the denial that some bits are independently obscure it relates to the message as a whole the gospel particularly we are able to grasp all that is needed to trust and obey to respond to God through his word in faith and repentance as we have said clarity relates to the intended effect of God's word which is salvific salvific and salvation is a broad category you know it's sanctification it's salvific rightly understood the clarity of scripture is not so much a category of epistemology that is like knowing things but it's a category primarily of redemption clarity of scripture is primarily a category of redemption its clarity is its efficacy its efficacy its soteriological efficacy it is able to save to the uttermost as the

[65 : 35] Westminster Confession reads or I could do it in these quarters as the London Baptist Confession of 1689 reads quote all things in scripture are not alike plain in themselves nor alike clear unto all yet those things which are necessary to be known believed and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of scripture that not only the learned but the unlearned in due use of the ordinary means may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them okay did you get that it's a good expression of the doctrine okay let me just read it one more time all things in scripture are not alike plain in themselves nor alike clear unto all some gifted others less so we lean on each other it's a corporate endeavor yet those things which are necessary to be known believed and observed for salvation soteriological primary category are so clearly propounded and opened in some place in the scripture again you might find a little bit that's difficult but you take the whole thing together let let let the clear illuminate the more obscure okay in some parts of scripture some places in scripture that not only the learned don't need to have all of these degrees for the word to be effectual to you not only the learned but the unlearned in due use of the ordinary means again some of the ordinary means when they say unlearned they're not talking about complete illiterate what you can read to you this is why the reformers always were hey teach everybody to be able to read the scripture that was one of the earliest laws in the books in the

New England colonies they call it the Satan spoiler law which we're going to teach everybody to read so they can read the Bible there you have it Satan so yes so this is a good expression so similarly the Irish articles of religion 1615 although there be some hard things in the scriptures yet all things necessary to be known unto everlasting salvation are clearly delivered therein and nothing of that kind is spoken under dark mysteries in one place which is not in other places spoken more familiarly and plainly to the capacity both of the learned and the unlearned so you kind of see these themes we could go down through all the Protestant confessions of faith and we have that so in conclusion and commission simply put if you go away with just one two word scripture succeeds scripture succeeds it is functional it's not dysfunctional scripture is not dysfunctional it is as we are told in 2nd 10th it is profitable it is able to fully equip the believer and supremely able to make us wise unto salvation it comes with sufficient clarity for us to discern its meaning and to respond accordingly as

Moses told the people of God in reference to the word of God it is not beyond you Deuteronomy 30 so don't despair don't despair open it up you start reading oh it's kind of hard cookies aren't always on the lowest shelf don't despair this has been historically the Roman Catholic tendency if the Bible seems daunting and impenetrable don't be discouraged go for it what God has revealed is for you Deuteronomy 29 29 read it read it says Paul to Timothy even as a youth even as a very young man through scriptures he had become convinced that is he formed convictions out of the Bible even as a young as a youth okay it communicated truth clearly and Timothy formed convictions and convictions aren't possible without clarity if the trumpet give an uncertain sound who shall gather for the battle you know we need to have a pattern in our life of reading and reflecting and responding to scripture back the augustans catherine of siena yeah all of them

I'm despising his gifts I'm just leaving them wrapped under the Christmas tree no open it up take about you know it's not solo scripture me and the Bible it's sola scriptura it means something different we'll talk about that maybe on reformation day we'll see we need to take advantage of the community of faith the very gifting within the body so don't despise that that's the times of Protestant tendency so let's approach the scriptures with confidence concentration and community for God has something to say to us and we need to hear it and be of good cheer for through the word he is very good at saying it and we need to hear it for the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit both joints and marrow and catch this next word don't miss it able able the scripture is able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart

[73 : 29] Hebrews 4 12 we went on for a long time okay I'm just dying this is so inspiring yeah we got no I'm not talking about me I'm talking about this next thing that I'm about to read okay I won't read it sometime go back go back and read Martin Luther's preface to his Latin works where he talks about his breakthrough and you could say the reformation under the sovereignty of God came as a result of the insight of a student of scripture Martin Luther and he talks about how he come to this place in Paul and says good news wait the gospel is good news you've just told me then in the next word that the wrath of God abides on us how could the righteousness of God that you announce as good news be good news the righteousness of

God good news you've got to be kidding me that means your inclination as a righteous God to judge and punish all those who are unrighteous how can that be good news it's just not clear doggone it and he said I longed to understand what Paul could mean that the righteousness of God is good news and and I he says I battered at this place day and night seeking with prayers and tears to understand what the apostle could mean it goes on I mean he worked hard at this and he said and then I perceived and it's just a wonderful little bit it clarifies this gospel that I can't go into it now but it's just wonderful and he said it was as if the gates of paradise opened before me everything the whole face of scripture changed for me

I read that in his commentary to Romans well it's often put there he makes a reference to it but actually he wrote that in his preface to his Latin works so but it is commenting on Romans so that's if you find it I should stop I've gone a long long time comments questions sorry sometimes just gets to yes what occurs to me as you speaking is the current social and political research known as confirmation bias so we as human beings accept ourselves from opinion we kind of bond to it yeah yeah adding new information the facts that are presented to us we undervalue the ways that contradict our opinion yep and hold tight to yes yes excellent so it's just like human even aside from

scripture any truth yeah yeah we tend to reject if it contradicts because we want that comfort yeah exactly yeah just having our opinion be correct yeah yeah and so it gets worse some of the some of the research most recently when they they took a chart and it was and they gave it to thousands of people okay and it was what is the effect of using ointment on itchiness of your skin just a simple graph the more ointment less itch easy you know just just one thing and everybody understood it and they took the exact same graph the exact same graph just changed the title just what is this graph of it's a relation of gun control to gun violence and and boom the interpretations were completely polarized depending upon your political background confirmation bias man sees what he wants to see and disregards the rest but here's the kicker that ought to be really scary in a room like this as I'm looking around the more education you had the more you were able to rationalize your view and take reality and twist it and tug it way far away from what it said so we are particularly those those who among us who might be learned or skilled or gifted we have an even greater propensity to just twist the truth so we need to be really really careful about that now one of the ways is what challenges my hardened heart the scriptures supremely this was that last verse dividing sharp two-edged sword laying bare that and then one another I try to find as many thoughtful people that I can who disagree with me most vehemently and I try to be with them as much of the time as I can who think my views are absolutely absurd that's why I hang out with Raul every once in a while he thinks my views are absolutely absurd and it hopefully challenges so if we use some of the gifts God knows that we're that way he remembers that we're but dust so he gives us each other to challenge and help us yeah all right team we should probably call it yeah thank you next we're I think we're on again next week I think it's Tom you guys are in luck stop