

“It Is Not Enough to Be Bright—It’s Essential to Be Right.”

22 January 2023 “Scriptural Christianity”

Text: 1 Cor. 15:12-28

What do I mean by “bright?” I am referencing a group of people who self-designate themselves as very intelligent and as “educated, or enlightened” so that they aren’t misled by tradition, historical consciousness or obsolete things like religion—particularly Christianity. They are too “bright” for that. Frankly it is hard to tell if “brights” are more about what they aren’t (reactionary) or about their vaunted mental superiority, or pride. I have two cautions for the “brights” and you may, lovingly I pray, gently pass them on. First, the older I get the less “bright” I find myself to be—it is humbling to consider all that I do not know. What I don’t know is much vaster than what I do know. Secondly, there is this life lesson: we must believe to understand. Belief precedes understanding, not the other way around. If you have to understand in order to believe, you will, most likely, never get around to believing very much—or, for that matter, understanding very much. This is on my heart, my purpose in bringing forth this word, because some of your children and grandchildren, or colleagues and friends, may be self-identifying as “Brights” and they need rescue from delusion.

To illustrate and explain further: St. Anselm, an eleventh century British saint once prayed: “I do not seek, O Lord, to penetrate Thy depths . . . my intellect is not equal to them.” Note the humility of intellect in this petition! The hidden sin of being a “bright” is intellectual pride: we are smarter than anyone who has ever lived before us and smarter than most of those around us. Anselm continues, “But I long in some degree to know Thy truth which my heart believes and loves . . . I believe that I may understand.” What a profound insight from an ecclesiastical fossil! Speaking of Anselm with respect to his antiquity, of course. If the truth be known, I made the awful mistake I am reporting on: I assumed that if I could understand, then I could believe *when it turns out, you must have faith, that is, believe, in order to grasp the truth of God at all*. The humility of Anselm is something that God approves us. It is written, **Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth.** (Matt. 5:5) Now King David was meek as he awaited his ascension to the throne, Despite being anointed king, he did not promote himself, or push himself forward but awaited the Lord’s timing—in due season, God would raise him up. He would inherit the throne! God’s secret purposes and sovereign means to accomplish them need no cooperation, or assistance from us—only acquiescence. . . submissive, quiet and patient waiting. Remember, God can do more in a word, and a moment than all of human history could ever accomplish!

Well, I had a bit of a false start this week. I spent all Monday meditating on Psalm 148 and it was a wonderful exploration of the praise of Jehovah as interwoven throughout God’s entire Creation. I do believe that God created the heavens and the earth and I receive the Creation account in Genesis as revealed truth. So it is a bit of a shock when I run into someone who thinks that the Genesis account is all myth and fiction—made-up, not true, unreliable and, frankly, irrelevant. Some of those who are most vocal about this are scientific (not “religious”) and they tend to believe evolution (which is equally myth and fiction) is a matter of settled science. I have Bachelor of Science degree and I know that science is no such thing—not settled, that it is in a state of creative flux and subject to revision as new findings and data come in that don’t fit the model, or current theory. Science that is not falsifiable, is not science at all. Sound scientists live with that! And so do thoughtful theologians and scholars in all disciplines. “Science says” is posturing; first because science doesn’t say anything (scientists do the talking) and second because those who deny the creative flux of science are being dishonest or naive (they don’t know, or own their history).

So, without provocation, I rarely feel the need to defend the veracity of Scripture. But the concerns have been raised, pastorally and as a father. Psalm 148 primed me for this moment. I was really disappointed that my usual recourse, speaking of sermon preparation, is to search the Spurgeon Archive and check out Spurgeon on Psalm 148. Alas, he did not preach on this psalm but he did on Psalms 147 and 149 so I did find some overlap and that was useful to my thinking. No I am familiar with the ministry of Charles Stanley—I have a lot of respect for his preaching and teaching—but I cannot say the same for his son Andy Stanley who fancies himself something of a “new light” in the dim skies of modern Atlanta. I tuned in to hear Andy say that Christians would do well to jettison the Old Testament, particularly the Creation account and the story of Adam and Eve. The two cited in Scripture as our first parents, are just not credible parents, says Andy, to the modern, enlighten and educated mind of his congregation. Now that is alarming! Not that we haven’t been here before, but the unwholesome idea of jettisoning the Old Testament because it doesn’t make sense to the modern mind *that just doesn’t make sense*. In fact it is error, heresy even—something that Arius tried in the late third century AD and consumed most of the 4th century of church history. It was a major disturbance and it divided the church very much as the gay agenda has divided the church in our own era.

My reflective and thoughtful process) is driven by four things that I believe are worthy of emulation by other thoughtful Christians.

1. I am very eager to learn from others—especially authoritative and trustworthy Christians. I embrace standing on the shoulders of prior saints, theologians and godly scholars alike. I would like to think that other inquiring minds have the same posture of respect and dependency. Yes, and when I get specific help from my predecessors and betters, when I am consciously able to delineate their contributions, I like to cite them—I rejoice to do so. I respect their intellectual property as well as appreciating their help and contributions.

2. I believe that it is the course of wisdom to learn from our mistakes, our missteps *as well as the mistakes and missteps of others*. Everyone wants to be right, but humility compels us to admit that we are more often wrong than right. Let me put that more bluntly. It seems incontrovertible that we are more ignorant than enlightened, we always know less than we think we know. Truth is hard won—and should be valued accordingly, respected as such. And this leads us to a third observation:

3. Learning from others, and learning from our mistakes should result in a determination not to repeat, ignorantly, the error and missteps of others, or ourselves. Error revived, and given a new suit of clothes, is not essentially altered—a change of name is like a change of clothing, Pointless. Error should be abandoned, or repented of and a course correction should follow.

4. Thank God for course corrections whether framed as an adjustment, or as a full-blown recantation. Yes, admitting that I was wrong, or that I misread the date—that I was premature in judgment and both misstated, and misinterpreted some matter, some scripture, or doctrine has its own integrity. I actually love this capacity in others—in Calvin for instance. He will admit when he has no opinion on a text, and he will be open about what others think and write *without prejudice as a natural, and honest course of discourse!* He is even able to say, I was mistaken. So human, refreshing and worthy of emulation!

All of this to say, if I am to believe my ears, that when Andy Stanley, one of the “brights” of this generation, openly jettisoned the whole Creation account of Genesis and intimated that the whole Old Testament is an embarrassment to the modern mind of educated Christians, I was

shocked. I thought, first, “How unfortunate!” And, second, “Where have I heard this before?” Oh, yes, this was the core move of the Arian heresy! Arius disposed of the whole Old Testament and, if I recollect accurately, much of the historical gospels. He was profoundly anti-Semitic and jettisoned all of Hebraic/Jewish tradition—favoring the new stuff of Pauline material: Acts, plus the letters of Paul. As a result, his theology veered off track in a Gnostic direction. Gnostics believe you are saved by what you know, not by who knows you (namely Jesus)! They ascribe to a form of *esoterism*, “special knowledge” only possessed by the elite, or the highly enlightened and that proclivity aligns them with the so-called “mystery cults” of a distinctly pagan variety. Arianism is a religion of the mind, of the *gnosis*.

Consequently, or as a result of these presuppositions . . . “a theological framework;” Arians held Scripture in contempt. ***It was not authoritative, reliable, historical, or authentic.*** When Scripture is regarded in such a derogatory manner, the truth of Scripture has been effectively neutralized, refuted. Now Andy Stanley, like the Arians who preceded him by many centuries, then resorts to the resurrection as the touchstone of our faith. This is minimalism. Trust in the truth and reality of the resurrection and you are saved—saved from sin, yes, and saved from the swirling controversies that come with the rejection of the Creation account in Genesis—coupled as it is with the denial of biblical truth. *This error cannot be allowed to stand; it must be exposed as fundamentally flawed, in error, wrong and false!*

Remember the terms: ***authoritative, reliable, historical, or authentic.*** Andy’s view is that Genesis and the Creation account are myth, story and fiction (not truthful) and that they are incompatible with the modern mind enlightened as it is by naturalism, theistic evolution and scientism. I did say scientism and not science—they are distinct.

Scientism is the opinion that science and the scientific method are the best or only way to render truth about the world and reality. It is methodological idolatry.

I think I have represented Andy’s view fairly—that is the plain meaning of his words!—and so I wish to present my thesis:

Andy’s view (and its Arian predecessor) is not the apostolic view, nor the Pauline view, nor even the dominical view.

The dominical view means: the view of our Lord” *on any matter as found in Scripture*—in this case, the view of the Scriptures as ***authoritative, reliable, historical, or authentic.*** They, the apostles and Jesus, believed that the Scriptures are both real and true. *And you should have no doubt that I agree with them and neither with Arius, nor with Andy!*

Did Jesus believe in the authority of Scripture? Yes. That is the crux of the matter in the wilderness temptations. Here’s a compelling reason not to jettison the historical gospels! Jesus cited Scripture authoritatively in rebuking Satan. Satan misquoted, Jesus cited; and the difference is: that Satan thought Scripture was something to be twisted to serve his purposes whereas Jesus saw it as powerful to defuse temptation, and to defeat Satan. I wonder if you have considered where you stand on this?

Did Jesus see Scripture as authentic? His many citations of **It is written** (Mat. 4:4-6) . . . His endorsement of **the Law and the Prophets** (Matt. 22:40; Luke 24:27) and His argument concerning divorce is rooted in Genesis: **It was not so from the beginning** (Matt. 19:8) and Jesus proceeds to allude to Adam and Eve as **the man and the woman as if they are real**

historical personages and not as metaphors, figures of speech or fictional creations! This usage of Scripture validates the historicity of Scripture. Jesus says nothing to disparage the historical reality of Moses, or of the prophets that He cited! He challenges others with **What does the word say, how do you read it? (Luke 10:26)** That is the test of reliability. So there we have it, Jesus views Scripture as authoritative, reliable, historical and authentic! And this evidence is the best defense against those who would claim that Adam and Eve were not real (Jesus believed they were). It is even more clear that Paul ascribed to the same view and he used Adam's name explicitly in advancing his doctrine (from one man came sin and death, the first Adam and Christ is then presented as the second Adam through whom came life and forgiveness of sins—see 1 Cor. 15:42-49). Gen. 2:7 declares that Adam became a **living person**, entering the world as a real, natural being; he entered history, time and space. Myths don't do that!

Andy's emphasis on the resurrection, in which he follows Arius, really resonates with me because I will freely admit that it was the historical truth and so reality of the resurrection that led me out of skeptical unbelief, through the door of evidence by testimony (or witnessing) into an affirmation of the *truthfulness of the resurrection* to the *reliability* of all Scripture. Because we hold this emphasis on the resurrection in common, because we agree on its significance, I want to summarize what made the evidence compelling:

1. Wide attestation: there is historical attestation, inside and outside of Scripture to the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. It wasn't just the devoted disciples who recorded it, so did pagans and unbelievers who had no vested interest in lying.

2. All four gospels affirm the resurrection. All four indicate that the disciples' first reaction was disbelief. It was no easy, credulous assent to the seeming impossible. And all four gospels affirm the occurrence of resurrection appearances—encounters with the crucified and risen Lord that sealed their belief in Jesus' resurrection.

3. Of those who attested to the resurrection, many were willing to die rather than recant, or deny the resurrection. I find their willingness to die for the truth far more compelling than the fact that some have died for a lie. But in those later cases, I have to suggest that either there is some measure of delusion, or plain ignorance (they just didn't know any better at the time).

4. The number and credibility of the witnesses. We read that there were hundreds of those who beheld the risen Christ, not just a few. One or two would be sufficient, but we also have to note that the testimony of women was included. This is important because, culturally speaking, the exclusion of women as witnesses makes the testimony of women strikingly different. The women testified as the first to have seen the Lord, and the things they reported were then verified and confirmed by men who went to investigate the scene of the resurrection.

5. The witness and testimony of the guards. They saw and heard and reported the same (the event of Jesus' resurrection) to the authorities. The empty tomb and the missing body are both explained by what they, the guard, reported. They were bribed to keep silent, and paid to put out the specious explanation that they had fallen asleep (a punishable dereliction of duty), and that the disciples had come, in the night, and stolen the body so as to falsify the matter and support their claim that Jesus had risen from the dead just as everyone had heard Jesus said He would on multiple occasions, saying, **and on the third day, I will rise again.** (There are 34 verses containing this prophetic, public declaration.) And this against the backdrop of the notorious resurrection of Lazarus of Bethany, who had been dead and buried for four days and was currently, engaging with hundreds of people—much to the dismay of the Sadducees who openly

ridiculed and denied resurrection, the after life, and the day of judgment. Resurrection cannot be confined to the odd affirmation of a small, peculiar cult of Jesus followers; besides Lazarus (and his sisters) were openly Jewish!

6. Finally, there is the considerable portion of the gospels spent on the passion week of Jesus (His suffering, trial, death and resurrection) I cannot improve on the following citation:

Consider this: approximately 40 percent of the first three (synoptic) Gospels focus on the last week of Jesus 'life. That percentage increases to about 66 percent when we come to the Gospel of John. If the Gospels were simply biographies of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we would expect a more balanced treatment of the various seasons of his life. But that is not what we find. A vastly disproportionate focus is given over to the last week of Jesus 'life, as if to say, "Whatever else you miss, please, don't miss this."

- "Looking at the Cross," from *Being Reformed: Faith Seeking Understanding*, by James D. Miller and Donald K. McKim (Congregational Ministries Publishing, Presbyterian Church USA, 2012), pp. 8-9.

Source: [<http://www.wipreacher.org/home/quotations-and-illustrations/-p/passion-jesus/gospels-spend-40--66-on-passion>]

This last consideration, the historical data, raises the matter of falsifiability to the fore—where it belongs—and as a result of considering all that, I changed my mind about the Scripture. Turned on its head, the prevailing sentiment of my religious instructors, liberals, who asserted that the Bible was not *authoritative, reliable, historical, or authentic. That is the covert posture of higher criticism and the ruling school of scientific theology* as assimilated from their idealist German originators in the 19th and 20th centuries. From that decisive moment onwards, I decided to maintain that the Bible was true, unless proven otherwise. And nothing has come up, these fifty-plus years that would cause me to return to the highly suspect presuppositions of those whose intellectual company I left back in 1968. The burden of proof lies with those who claim otherwise; don't let them shift that burden onto you! Not ever.

Yes, the resurrection is a very big deal, a supernatural event, the greatest miracle of all. If this enormous mountain of complex perplexity, can be overcome, lesser matters can certainly be addressed and resolved: **Let God be true and every man a liar.** (Romans 3:4)

It is not enough to be bright, it is essential to be right. If you believe on Jesus, that He rose from dead and that your sins were atoned for by His blood, you are saved. (See Romans 4:25) And consider the truth of Romans 10:8-10:

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 [a]that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, [b]resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, [c]resulting in salvation.

Amen