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What This Book Is (and Isn't) About

This is not a book about the inspiration of the Bible. It is not an apologetic defense of the books of the canon. It is not a book about how we can know the Bible is the Word of God. Those are all important topics that have been ably addressed elsewhere.¹ The focus of this book, though related and complementary to all those themes, is different.

This is a book about God's jealousy for His integrity, His passion to be believed on the basis of His words alone. It is about the trustworthiness of God's words in the Bible. Throughout Scripture God expresses His determination to be known as the God who keeps His words. He has resolved that every person and nation will see and confess that all His words are reliable down to every last syllable, jot, and tittle. Learning to trust a God who is sovereign and in control, especially in the ache and throb of life, means hanging on to the conviction that every word He speaks is utterly dependable.

Open the Bible and the first thing that tumbles out is a presupposition, a foundational assumption: 'In the beginning, God ...' The Bible never argues rationally or philosophically for the existence of God; it simply assumes it. Similarly, this book makes no attempt to argue that the Bible communicates the words of God; it is written from the presupposition that the Bible is God's Word—or, as I prefer

1. Just to give a recent example for each category, see Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word: Why the Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me* (Crossway, 2014); Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Crossway, 2012); John Piper, *A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness* (Crossway, 2016).

to express it, God's *words*. That language is my way of making the general specific, and I will stick to it throughout the book. If you are not already persuaded of the divine origin and content of the Bible, it is not my purpose to persuade you of that here. Again, many other books designed to argue that very point are already available. My purpose here is to persuade believers not only to believe the *logos* (the revelation or message) of God but to trust the *rhemata* (the revelations or sayings) of God, the individual statements He makes in that revelation, all the words within the Word—in short, to actually live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).

So, my intended audience is not the unbeliever, though I think God could use much of this book convincingly in an unbeliever's life. Nor am I targeting academicians, though I hope what I've written will profit such an audience since I have labored to make it academically informed and competent. I am writing for the Church, the people of God at large—the housewife who finds herself doubting God's assurances to provide for the needs of His people, the young father wrestling with the character of God when his child is diagnosed with a terminal illness, the senior wondering about God's promised presence to the end of her days, the high school student whose faith is intimidated when unbelieving teachers mock Scripture, the undergraduate or seminarian tempted to follow scholarly interpretations that undermine the words that God chose to express Himself.

For me as a teacher, documentation and explanation are non-negotiable. I have, however, traded the extensive endnotes of my previous books for fewer and (usually) briefer footnotes, and a simplified documentation system. I have tried to cite works that are generally more accessible than abstruse volumes of interest only to scholars, though the latter are cited when necessary. Corroborative or elaborative material that would clutter the text but is still important to interested readers is incorporated in brief appendixes.

Also, I am not of the opinion that the teacher's (or writer's) job is always to 'put the cookies on the bottom shelf.' To quote C. S. Lewis, 'I do not think the average reader is such a fool.' On the other hand, to place them out of reach is in no one's interest either. So I try to aim

for the middle shelf. My experiences as a teacher convince me that a learner—whether sitting in class at a desk or in an armchair with a book—is best served by being stretched a little. I don't think readers resent being treated like adults and challenged to understand the Bible and its Author better.

The contents are arranged into three major divisions. Part 1 lays down essential scriptural foundations. What, exactly, do we mean by trust and is it distinguished in any way from belief (Chapter 2)? Where and how does God express this 'jealousy' for His integrity (Chapter 3)? In what ways and passages does God demonstrate the value He places—and that He expects us to place—on His words (Chapter 4)? How do we know that God is trustworthy, and how does that relate to His other attributes (Chapter 5)? What does Jesus have to say about the trustworthiness of God's words (Chapter 6)?

Part 2 then explores specific practical applications of the trustworthiness of God's words, like what it means to trust God's testimony of past history (Chapter 7), God's assurances about His own character (Chapter 8), and even God's most astonishing promises (Chapter 9). What does trusting God's words look like in real life (Chapter 10) and how has it played out in the experience of God's people historically (Chapter 11)?

Part 3 invites the reader to a wide-angle view of the Bible. Chapters 12-14 unfold God's overarching narrative of reality in terms of His primary metaphor for that reality throughout Scripture: the kingdom. The only proper response to the truth this book seeks to display is captured in a single biblical word (Chapter 15). Finally, the Review & Reflect questions at the end of most chapters are suggestive, optional opportunities to process, recover, apply, or expand on principles or passages covered in the chapter, whether in a personal or group study setting.

I will confess that in the writing of this book I was often torn by opposing impressions. At times it seemed that what I was writing was, on one level, so simple and so obvious it hardly needed to be written. But that sense was always quickly countered by the sudden awareness that God jealously defends His integrity in so many ways and places,

that the integrity of His words is obviously deeply important to God, and that this theme therefore has the profoundest implications for the glory of God.

God charges His prophets, '... let him who has my word speak my word faithfully' (Jeremiah 23:28 ESV). Or to be pedantically literal, *let him who has my word, word my word faithfully*. However imperfect my efforts, that's my ambition as a teacher and as a writer. My aim in this book is a simple one: to magnify God's integrity and His zeal to be known as the God who keeps His words, and to magnify those twin themes in a way that encourages and nourishes in His people a confident trust in every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

God has tucked into every dell and dingle of the Bible this emphasis on the trustworthiness of His words. He is passionate about displaying and sharing His glory with His people. That, as Jonathan Edwards put it, is 'the end for which God created the world.'² Part of God's passion for His glory is His passion for His integrity—that He means what He says, that He has said exactly what He meant to say, and that He will unfailingly do all that He has said. We glorify God and vindicate His integrity when we trust His words entirely—all of them.

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,
 Just to take him at his word,
 Just to rest upon his promise,
 Just to know, 'Thus saith the Lord.'³

Trusting Jesus is not a vague, indefinable spiritual experience. Trusting Jesus has specific, identifiable content. To trust in Jesus is to trust His words, to rest on His promises, to be confident in every 'thus says the Lord.'

Oh, for grace to trust Him more.

2. The most accessible version of Edwards's magisterial essay, 'The End for Which God Created the World,' is in John Piper's *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Crossway, 2006).

3. Lyrics by Louisa M. R. Stead, published in 1882, after her husband drowned trying to rescue a drowning boy.