

How Do I Know the Truth? | The Doctrine of Holy Scripture | Psalm 19
To Be a Christian: Nine Questions Every Life Answers
The Rev. Dr. Samuel D. Ferguson | The Falls Church Anglican
Preaching Draft | September 20, 2026

Three quotations to begin:

*"There are **no facts**, only interpretations" (Friedrich Nietzsche).*

*"What is **truth**?" (Pontius Pilate, John 18:38).*

*"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know **the truth**, and **the truth** will set you free" (Jesus, John 8:31-32)*

We live in a world where everyone seems to be asking, "Who can I trust? Who is telling me the truth?" Whether or not we can know the truth matters—it impacts our understanding of current events

It also matters for deeper reasons. Whether or not we can know the truth impacts how well we can know ourselves, understand the meaning of life, instruct and guide our children—knowing what's true, or where to go for truth, is an essential part of building a sturdy life.

In our series, *To Be a Christian: Nine Questions Every Life Answers*, this is the first question we take up: "How do I know what is true?" Do I trust my feelings? My Thoughts? The thought-leaders and researchers? What if, as some say, there is no truth, just interpretations?

This is a big question, *How do I know what's true?* This morning I want us to see how Christians answer it. It's an answer that will take us to the church's teaching on the doctrine of Holy Scripture. It's a question that takes us to the voice of God.

To see this, we turn to Psalm 19, which is a Psalm about God speaking. It unfolds by first emphasizing what God says through nature (1-6), then through Scripture (7-10), and finally, the Psalm concludes with what it looks like for God's voice to address me (10-14).

So we'll consider **(1) Nature Speaks; (2) Scripture Speaks; and (3) The One Who Speaks to Me, Whom I Trust.**

I. Nature Speaks (vv. 1-6)

Verse 1 soars, "**The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork**" (1). David goes on to speak of the cycle of day and night (2), and the profundity of the Sun, as it strides across the sky like a warrior, where nothing can hide from its heat (4-5).

The point of these first six verses is that creation—the natural world—speaks a message. Ironically, it's a "voiceless voice;" "There is no speech, nor are there words" (19:3). Christians understand the opening section of this Psalm to refer to *natural revelation*—the truth conveyed through the created world.

There are a few things about this relationship between nature and truth to note.

First, we can discover truth from nature.

From math to science to technology to medicine to philosophy, Nature reveals treasures of wisdom, insights, discoveries. From both the world around us, and from our conscience and reason within us, nature is a source of truth.

Second, the most important truth creation points to is the need to know its Creator.

The heavens don't proclaim their own glory. They proclaim "the glory of God" (1). Meaning, nature is so profound, so beautiful, that it forces our minds upward to the greatest question of all: from where did all this come from?

By the fact of its existence, its profundity, its motion, its beauty, creation testifies—like finding a watch in the woods—to a Creator that must be behind it. As Paul states in Romans,

[God's] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made (Rom 1:20).

How does this relate to our question, "How can I know what is true?"

It tells us that if we really want answers to life's biggest questions, we have to go not just to creation, but to its Creator. Theorizing about the Big Bang has not, ultimately, answered our questions about origins, meaning, and purpose.

If you're a person interested in spirituality or Christianity, I hope the profundity of nature leaves you with an *ache* for knowing from where, from whom, all this came about.

If you're a Christian, I hope creation's testimony to a Creator leaves you in awe that you can hear from the creator.

And for all of us, we need to acknowledge that while we can learn so much from nature, we cannot learn enough. Creation speaks, but in a faint way—it cannot, by itself, tell us who we are, why we are here, what we are for.

Which brings us to the next portion of the Psalm, where David turns from the Book of Nature to the Book of Scripture—from an inarticulate to an articulate voice.

II. Scripture Speaks (vv. 7-10)

In verses 7-10, David moves from extolling the wonders of God's creation to singing the praises of God's Word: "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul" (19:7).

Verses 7-9 are carefully organized and dense:

David uses six terms for Scripture: *Law, Testimony, Precepts, Commandment, Fear, Rules*.

Six terms for Scripture's qualities: *perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true*.

And six descriptions of Scripture's powerful effects: *revives the soul; makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart; enlightens the eyes; endures forever; is righteous altogether*.

We could say much about these verses, but I'll restrict myself to nothing three great realities about Scripture.

First, Scripture is God's Word.

Scripture is not a vague impression, an inner sense, it is an articulate *word*. Scripture tells us, that God speaks to us, by words.

God speaking in words often took the form of direct address in Scripture:

"The **Lord commanded** the man [Adam]" (Gen 2:15); "**God said** to Noah" (Gen 6:13); "the **Lord said** to Abram" (Gen 12:1); "**God called** to Moses" (Exod 3:4); The Lord came and stood, **calling** as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' (1 Sam 3:10); "And [**the LORD**] **said to me**, 'Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you'" (Ezek 2:1).

In the days of the New Testament, God spoke most powerfully by His Son, Jesus:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days **he has spoken to us by his Son** (Heb 1:1-2).

Most common, however, is God's voice coming to us as **Scripture** (γραφή), a term that means "writing" or "writings." Jesus uses this term to refer to everything God said through the leaders and prophets of the Old Testament:

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the **Scriptures** the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

The earliest Christians understood not only the words of the Old Testament, but also the words of Jesus and His Apostles to be on par with these Old Testament Scriptures.

Hence, when you come in the Anglican Catechism to the question, **What books are contained in Holy Scripture?** It answers,

This is a preaching draft.

The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament together form the whole of Holy Scripture. (*To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism*, Q. 26.)

This needs to illicit in us a **respect for the Bible**. We are not here dealing with an old book; we are reading the living, authoritative Word of God.

Notice that after every title for God's Word—*law, testimony, command*—David adds, “of the Lord: **The Law of the Lord** (7); **the testimony of the Lord** (7); **the commandment of the Lord** (8); **the rules of the Lord** (9).

This connection between the written word and the Word of the Lord is explained by Paul as Scripture being “**God-breathed**”: “**all Scripture is breathed out by God**” (2 Tim 3:16); Peter writes similarly, “**For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit**” (2 Peter 1:21).

The written Word of God is *inspired*, the Holy Spirit working through each writer to convey the mind of God.

This connection between the living God and the Letters of Scripture not only underscores the Bible's authority, but also its reliability, which brings us to the second great reality about Scripture: Scripture Is Trustworthy.

Scripture Is Trustworthy.

With the language of “**perfect**” (7), David means Scripture is without error—it conveys what God said, perfectly; with the terms “**sure**” (7) and “**true**” (9), he means it is reliable.

This means not only that what the Bible says is true; but that what it says brings us into alignment with the very grain of reality.

E.g., Trainer: you could have a book of instructions, say, from a personal trainer. And someone could say, “these instructions are true,” meaning, they convey what that trainer said. But what if that trainer's advice was bad? Then the words would be true, but not trustworthy.

The Bible is true in both senses: it conveys what God actually said; but it also aligns with the deepest reality—of who we are designed, of what life is for, of how we should live.

C. S. Lewis, who describes Psalm 19 as “the greatest poem in the Psalter,” captures well the sense of trustworthiness one finds when living the Scripture:

Their delight in the Law is a delight in having touched firmness; like the pedestrian's delight in feeling the hard road beneath his feet after a false short cut has long entangled

him in muddy fields...like mountain water, like fresh air after a dungeon, like sanity after a nightmare.¹

Friends, this means not only that we should learn Scripture; but we need to *live* scripture.

A third reality about Scripture that comes forth is that it is Satisfying.

Scripture Is Satisfying.

“More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb (Ps 19:10).

Scripture is satisfying because, as David notes well, it has the power to change us. It “revives the soul” (v7). It works its way down into the nooks and crannies of our hearts, like water trickle down into a rock, and changes us.

Scripture is satisfying because it makes us wise, “the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (7); “the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (8). God’s Word gives us the right perspective; it opens our eyes so we can see things rightly, in light of God, sin, salvation, and eternity.

Scripture, as the Spirit works through it, has a *hygienic, transformative* power that satisfies the man or woman who is hungry to “taste and see that the Lord is good.”

E.g., A.I. This summer I was surprised to find myself on a call with two developers from a major technology company. They are working on the “constitution” for their company’s A.I. tool and wanted to talk to some religious leaders about morality.

Our conversation made me think about how crucial this question of truth is. These brilliant engineers are tasked with hard wiring a powerful tool’s sense of right and wrong, good and evil.

Even the people building some of the most sophisticated technology in the world are asking these ancient questions: who gets to decide what is good, or right and wrong? What is finally true? Who has the authority to determine what is true? What is the best path?

This isn’t a problem merely for engineers; it’s a question every one of us is asking, and answering, every day when we make decisions. *Who has the authority to tell me what is true, right and wrong?* Whose advice is trustworthy? Whose Word will satisfy me?

In Scripture, God speaks—authoritatively, wisely, powerfully. His word contains “all things necessary for salvation” (Article VI), and for living a wise and godly life.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 62, 63.

[T] There is a final feature of the Psalm to consider: David's own very personal encounter with God's Word. Which leaves him both undone, but also secured and upheld. We come to our final point:

III. The One Who Speaks to Me, Whom I Trust (vv. 11-14)

Notice David is laid bare, exposed at the deepest level by God's Word.

Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. ¹³ Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression (19:12-13).

It's as though the all-searching heat of the sun, spoken of in verse 5 ("there is nothing hidden from its heat") was simply a way to prepare the reader for understanding the all-searching power of God's word, and how nothing in man's soul can hid from it.

But also, notice where David ends: He addressed the one who speaks to Him, and with two profound titles:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. (Psa. 19:14)

What I want us to see is that by the end of this Psalm, David is not standing before a sourcebook that he trusts for finding some facts; he is standing before a person—someone he has come to *revere, respect, and love*. His rock. His Redeemer.

Which raises the question for me about why we ultimately come to trust the Bible; and how it answers our question, "How do I know what's true?"

We Trust, Because We've Seen Glory

Part of what helped me trust Scripture was arguments about Scripture's historical reliability.

Evidence from the many manuscripts we have of ancient copies; evidence about how careful these cultures were about oral transmission; evidence from archeology. I've even taught seminars on the historical reliability of the Bible.

But I have also been surprised by the limits this line of argumentation has had for me. When I sit before my Bible at night, and I cry out to God to speak to me, I don't find myself deploying historical arguments to bring my heart to trust His voice. Something else is going on.

I want us to consider that with David, and with us, there is something else that happens when we come to deeply trust the Word of God. And that something is when the Spirit of God works through the Word of God to pierce our hearts.

We can't always perceive when, exactly, this is happening. But we read something in Scripture, about Christ, or about the greatness of God, or about how God is both high and lifted up, and He comes down to help the lowly—and the Word suddenly appears to our soul as deeply compelling and true.

We don't just believe it; we love it.

Consider an analogy for what may be happening, an analogy I believe David is inviting in this Psalm. It's an analogy from how we come to believe in **the sun's light and heat**. You don't convince someone of the sun's brightness by making arguments about light waves; or convince them about its heat by making arguments and thermodynamics. People simply see the sun; they *feel* its heat. And they know it's there.

This seems to be how David describes the self-authenticating power of the Word of God. What has "revived his soul" and "enlightened his eyes," has been the Living God whose power and love he has encountered.

Psalm 19 testifies to something like what happened to **Peter**, when he answered Jesus' question, "who do you say I am," with, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God**" (Matt 16:16). Jesus responds with such a profound insight: "**Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven**" (Matt 16:17).

Or consider **Paul's words in Second Corinthians**, about why some people end up believing the word about Jesus:

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6).

David did not reason his way to believing in the *perfection* and *reliability* and *trustworthiness* of God's Word. He deduced these things from the God he encountered by that Word, the life he experienced when ordered by that Word, the satisfaction he felt when fed by that Word.

And this helps us understand how, more specifically, Christians answer the question, "How do I know what's true?"

We Trust, Because We Trust Him—The Man of Truth

Here, then, is how I would summarize point three and connect all this to the question about truth.

What happens to David is not that he finds in Scripture a source book for truth—like a perfect encyclopedia. What He finds is a savior—a living God, who is at once holy and awesome, and merciful and compassionate. David calls him his "rock" and "redeemer" in verse 14. Words that point to Christ.

In the Word of God, Scripture, we meet the Word of God, Jesus—who says, “I am the truth” (John 14:6).

So, truth is not being given a bunch of answers to all your questions. Truth is Jesus grasping your hand, saying that he will never lie to you or let you go, and trusting that He will guide you into everything you need to know.

Close: I conclude with three ways to respond.

The first is obvious: **be in the Word**. But more specifically, go to the Word like a farmer not an influencer—you are not in this for quick, flashy results, but actual growth. The great Anglican clergymen, J. C. Ryle, wrote,

Do not think you are getting no good from the Bible, merely because you do not see that good day by day. The greatest effects are by no means those which make the most noise, and are most easily observed. The greatest effects are often silent, quiet, and hard to detect at the time they are being produced. Think of the influence of the moon upon the earth, and of the air upon the human lungs. Remember how silently the dew falls, and how imperceptibly the grass grows. There may be far more doing than you think in your soul by your Bible-reading.²

Second, **respect the Bible**. By this I mean, work to read it as God presents it to us: it is not a book of spells; it is not a mysterious book of magic; it is a book. God chose prose, words, history, epistles, stories. It’s a big book. Our first priority when reading is the author’s original intent, and only then do we work to apply it to our lives.

And Scripture has both parts easy to understand, and more difficult. As Thomas Cranmer put it, “The scripture is full, as well of low valleys, plain ways and easy for every man to use and to walk in, as also of high hills and mountains, which few men can climb.”

It is a book for the learned and unlearned. And God walks with you when you give yourself to it. He provides teachers, pastors and friends to help

Third, for the seeker, read the Bible with a Christian: If you are on a college campus, look for a Christian friend or a campus minister. If you came to church today with a Christian friend, ask them to read a Gospel with you this year. If you need a Bible, take the one in the pew, or come see one of the pastors—we’ll gladly get you one.

But the best evidence for the trustworthiness of Scripture, is God speaking to us in it.

² Ryle, *Practical Religion*, p.136.

How do we know what's true? True about the world. True about ourselves. True about God. We humbly, and prayerfully, turn to God's Word, and there, in the rich feast of law, testimonies, rules, commands, precepts, narratives, psalms, Gospels, and Epistles, the God of all Truth speaks.

Small Group Questions | Psalm 19

1. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). The Psalm reminds us that creation reveals much about God, but that we ultimately need to hear from the Creator himself. When have you experienced creation stirring a sense of awe or a desire to know God more deeply? What can we learn about God from creation, and what do we need Scripture to tell us?
2. "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7). Scripture is not merely true in what it says, but trustworthy as a guide for how we should live. Where do you find yourself most tempted to look for truth or guidance apart from God's Word? What would it look like to trust Scripture more deeply in that area of your life?
3. "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:10). David describes God's Word as something deeply desirable and satisfying. Have you experienced Scripture reviving your soul, giving you wisdom, or changing your perspective? What helps you approach the Bible not merely as something you ought to read, but as something you genuinely desire?
4. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). David's confidence in Scripture is ultimately rooted in his relationship with the God who speaks through it. How does it change the way we read the Bible when we understand that we are encountering not merely a source of information, but our Rock and Redeemer? What is one practical way you could approach Scripture differently this week in light of this truth?