

...in the Authority of the Bible

Well, great to see you guys. My name is Kent, if I haven't had the chance to meet you—I'm one of the pastors here. If you have a bible, turn to **Luke 1**. While you're getting there, if I can, I'd love to just brag on you guys for a second. Is that cool with y'all? As many of you guys know, this past week was our annual **Best First Week Ever** for University of Tennessee students. So nearly every day the past seven days, we had some sort of event on campus, or even multiple events. We handed out all kinds of free stuff: over 400 coffees on Wednesday, 500 Chick-Fil-A biscuits on Wednesday, all kinds of stuff. But the part I wanted to brag on you guys about is that **this year we had more of you come out to volunteer for it than ever before**. 40+ of you were there, and together put in over 300 combined hours to love, serve, and get to know students on campus. Which is just amazing. It's stuff like that that makes us extremely proud to be y'all's pastors: you guys just leap at the opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus here in our city, and this was just one more example of that. So thank you to all of you who served and helped us put on all of that.

But **just in case you're a college student here today**, and you didn't know anything about any of that, you're in luck. Because today, after the Gathering, we're taking any college student who wants to go right down the street to Sweet P's for lunch—our treat. So feel free to meet us out on the patio and we'll all head over together. All this is our way of welcoming back those in our church family that are students and just got back into town. So that's that.

But that said, last week, if you weren't with us, we kicked off a **series called *I Just Can't Believe***, where we are looking at some of the most common objections and obstacles to faith in Jesus. And as we mentioned, we are doing this series for sort of three groups of people. First, for those who openly struggle with these objections. Second, for those who struggle with these objections, but haven't really ever felt the freedom to acknowledge that. And third, for people that we will inevitably come across in our day-to-day relationships who struggle with these questions. Those are the groups of people we had in mind when we decided to do a series like this one. And then we just spent some time last Sunday talking about how faith and reason are often not as opposed to one another as a lot of people think.

Today, we're gonna talk about **one of the primary objections** people often have to faith in Jesus, and that's the objection to the *authority of the bible*. **For both believers and**

nonbelievers alike, there is generally an understanding that to *become* a Christian, you have to view the bible as *authoritative* over your life, at least on some level.

And for a lot of people, that's a problem. Because to many people, the *ideas* in the bible seem at best *outdated*, and at worst *regressive* and *harmful* to society. People read the bible and see things like polygamy, slavery, and sexism, and all sorts of other things and go, "I can't get on board with this. There's just no way I can say that a book with those ideas in it could be *authoritative* over my life." That's where many people are at in regards to the bible. So today, I want us to talk a little about *that* objection.

But first, before we talk about the bible being authoritative or not authoritative, **we should probably clarify what we mean by "authoritative."** Right? Just so we at least know what it is we're discussing. And here's why I think that's worth doing: because even those who believe in the authority in the bible, when they say that, don't generally mean that *every line and instruction* in the bible is directly binding over our lives today. Very few Christians believe *that*. For instance, laws in the Old Testament would forbid God's people from wearing **clothes made of mixed fabrics**. But I've encountered very few Christians in today's world who feel racked with guilt over having accidentally worn a polyblend tee. Other laws would forbid people from eating **shellfish**. I've never once invited another Christian to a seafood restaurant and had them decline because of that Old Testament law. Even some things in the *New Testament*—Romans 16 says "greet one another with a **holy kiss**." Not a *single one* of you kissed me when we got here this morning (and just to be clear: I'm 100% okay with that). My point is that very, very few Christians, when they say that the bible is "authoritative," mean that every single instruction, Old Testament and New, is still binding on us today. **Most Christians rather, when they say that the bible is authoritative, they mean something like the bible is true, that it's trustworthy, and that it has bearing on our lives.** That's what most Christians mean when we talk about the bible being authoritative.

So this morning, **let's start** by just talking about the authority of the ***New Testament***: the part of the bible that starts with Jesus' life. We're also going to talk about the *Old Testament* before we're done, but I want us to start with the New. Not because the Old Testament doesn't matter, but because *the New Testament* is the part that tells us most explicitly about *Jesus*, and Jesus is ground zero for understanding everything else in the bible. Make sense?

So let's start by asking the question, **can we trust what the *New Testament* tells us about Jesus?** Now, some people would say that we *can't*. Usually for one of two reasons. Some people say we can't because the accounts of Jesus' life were never intended to be

understood as historical facts. That they're more like myths or legends, like Greek mythology, or something like Aesop's Fables. So they *were* intended to be *inspiring stories*, but never intended to be read as historical nonfiction. The *other* reason some people give is that maybe at *one point* the stories *were* historical accounts, but then somewhere along the line they were tampered with in some way. They believe that religious people, in an effort to make Jesus look more impressive than he really was, or maybe to consolidate political power among themselves, turned these normal stories about a good moral teacher named Jesus of Nazareth into these fantastical stories about miracles and resurrections and claims to be God. For one of those two reasons, people tend to cast doubt on what the bible tells us about the person and work of Jesus.

But let's first **let the texts speak for themselves** before we jump to any conclusions. We'll start with **Luke 1**. This is the very *opening paragraph* of the gospel of Luke, one of the early biographies of Jesus. And here's how Luke, the author, kicks things off:

*[1] Inasmuch as **many** have undertaken to compile a **narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us**, [2] just as those who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses** and **ministers** of the word have delivered them to us, [3] **it seemed good to me also**, having **followed all things closely** for some time past, to write an **orderly account** for you, most excellent Theophilus, [4] **that you may have certainty** concerning the things you have been taught.*

Now, **a couple things I want you to notice** about those four verses. First, just notice **the overall tone and language** Luke uses. Does this start off like you'd expect a legend or a fairy tale to start? It doesn't, does it? You start fiction with lines like "once upon a time..." or "a long time ago, in a galaxy far away...". You don't start fiction with "it seemed good to me, having followed all things closely for some time, to write an orderly account for you." You don't use phrases like "...so that you may have *certainty*." This intro to Jesus' life doesn't read like fiction or fairy tale at all—it reads like a researched, verified, historical account.

The **second thing** I want you to notice is that judging by his language, Luke, the author, is apparently a **skeptic's skeptic**. He seems like the type of guy who takes *nothing* at face value. **If he was around today, I feel certain that Luke would be the type of guy who immediately gets out his phone and Googles every fact or statistic that anybody throws out.** I mean look at what he says here. It's essentially, "yeah I know a lot of people who were eyewitnesses have documented the things Jesus said and did, but I wanted to do some research for myself." So Luke isn't just *hearing* things that other people say and

just adding it automatically to his writing. He's taking things that eyewitnesses say, and then checking them against *other* eyewitnesses to see if they're legit or not. In other words, if you're skeptical about the claims of Christianity, Luke is probably the guy you want to read from. The dude does his research. He doesn't set out to repeat myths—he sets out to confirm and verify *historical events*.

So **you can believe** that the book of Luke is a myth or a legend of some sort. But to do that is completely *ignore* the *stated* intention of his writings. So unless you've got a valid, trustworthy reason to do that, I would argue that's not a fair way to read historical literature. It reeks a little of arrogance, to read it that way. It would be like reading the story of the Titanic sinking and going "I don't know—this was a really big sophisticated boat. It just doesn't sound plausible that a little iceberg would take it down." It might *not* sound plausible, but that doesn't *necessarily* mean it didn't happen. Things that don't seem plausible happen all the time: truth is stranger than fiction. So **when it comes to the New Testament**, *examine* its claims, sure. *Verify* everything in it that you can, absolutely. **But don't cast doubt on what it says simply because it's difficult to believe. No doubt, many of the things that happened seemed difficult for Luke to believe too, which is probably why he put in the work to go and verify that they were true.**

Now, on a similar note, I also want us to take a look at **1 Corinthians 15**. You can turn there, but we'll also put it up on the screen. Here, Paul is talking about Jesus' life and death, but specifically about his resurrection. And I want you to pay careful attention to how he presents it, starting in v. 3:

[3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, [5] and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. [6] Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

So Paul's focus in this passage is on the **resurrection**. Now, of all the things in the bible that seem hard for people to believe, the resurrection has to be towards the top of the list. And understandably so—claiming that someone came back from the dead is a pretty massive claim to make. But one thing I always think is funny is when people cast doubt on the resurrection by saying things like "well, *now we know* that things like that don't happen." As if, somehow, people *back then* didn't know people don't come back from the

dead. I'm pretty sure they were aware of that. In fact, you could argue that's *exactly* why it's *in there*: because of how *out-of-the-ordinary* it was.

But in this passage from 1 Corinthians, **Paul doesn't just take for granted** that people will *believe* that—he grounds it in *eyewitness testimony*. He says that after Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to Peter, and then the twelve disciples, and then over 500 more people. In fact, 500 people, who at the time of this writing, were *still alive*.” So **at the time of Paul writing this letter, literally hundreds of people who saw the resurrected Jesus with their own two eyes were still living**—meaning the people reading this could go and check with them to see if it was true.

Now again, **if** Jesus coming back from the dead is **meant to be a legend**, you don't put things like this in there. If the resurrection was something more like an *allegory* for victorious living, not meant to be taken literally, Paul wouldn't have said, “go talk to any of these several hundred people who saw Jesus once he rose from the dead.” That's not how legends read. **At the end of the story of Little Red Riding Hood, it doesn't say “...and so if you go to Clinton, TN right now, you can go talk to all the people that saw this little girl get eaten by the wolf!” Because it's a legend. It's not meant to be verified.** But the New Testament accounts don't read like legends—they read like verifiable, historical events. Does that make sense.

But **maybe you're still not convinced**. Maybe you're thinking, “well, even these two passages you just *read* could've been tampered with or added on later on.” But let me just go bible history nerd level 1000 with you for just a second. The four gospels—the four early accounts of Jesus' life—they were written at the *very most*, **forty to sixty years** after Jesus' death and resurrection. So that leaves *plenty* of people still alive to *verify or to challenge* them. *Paul's* letters—letters like 1 Corinthians—they were written just **fifteen to twenty-five** years after Jesus' death and resurrection.¹ So when Paul said “go check with any of these 500 people who saw it all,” that wasn't an empty promise. He meant that they really could do that.

And I'll just add this and then we'll move on: **if you actually do the research**, you will find that we have **more manuscripts** that attest to the reliability of the New Testament than nearly any other writings or documents from that time period, by a long shot. We have somewhere around 6,000 manuscripts for the New Testament. By contrast, for some of the manuscripts we have from Homer and Plato, there's only about 30-50 manuscripts,

¹ This is all gleaned from F.F. Bruce's *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* That work is available [here](#).

and there's no significant debate about their reliability. 30-50 versus 6,000 for the New Testament.² That's pretty reliable. So bible nerd moment over—here's my simple point: you should know **if you choose to reject the claims of the New Testament, it's not nearly as simple as just saying “this stuff seems implausible to me.”** You actually need to contradict a lot of evidence to the contrary to arrive at that conclusion.

But to sum up, **if you're looking for good reasons to trust the New Testament, there are actually plenty of those reasons out there for the taking.** But all that being said, I know that a lot of people's problems with the bible reside not with the *New Testament*, but the *Old*. After all, *that's* where we find more examples of things like polygamy and slavery—the things a lot of people get hung up on. So when it comes to the *Old Testament*, let me just give you three important considerations to make in how we read and interpret *it*:

Some of it is descriptive, not instructional.

In other words, **some of the Old Testament isn't condoning what happened, or approving of what happened, it's simply describing for us what *did* happen.** Much of the Old Testament is not trying to hold up for us perfect moral examples to follow. In fact, it's often quite the opposite. Look at **1 Corinthians 10:6** with me on the screen:

Now these things [in context—that's referring to many of the “things” we read about in the Old Testament] occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

So **the bible itself tells us** that at least some of the things in the Old Testament aren't there because they're noble or exemplary, but precisely the opposite: so that we know what *not* to do. So that we see how *not* to live. **For instance, the stuff you'll find in the Old Testament about polygamy.** It's easy to read through those stories and go, “wait—so God was just *okay* with these men having multiple wives and with them exerting all this power and manipulation *over* their wives as a result?” And the answer is “no. No he wasn't.” **And if you really pay attention to the stories that include polygamy, you'll pick up on how it highlights all the carnage and destruction that occurs because of the polygamy.** So **just because the bible says it happened doesn't mean God condoned it happening.** At times, the bible uses narrative to expose the horrors and abuses of certain practices. **A lot of times in the bible, when we see really horrific things happen, they're not there because God approves of them. Often they're there**

² For more on this, listen to Tim Mackie's excellent lecture on the *Making of the Bible*, available [here](#).

because the authors are exposing them for the evil that they are. Now it might be easy to miss that because the Old Testament doesn't always come right out and say explicitly that's what it's doing. It often simply uses narrative to make its point.

But if you think about it, **this is how a lot of good storytelling** goes about it. For instance, at the end of the famous film *Shindler's List*, you don't see a huge graphic come across the screen that says "*the producers of this film are against the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime and denounce racism in all its forms. Just, FYI.*" They didn't have to do that, because in the film, they demonstrate that by *exposing* the violence for what it is. It's *inferred* that they're against it. So in the Old Testament, when you read through stories of things like polygamy and favoritism and sexism, pay attention—not just to what the stories are *saying explicitly*—but to what they are *showing* you. What they are *exposing* about the characters and practices in the story. Because much of the Old Testament is descriptive, not instructional. Second...

Much of it requires knowing the cultural context.

Some of the Old Testament requires **understanding the cultural dynamics** at play around the time that the passage is written. For instance, a lot of us read passages in the bible that talk about **slavery** (maybe both in the Old *and* New Testaments), and find them incredibly troublesome. It seems *crazy* to us that when the bible talks about slavery, it says *anything other* than "abolish it all completely and immediately." But if you dig in much to the cultural context, you'll find that slavery in many of those ancient cultures didn't really resemble the type of slavery that most of us think of today. It wasn't racially motivated like American slavery was, it didn't start with one group of people capturing another group of people and forcing them into slavery—**there were a lot of pretty significant differences between what you and I think slavery is, and what people in the biblical societies understood slavery to be.** In a lot of ways, slavery back then had more in common with what we would call indentured servitude and even some things in common with the modern day *workforce*, than it did with 18th century American slavery. Now, I know that's a whole can of worms on its own—so if you're interested in digging in further on all that, we did a teaching in our Ephesians series where we went into all of that in-depth. You can find it on our website.³

But my point is that many initially read passages that give instructions to "slaves" and "masters" and write the bible off as unreasonable, but to do that is **to read our cultural context into** the bible. You can't really do that with *any* historical literature—you have to

³ You can find that teaching [here](#).

understand *its* cultural context to know what it is and isn't saying. You and I wouldn't read a line in the bible that said "Jesus ate a meal with his disciples," and assume that meant they went through a drive-thru, picked up cheeseburgers, fries, and ate them together in their car as they traveled down the road. We wouldn't conclude all that, simply because that's what "eat a meal" often means to us. In the same vein, we shouldn't assume that words like "slavery" meant the same thing that that word means today. Some of the Old Testament simply requires knowing the cultural context. And finally...

Some of it is *temporarily* authoritative, and some of it is *permanently* authoritative.

This is probably the most complex idea when it comes to reading the Old Testament. Often, understanding the Old Testament comes down to knowing that some of it is *temporarily* authoritative, and some of it is meant to be *permanently* authoritative. This is what we alluded to earlier: very few people actually believe that the entire bible—Old Testament and New—is all meant to be binding to all people at all times. Especially when it comes to many Old Testament laws and regulations, they had a purpose for a *time*, but were never meant to be binding for all people at all times. Now, before you think I'm a heretic, let me just show you where I get this. Take a look on the screen at [Galatians 3](#), where it says this:

[23] Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. [24] So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. [25] Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

Alright, now confession time: how many of you just got lost in all that? Yep, I'm pretty sure I did too the first few times I read it. But what he's saying is actually really helpful when it comes to how we understand some of the codes and laws in the Old Testament. The imagery he uses is that some of the Old Testament law served as a "guardian." Today, we might use a word like "nanny" or "babysitter." He says some of the Old Testament law was actually meant to function like a babysitter for God's people. Meaning, it served a good purpose for a particular people in a particular time, but it wasn't designed to be binding for *all* God's people at *all* times.

So think about it this way, to just sort of borrow his word picture: Ana and I currently have a three year old son and a three month old daughter. Which means currently, if we

leave the house and our kids don't come with us, we have a babysitter stay at our house with them. Usually one of you guys or a couple of you guys, come over to our house, and you watch our kids for us. And that's a *great* thing—in fact, a *necessary* thing—for us to do when our kids are three months and three years old. It will *not* be a great thing for us to do when they are 30 years and 33 years old. If when our kids are adults, and they come to visit us, and we have to hire a babysitter to stay there with them while we're not home, we have done something *horribly* wrong as parents. Because hiring a babysitter is a great thing for a time, but not forever. Am I making sense? Okay, well Paul says that in a similar way, **there are laws that were binding on God's people for a time, for certain reasons, are no longer binding for God's people today.** They were meant to be *temporarily* authoritative, not *permanently* authoritative. Let me give you just a couple examples of this.

One example of this would be eating **pork**. The book of Leviticus explicitly forbids God's people eating pork, as well as a number of other types of meat.⁴ But then in the book of Acts, God explicitly lifts that restriction.⁵ So college students: if you were gonna walk down to Sweet P's and have some ribs after this with us, you will not need to repent after doing that. Another one: In the Old Testament, all the men of God's people had to be **circumcised**. But then in the New Testament, there's an entire book of the bible almost exclusively devoted to explaining why that is no longer a requirement for God's people.⁶ So we don't require circumcision for men to join our church. And thank God, because that would be a very awkward policy to enforce. So parts of the Old Testament were meant to be *temporarily authoritative*, but are no longer binding in the same way for followers of Jesus living today.

That being said though, there are **other parts of the Old Testament that are permanently authoritative**. For instance, the command to "love your neighbor as yourself—" that one still applies. "Do not murder"—we're still gonna hang onto that one. Or, we'll get a little more controversial: the Old Testament law to "treat the foreigner among you as a *native*." That one still applies, contrary to what a lot of people who claim to be Christians would lead you to believe. There is plenty of the Old Testament law that is still *very much* authoritative over followers of Jesus today. Some that isn't, and some that is.

So that **raises a question**, doesn't it? It raises the question, *how do we know what parts of the Old Testament still apply to us, and what parts don't?* Seems like an important

⁴ Leviticus 14:5-8; 11:2-8.

⁵ See Acts 10:9-16.

⁶ This is of course referring to the book of Galatians.

question for followers of Jesus to answer. And to be honest, it's not super cut and dry. We could do an entire *series* on how to answer that question. But for our intents and purposes, I'll just give you these two guiding principles, and then we'll move on: *if the New Testament affirms or confirms it, it still applies. If the New Testament clearly fulfills it or changes it, it no longer applies.* That doesn't clear up every single instance for sure, but it's a pretty good operating principle.

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So there you have it: **a few things** to keep in mind about the **New Testament**, and three specific things to keep in mind when trying to understand the **Old Testament**. Now, I fully realize that does not answer or speak to every single objection some of us have with the bible—probably not by a long shot. But I do think that gives us some help with a lot of them.

And **more than anything**, I give you all of that to show you that **there are ways of understanding the bible**. **There are answers and responses to many of our hang-ups with it, if you're willing to consider that those answers might be out there.** There are intelligent people who have written books upon books upon books, about how an informed, 21st century, critical thinker might wrap their minds around some of the bible's more difficult claims. So hopefully, if you're a person who *genuinely wants* to try and understand the bible, that gives you something to go on. If you're willing to consider that there might be answers *out there*, they *are* out there.

But I think the problem sometimes is that a lot of people—maybe even some of us in this room—don't really *want* those answers. **So for some of us, we've wanted to understand and believe the bible, and have just had a hard time getting there. That's one thing. But for others of us, we've simply wanted to reject the bible, and have had plenty of luck finding justifications for doing that.**

And I think **this really gets at a deeper problem** that may be going on in us: **some of us take issue with the authority of the bible, because we have an issue with authority in general.** For some, it's not so much that we have scholarly, researched, thoughtful objections to the Bible. It's just that we don't like the idea of anyone or *anything*—let alone a 2,000+ year old *text*—telling us what to do and not to do. **I heard someone put the problem this way recently about millenials specifically (and I am a millennial, so this is a self-critique—don't email me): I heard someone say "millenials don't have any problem with authority, so long as that authority is themselves."** I thought that was pretty accurate, at least for what goes on in my own heart sometimes. Truth be told, **for many**

of us there's just this innate opposition in us to anything outside of *ourselves* telling us how we should live our lives.

And **that's not just a problem we have with the bible**. That's a problem with Jesus himself. With him and his claims about who he is and how he designed life to work. And for those of us with *that* underlying issue, it comes down to *arrogance* or *humility*: are we going to assume that we, with our limited experience and limited understanding, are the end-all be-all? Are going to assume that we should be the final authority on everything? Or are we going to trust that there is a good and loving and compassionate creator God, who designed the world to work a certain way, and that in light of that, *our life works best* when we place ourselves in and *under* his design?

So in light of that, I would submit that **when becoming a follower of Jesus, the question worth asking** *first is not* "can I get on board with everything in the bible?" That's not where you start. You start with the question, "can Jesus be trusted?" Is the authority of Jesus *good* authority, or bad authority? Plenty of us have seen our share of examples of *bad* authority—the type of authority that demands blind *obedience*, without establishing trust with us first. The type of authority that demands blind *loyalty* without putting any skin of their own in the game. We've seen bad authority. So a lot of us can't help but wonder: is *Jesus that type* of authority? Is he bad authority?

I would argue it's **not that type of authority at all**. I would argue it's quite the opposite. For example, there's a passage in the gospels where Jesus is talking to his disciples about authority, and he lays out *his* vision of how authority *should* function. He says that is authority isn't the type of authority that rules with an iron fist, that manipulates and controls people with power. 'Instead,' he says, 'in the kingdom, whoever wants to be the *greatest*, should take the posture of a servant. And he doesn't exclude himself from that. He says, in **Matthew 20:28**:

[28] ...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus gives us **a crystal clear picture** of what his brand of authority looks like: it looks like *giving up his life*. Jesus came to be the type of authority that offers up his *life* for the good of others. The type of authority who allows himself to suffer for the *benefit* of others. The type of authority that doesn't demand *loyalty* from *anybody* without putting his own skin in the game. In fact, Jesus puts every bit of his skin in the game. His is the type of authority that goes to the cross to secure the freedom of those he loves. **Now I**

would argue that is an authority worth *trusting*. It's an authority worth *listening to*. Worth *submitting to*. Worth giving our *lives to*. Because he's shown that he can be trusted.

And once you get *there*—once you realize you can trust the authority of Jesus—trusting the bible becomes a very logical step. Andrew Wilson, a pastor and author in London, puts it like this in his book about the authority of the bible:

I don't trust in Jesus because I trust the Bible. I trust the Bible because I trust in Jesus. I love him, and I've decided to follow him, so if he talks and acts as if the Bible is trustworthy, authoritative, good, helpful and powerful, I will too.

If *Jesus is your starting point*, that shifts your perspective on the bible. Andrew Wilson continues—I really *liked* his book on this, in case you couldn't tell:

*The point is: whenever Scripture challenges some of our deeply held beliefs, as it often does, we have a choice. We can **challenge the Bible**, or we can **let the Bible challenge us**. We can do a Jefferson on it [there he's referring to Thomas Jefferson, who supposedly physically removed the parts of his bible he didn't like. We can do *that*], *cutting out the bits we like and binning the rest*. Or we can do a Jesus on it, affirming the accuracy of the Bible in spite of the difficulties we have with it, and allow it to refine our view of God, the world, sexuality, or whatever it may be.*

I think that's so very helpful. *Those are the two options* we have when it comes to the bible. So I'll just tell you this—I'm a pastor. Which means part of my job is to *teach* this book. And that being said, there are times that I don't *inherently like* what this book says. Can I say that? But the question that will define me, and *all of us* in our relationship to the bible is this: *how do I respond when that happens?* Do I wipe my hands and walk away because it's difficult? Or do I consider that maybe the author of this book has a perspective that I'm missing? Do I consider that maybe he sees things from a vantage point that I can't? When you *look around the room today*, those of us who are here and would call ourselves followers of Jesus, it's not because we have resolved every single one of our issues with the bible. It's not because there aren't any parts of it that bother us or confuse us at times. None of that. It's because we have found *Jesus* to be compelling enough—and *gracious* enough, and *trustworthy* enough—that we're willing to wrestle through our issues with the bible. Does that make sense?

I say that **in order to tell you that** if you're here and you *also* find Jesus compelling, but just don't think you could follow him because you have questions and confusions about the bible, you might be starting at the wrong place. You don't need to have the bible 100% *figured out* to trust in Jesus. You just have to find *Jesus* trustworthy enough to walk with *through* your issues with the bible. **Peter himself wrote that some things in Paul's letters are "hard to understand."**⁷ **If there's room for *him* to say that as a *fellow author of the bible*, I think there's room for us to say that too.** The question is simply, "do we trust Jesus enough to work through our questions?" That's where I'll leave us.

Let's close by **asking for the Spirit's help** with it all. Let's pray together.

⁷ 2 Peter 3:15-16.