

Why Do We Believe the Bible? #3 (How Did We Get the Bible?)

Why Do We Believe the Bible?

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So our first point here is the recognition of the Old Testament. The early church had recognized the Old Testament. They were accustomed to the idea of a Canon because they were already used to basing their worship on the Old Testament Scriptures and in Luke 24:44, Jesus said, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." He's making a reference to the threefold division of the Old Testament and this was a recognized Canon. This was everything that they had based their understanding of Messiah on, and so they were already used to an idea of a Canon having authority, and so what happened is that as the apostles began to write, as they started to receive more revelation, they became conscious of the fact that they needed to, that another dimension to the Canon was being added. The early church knew that they needed to supplement the Old Testament with these new authoritative books. They were used to a standard of authority. This was established for centuries, if not millennia, in their thinking, and so as they started to receive more revelation from God, they knew that they needed to preserve it and to recognize it and to single it out as that which had authority in their worship, and so there was a recognition of the Old Testament.

That's number 1, secondly, was the requirements of public worship, and I just think this is really, really fascinating. The second impetus that we're going to look at tonight to the development of the New Testament Canon arose out of the church's practice of reading Scripture. The church had a practice of reading Scripture. Remember that in the first century, they didn't have any individual private copies of Scripture; they were dependent upon the public reading of Scripture in order to hear the word of God. They're not like us when we've got 10, 15 Bibles laying around in the house. They would be astonished at the embarrassment of riches that we have with the availability of Scripture. They didn't have that, and so the public reading of Scripture was crucial to them, and the Apostle Paul instructed the churches to read his letters publicly.

Turn to the book of Colossians to start with, the book of Colossians 4, and I'm going to take you to some verses that you're probably used to just reading through real quickly and wondering why is this even in here, why is that important, but these little passing references give us great insight into what was happening in the early church. When we talk about the early church, we're talking about people that we're going to spend eternity

with. We're talking about people that had a like precious faith in Christ that we did, and so we are seeing here what people who had the same affections, the same love of Christ, had been subject to the same work of the Spirit in their hearts, this is what they were reading, this is what they were getting, this was instruction that affected them in the way that they worshiped together.

So in Colossians 4:16, Paul says, "When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea." And so what we see here is that Paul's letters were meant to be read publicly in the church and to read them publicly was to put them on a par with the Old Testament Scriptures that they had always heard read before. So the church needed to know which letters to read, they needed to know what they were supposed to read in the public services, and that taught them to regard them as Scripture.

Turn over a couple of pages to 1 Thessalonians 5. You can see that this was a major concern of Paul's that his letters would be read publicly and that the common Christian would hear them. So in 1 Thessalonians 5:27, in his almost concluding words of this letter, he says, "I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren." 1 Timothy 4:13, just a few pages on toward the end of your New Testament there, 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul said, "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching." "Read the Scripture. Read it publicly. Read it in the service. I adjure you, read these things when you gather together." And finally in the book of Revelation, Revelation 1 if you want to turn back there. Revelation 1:3 says, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near." So here we are, we've got multiple examples of this in the New Testament where we see directly from the pen of the Apostle Paul himself, saying that, "My letters are to be read in the churches."

Now, stay with me here. There was a problem as this practice was being done. There were false letters that were also being written. Look at 2 Thessalonians 2, and you'll see this will all start to come together for you now pretty quickly as to why this was such an important issue. 2 Thessalonians 2, we'll start at verse 1. Paul says, "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come." And that's a little window of insight that shows us that there were false letters that were in circulation. There were forgeries that were out there purporting to be from the Apostle Paul but teaching false doctrine and trying to lead people away from the truth. So what happened is that the church found itself with a group of letters that they had to sort out. They had to separate the true ones that were really inspired by God from the false ones, the forgeries, and they had to be able to separate them out so that only the true letters were read in the church, not the false ones by the imposters. So this forced them, this very practical necessity of week to week worship, forced them to assess which ones were true and which they would regard as Scripture, and which ones were false that they would disregard. And so these forgeries, carried weight; they looked like they were written by Paul, but they weren't and so they needed to be separated out.

Now, I think this stuff is just really fascinating. I think this is really cool. Because the forgeries were a problem, you know, it's like having counterfeit money, you've got to be able to separate the true from the false. Well, Paul, and this just explains so much in these little verses that you think are throwaways that don't really matter. All of a sudden you put 2 and 2 together and you say, "Oh, this starts to make a lot of sense." Look back at 1 Corinthians 16:21. Paul, the apostle, was aware of this problem of potential forgeries and so he took means to help the church distinguish his true letters away from the false ones, and you see this repeatedly in the New Testament. If you've ever wondered why some of these verses were in your Bible, now you understand. 1 Corinthians 16:21, "The greeting is in my own hand – Paul." This is his own signature. He had his own unique signature that he would add to these letters as they were finished that would distinguish them and help people know that they had the real thing, not a false one.

Look over at the book of Galatians 6:11. Paul says, "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand." He's saying, "Look at my signature. It's well known what my signature looks like. Look at these large letters and understand that I am writing the real thing to you." Well, that's really important that they know that because earlier in Galatians, in chapter 1, he said, "I'm amazed that you're departing from the true Gospel for people that are teaching you a different Gospel. There are some who want to distort the Gospel of Christ," he says in chapter 1, verses 6 and 7. And so he added his authenticating signature so that people would know, "Paul is the apostle. This is a letter from Paul. I see his signature therefore this is the teaching that we follow and we ignore these other letters. Even though they claim to be from Paul, they don't have that distinctive signature and so we know that that's not the real one."

Look back at Colossians again, chapter 4. Colossians 4:18, again, at the end of the letter he says, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand." Then one more, 2 Thessalonians 3, and I'm just showing you the abundance of the illustrations just so you can see that this is woven throughout the fabric of the New Testament. 2 Thessalonians 3, this is perhaps the most important verse of them all. 2 Thessalonians 3:17, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write." "Every letter, I write this." This is distinguishing and so you see right in what Paul said, "I am helping you distinguish the real thing from the counterfeit by my signature." It was obviously an issue and God preserved this in the writing of the New Testament so that we later on would have an understanding of this. So how do we know that we got the right books? Well, in part, it was by the requirements of public worship. Church leaders had to know which writings to read publicly and which ones to ignore and that helped them identify the Canon of Scripture.

Now, thirdly, we said the recognition of the Old Testament; secondly, the requirements of public worship; and thirdly now, and we'll deal with this one much more quickly, I think: the refutation of heretics. The refutation of heretics, to show that heretics were teaching falsely and to affirm the truth. This was a third impetus to the formation of the New Testament Canon and it was this: the early church, just like we are today, had to deal with false teachers and one particularly prominent false teacher that they had to deal with in

the early second century was a heretic named Marcion, and he was a man of some considerable skill and talent, it would appear. He had a large following. He was influential and he claimed that he was establishing a church based on the teaching of the Apostle Paul and, taking that a step further, Paul asserted the Christian's liberty from the law, is what Marcion said, distorting what Paul's teaching was. So what Marcion did was he rejected the entire Old Testament and he rejected all of the Gospels with the exception of Luke and he edited out parts of Luke, and he had just ten letters from the Apostle Paul and he says, "This is the Canon. This is the true Scripture," an edited version of the Gospel of Luke and ten letters from the Apostle Paul, leaving out the letters to Timothy and Titus, and that was his Scripture, and it was everything that he said agreed with Paul and everything else was not Scripture.

Well, that created a problem. Now watch this: with the earlier issue of the requirements of public worship, we had a problem that there were too many books that were trying to claim authority for the church; there were too many writings; there were true and false writings that were claiming to have the authority of God behind them; there were too many. Well, here with Marcion, we have the exact opposite problem. Marcion was excluding legitimate books from the Canon and so he had his own list and so the early church was faced with the exact opposite problems. Marcion was trying to subtract worthy books from the Canon, in other places, people were trying to add unworthy books to the Canon, and so they were getting the pressure from both directions.

So in this process, the church had to get more precise. Marcion said, "These other letters aren't real Scripture," and the early church had to step up and say, "Yes, they are," and they had to identify with more precision exactly what letters were to be included, what Gospels were to be included so that they could refute this false teacher who was starting to lead a lot of people astray. And what I want you to see is just quite simply this, is that in the middle of trying to fight for the truth, in the middle of defending the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, these early church leaders who were men of flesh and blood just like you and me, only they were more remote in time, they had very practical issues that they were responding to. This wasn't an academic in a university someplace speculating about things. They had to get it right so that their church worship was pure and that they defended the truth of the Gospel and, trust me, those men felt the weight of responsibility to get it right.

So, on the one hand, they say, "No, these are false letters. They don't bear the signature of the Apostle Paul. We can tell that those are counterfeits." Then on the other hand, they look at what Marcion is doing and they say, "You know, this isn't right because we have a lot of truth here that is also inspired by God and we can't leave them out. We have to cut some of them out, we've got to bring others of them in." That's the idea. And so the church came to see the necessity of a clearer definition of its own authoritative books, and what I want you to see in this, is that in this process, God is providentially directing the church to identify the books that he inspired through the apostolic authors. God is superintending this entire process so that we get, in the church, we, speaking very broadly, we get the right books delivered to us. And do any of you, off hand, know what Genesis 50:20 says? Any of you know that verse? Joseph was speaking to his brothers at

the end of, after they had been restored after he had become Prime Minister of Egypt. His brothers were begging him for forgiveness because they had sold him into slavery and all that, and Joseph said, "No," he said, "it's okay." He said, "You meant it for evil but God meant it for good to bring about this present result."

So what we have here in this development of the New Testament Canon is a very important illustration of God using the actions of wicked men to produce a good result. We had heretics falsely claiming to speak for God. We had heretics that were trying to exclude true writings, and God in that process with the occasion of the evil of these men, motivates leaders in the church to identify with greater precision what the true Canon was. And so we see God's providence overruling even the actions of these heretics and turning it into something good, preserving the New Testament, as it were, through fire. You think about gold mixed with stubble thrown into a fire, the stubble burns off in this process and the gold of God's revelation is left behind for us. That's part of what happened.

Now, the fourth one is this, and I'm going to spend a little more time here and read you a couple of quotations that I think are just really, really fascinating. Remember, once again, I'll say it once again, that although they were living in a different culture and in a different time, we're talking about real people who married, had children, went through life, had joys and sorrows, and loved Christ like we do. These are people that we should have the utmost appreciation and sympathy for that we're talking about. These were real people, not just academics, and the fourth thing that brings all of this to clarity for us is the reality of persecution. The reality of persecution. When the church was persecuted for its faith, it helped them identify the proper books to be included in the New Testament Canon, and we're just going to focus on one thing in particular. At the end of the third century in 290 or so, a new Roman Emperor came on the scene named Diocletian, and he was, you can find a lot about him in Roman history books and things like that, but he was concerned to preserve the unity of the Empire, of the Roman Empire, and through some wicked counsel that he received from a man named Galerius, he came to view Christians as a threat to the unity of the Empire. Instead of participating in the pagan worship that was meant to unify the Empire, the Christians were separating out and they refused to worship this, and Diocletian was persuaded, both by his counsel and, no doubt, by his own impulses, that the Christians needed to be exterminated for the sake of the unity of the Empire. It looked like, you know, there was this false sense that the Christians were creating a rival claim to authority that was a challenge to the Empire and to the unity of the Empire. So to address that, in order to preserve the Empire and to preserve the unity and the power of Rome, I guess, Diocletian issued an order in the year 303 that among other things said that the Christian Scriptures were to be destroyed with fire.

Now, one historian describes it this way and I'm going, this is kind of a lengthy quotation but that's okay. Just stay with me. This is from a secular book on Roman history from 1939 or something like that, I think. It describes it this way, "Christianity faced its most extensive and persistent ordeal of persecution between the years 303 and 311 under Diocletian and Galerius. In these years, the number of Christian victims exceeded all previous totals. Diocletian's determined attempt to curb the aggressive faith was probably

motivated largely by his general policy of imperial unity and restoration of order in the state."

Now, continuing on in the quote, what did Diocletian do? What was his order? "In 303, he published edicts ordering confiscation of church property, dismissal of Christians from civil offices, deprivation of their judicial rights, enslavement of all Christians of plebeian status (of the lower class of society), arrest and imprisonment of the chief clergy, and destruction of the churches and their sacred books."

Time out. We'll stop the quote there. I've got just a little bit more to see. This was an all-out assault on Christianity with the power of the Roman Emperor behind it. All of a sudden all of the forces of the great government of Rome came to bear in order to try to destroy Christianity, and it was a comprehensive plan of attack: confiscate church property; imprison their leaders; dismiss, make it so that, dismiss them from civil office; enslave them; arrest them; destroy their churches and destroy their sacred books. Now, look, and I just want to step back and have us think for a moment here. You know, all of us here to one degree or another are probably dissatisfied with the political direction of our country and we're concerned about our constitutional rights and all of this, and what about our guns and health care and all of that. Well, look, when you view that in comparison to what our brothers and sisters in Christ were facing 1,700 years ago, you realize that the things that concern us politically now are of very minor consequence compared to what they were facing. With government sanction, their churches were being destroyed. With government sanction, their church leaders were being arrested. With government sanction, they were being ordered to turn over their sacred books so that they could be burned and destroyed. Now, look, you know, we just need to have a little bit of perspective and context on this and to appreciate. What I'm asking you to do tonight is simply to kind of step out of this current century and the things that concern us and step into this early fourth century situation with people that we're going to share heaven with, and to realize the massive upheaval that this represented to them, and for the sake of the same faith that you and I hold dear, all of a sudden, their entire life, everything was jeopardized, everything about it was jeopardized. You know, this is not what we're facing today in the 21st century. We may not like the idea of government health care, but it's not a threat like this was.

Now, continuing on with the quotation. There's just one little paragraph here from this historian. "The extent of enforcement of the decrees varied, but despite the many martyrs among its leaders," so a lot of them died, a lot of them were killed, "and the large number who fell away, the church emerged more thoroughly organized and aggressive than ever."

What he's saying is that there was this massive persecution that came upon the believers at that time that lasted for a period of about eight years, eight, nine years or so, but coming through the fire on the other side, they were purified; they were more aggressive, they were more organized than they ever were. Some of the true Christians were killed. Many of them were killed. Some falsely professing Christians fell away. They weren't true disciples of Christ, they weren't truly regenerate and so they got out of the kitchen

before the fire got too hot, and what was left was a purified church as a result of that persecution.

Now, and so, what we're seeing here is that the destruction of the Scriptures was only one part of a greater campaign to destroy and exterminate Christianity altogether, but the destruction of the Scriptures was one part of that and this had a defining impact on the Canon in a way that we're going to see here shortly. Now, in some ways, this is the best part of tonight's message. I hesitated to read what I'm about to read to you because it's so lengthy and I don't like to read lengthy quotations, but I'm going to make an exception for tonight because I think the detail of what I'm about to read will drive this point home. It's a story, a true story recorded in Fox's "Book of Martyrs" about a particular couple that faced this persecution some 1,700 years ago. In Fox's "Book of Martyrs" in the edited version that I have on my shelf, there's a ten page summary of the different martyrdoms that occurred under Diocletian listed out by name and the ways that these people were tortured and killed, and by this man who tried to stamp out God's word, and in the midst of that ten page summary, is this story of Timothy and Maura. True story and I'm going to quote now here.

"Timothy, a deacon of Mauritania, and Maura his wife, had not been united together by the bands of wedlock above three weeks," they were a young married couple; been married for three weeks, "when they were separated from each other by the persecution." You see, you need to have a sense of the detail of this. What I want you to see, what I want you to appreciate is that we stand on the shoulders of some really courageous people whose names have almost been lost to history. The Scriptures that we have were delivered to us by a river of blood and this persecution from Diocletian was one of the main streams that contributed to that river. People just like you and me are what we're talking about. These are real people, a young couple just married three weeks. What happened to them?

"Timothy, being apprehended, as a Christian, was carried before Arrianus, the governor of Thebais," there was a Roman governor that he was taken before and he was apprehended as a Christian. Remember, the Christians were being exterminated at this time and so he's taken before a Roman governor. This Roman governor, now I'll continue the quote, "knowing that Timothy had the keeping of the Holy Scriptures, commanded him to deliver them up to be burnt." So he's commanded Timothy, "Hand over the Scriptures so that they can be burned in compliance with this edict from our Emperor."

Timothy answered, quote, "If I had children, I would sooner deliver them up to be sacrificed, than part with the Word of God." The governor being much incensed at this reply, ordered his eyes to be put out, with red-hot irons, saying, 'The books shall at least be useless to you, for you shall not see to read them.' Timothy's patience under the operation was so great that the governor grew more exasperated; he, therefore, in order, if possible, to overcome Timothy's fortitude, ordered him to be hung up by the feet, with a weight tied about his neck, and a gag in his mouth." So he's hanging upside down. It's just sadistic torture for the sake of our word of God.

"In this state," while he's hanging upside down like this with his eyes having been burnt out, "Maura his wife, tenderly urged him for her sake to recant; but, when the gag was taken out of his mouth, instead of consenting to his wife's entreaties, he greatly blamed her mistaken love, and declared his resolution of dying for the faith. The consequence was, that Maura resolved to imitate his courage and fidelity and either to accompany or follow him to glory." It's all I can do to control my emotions as I read this. "The governor, after trying in vain to alter her resolution, ordered her to be tortured, which was executed with great severity." Executed with great severity. "After this, Timothy and Maura were crucified near each other, A.D. 304."

This is an illustration of how severe that persecution was; how sadistic it was and this was happening in various degrees as shown by a ten page edited summary that's been preserved for us through history. This shows us how severe it was. You know, to read that Christians were dying is one thing, to read the details of it and to think, "Wow, this was a young married couple." I remember what it was like to be a young married couple, at least my half of being a married couple, I guess. These were real people. These were real Christians, and their love for the word of God was so great and their conviction about it was so perfect and pristine, that they preferred this level of persecution rather than simply to hand over the Scripture and say, "Here, burn it." They said, "Burn me, but you won't burn the Scriptures. I won't hand them over to you."

Well, the effect of that is for the study of what we're doing here tonight, is that as part of its response to that brutality, the early church had to know which books were canonical, which ones were truly inspired, which ones would they shed their blood for, which ones would they have their eyes poked out over, versus those books that weren't from God and therefore they could hand over without fear of being guilty of infidelity to the one who had saved them. You see, you've got to understand, you've got to understand that the Scriptures as we have received them here in our age, have been tested by fire. I mean, virtually literally speaking they were tested by fire, and people just like us, with all of their imperfections and just their simple love for Christ, people just like us preferred that kind of treatment that Timothy and Maura had to handing over the Scriptures to be burned. So they had very practical urgent reasons, it was of utmost importance to them to get it right because their blood and the blood of their loved ones hung in the balance. This helped establish the limits of the Canon. These men and women would die for the inspired books but not for the lesser ones and so the result of that was we have clarity about what the true Canon is.

Now here's the conclusion. Here's the conclusion. The New Testament was not established by church councils several centuries after the books were written, who had a bunch of different things spread out before them and said, "We'll choose these and we'll leave out others," as if nothing had happened in the intervening 400 years. The authority in the New Testament was inherent from the beginning because it was inspired by God and there was just this process that took place of the church recognizing and recording the previously established authority of these books.

Now, if you think about it, if you think about it, this is actually a much better process than if there had been a council in the second century that declared the 27 books. You know, you had a gathering at one point in time of a few men who gathered and said, "This is the Canon," and then we went forward from there. This is a much better process that God has given us and you've got to think about this, you've got to understand it: this historical process that we've described that took place from the time the first book was written in 50 AD to the final declaration of the councils around 400 AD, 397 really, 367 is another key date in there. But over a period of 3 ½ centuries which is longer than the United States has been a functioning nation, over 350 years, many men, over many centuries, in many different locations, affirmed the recognition of the Canon. There is a collective historical judgment that gives us multiple, countless really at this point, countless independent affirmations. These men were motivated by the highest compulsions to get it right. "Our church is at stake. Our lives are at stake. Our blood will spill and we don't want to spill it in vain."

These men, committed believers in Jesus Christ, had every motivation to get it absolutely correct with not mistakes and we're not dependent on one group of men at one point of time, we have the growing recognition of many men over centuries pointing us in the direction that we now have. I'm obviously leaving out a whole lot. You cover 400 years of history in an hour and, look, you're going to leave out a lot of really important stuff. But here's what I want you to see: decisions regarding canonicity were not lightly made. The conduct of church meetings, their week to week worship, was at stake. The content of the Christian faith was at stake and, at times, the lives of Christians hung in the balance over the decisions that were over their judgment of this. And so with the greatest incentive to get it right, many men, over many years, in many places, came to a collective conclusion that these 27 books are the books that God gave to us through the apostles and their representatives, and that, you know, one of the verses that many of you would easily quote from, the book of Proverbs, is the idea that in multitude of counselors there is safety. You know, where there are many counselors, you succeed. Well, that's what we have in the New Testament Canon. We have this recognition, this diverse, prolonged affirmation that the church has respected in the 1,700 years that have followed, and it's through this process that is historically complex, that wasn't always clean and tidy as we might like it to be, but it was through this process that God's sovereign hand was providentially guiding the recognition of his revelation, and it's through that process that God established for all time the boundaries of his revelation. In the New Testament, these 27 are in and everything else is out. There is no other revelation.

You know, and look, people are trying to reopen it today and they want to inject the Gospel of Thomas or other writings into it. No. No. No. No. No. No. No, that is not to be tolerated. That is not to be countenanced as even a possibility because this decision has already been made by the church. This recognition has already been given, and the men who were there, the men whose lives were at stake said, "We recognize these writings as being the ones from God." They had the other ones there and said, "No." What kind of arrogance and vanity is it to think that 2,000 years after the fact, that we could come in and reopen this collective judgment. So today we do not add to it, we do not subtract from it, and we look at the history of this book, we know what it's done in our own lives,

we realize the intrinsic authority that it has, we realize that there were tens of thousands just like Timothy and Maura whose lifeblood was spilled over these pages that we hold in our hand, and we trace it back to the original source of blood itself, the Lord Jesus Christ, that his own divine precious blood was shed for our salvation and, in part, to deliver this word to us.

Bow with me in prayer.

Father, help us to be faithful to you and help us to be faithful to this Canon of Scripture. We have exactly the books that you want us to have and, Father, we thank you for the many faithful men through countless generations over the past 2,000 years that each played a part in delivering this to us. Father, you used each one to make a contribution, and the names of the martyrs might be lost in time to us, but they're not lost to you, Father, and the ones that were true Christians, it wasn't that being a martyr made them superior to those who weren't martyrs but, Father, they sealed their testimony with their own blood, and they often sealed it over this word that we have in front of us. Father, forgive us for sometimes taking your word lightly, for treating it with less regard than it should be. Lord, none of us have shed our blood over this word but men who had less opportunity, less resource, less privilege than we have, gladly opened their veins to spill their blood for the sake of preserving this word, and now we're the beneficiaries of that process.

Father, we thank you for those men but we realize that they were simply instruments in your hands and it gives us a sense, our God, it gives us a sense that we're part of something that far transcends our individual lives. We swim briefly in the stream of faithfulness of men that have gone before us and one day you'll take us out and we'll enter the banks of heaven, as it were, and the stream will continue on and you'll raise up others behind us because Christ will always build his church. There will be others who come after us, Father, who love your word also and want to be faithful to it. So, Father, we would just ask, even as we think of the contemporary song, may all who come behind us, find us faithful. Father, may the passion of our own devotion be a light for a generation yet to come, a generation yet to be born, Father. And as we go about our individual lives and take care of day to day responsibilities that seem so mundane, Father, motivate us that we might be faithful to your word; that we would love it supremely; and that when the stories of our lives are written after we have gone on to be in heaven with you, that there would be a lingering testimony, a lingering aroma of our lives that children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren would hear of and be drawn to this word and inspired in their own day and age to be faithful to it because, Father, somehow there was a lingering echo of our own lives that somehow affected them. We pray for that. We ask you to use us to that end.

And in the meantime, Father, even as we have that great opportunity and that great purpose to ennoble our approach to life, Father, day by day we just thank you for the joy of being able to go through life together, to work together, to serve together, to worship together at Truth Community Fellowship. Father, may we just find joy in the day to day lives and may there just be an ever sanctified, ever more sanctified joy and appreciation

for just the privilege it is to be a Christian in this world. Father, may the things that we've talked about tonight give us perspective as we look at the world around us and, Father, one last time I pray, would it motivate us. Would you just take this and drive the nail deeper in our lives to love this word and to be faithful to it, and to know that as we're being faithful to your word, we're being faithful to you and, Father, may our lives together mutually edify one another, encourage one another to that end.

I thank you for these brothers and sisters in Christ. I thank you for the young people that are here that maybe gave up other activities in order to spend their time here with God's people. Father, may you just bless them for that and sanctify those godly decisions to a greater level of service to you and a greater experiential knowledge of the joy of knowing Christ and walking with him in this world. So we thank you for what we've been able to study today knowing that it was very, very imperfect but, Father, it just gives us a taste that you have always been at work and the history of the world has been an instrument in your hands to confirm the Scriptures to your people today. We thank you for that and we just commit all these things to you and pray that you would bless us now as we go. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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