

## The Veracity of the Gospel

II Peter 1:12-21

“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

The primary theme of II Peter is to warn Christians against false teachers. To combat false teaching, II Peter reminds believers of the truth. II Peter 3:1 says, “This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you, in which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.”

In the first 11 verses of the first chapter, the apostle Peter presents the gospel: justification, sanctification, and glorification. The second part of chapter 1, verses 12-21, defends the veracity of the gospel. How do we know the gospel is accurate? How do we know the gospel is true? How do we know the gospel is reliable?

In our text this morning, the apostle Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, begins with a reminder of the importance of the gospel. He then presents two powerful assurances to the truth, the veracity of the gospel. First, the eyewitness testimony of the apostles. Second, the confirmation of the written word of God.

### **I. Peter’s Persistent Reminder (v. 12-15)**

First we see the necessity of the truth in a time of increased corruption. Peter begins verse 12 by saying, “Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things.” In the first 11 verses of this epistle Peter has introduced and explained the gospel. In verses 1-4 Peter reminded us of God’s

work in our salvation. Verse 1 tells us that our faith is obtained by the righteousness of God. Verse 2 tells us that grace and peace is multiplied through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. In verses 3 and 4 we are told that through divine power we have been given all things that pertain to life and godliness. We have received great and precious promises. We have been made partakers of the divine nature. We have escaped the corruption of the world.

In verses 5-11 Peter reminded us that we are to press on and grow in our faith. These verses teach the importance of developing Christian character and the advantages of pressing forward in grace and holiness in your walk with the Lord. The seven elements of divine life that are taught in verses 5, 6 and 7 are vital to a fruitful Christian walk. Verses 9-11 teach that growing in our walk with God is inseparably linked to our calling and election.

Now in verse 12, Peter says, "Wherefore." Because these things are so important. Because the gospel is so vital. Because there is a flood of false teachers. Because there is an ever increasing need for the truth in the face of ever increasing corruption. "Wherefore," Peter says, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance." I will always remind you of the truth. I will always set the gospel before you. I will always teach the gospel and remind you of its importance in Christian living. I will not let you forget these things. I will not neglect my duty to remind you of these things. I will regard you as always needing to be reminded.

Peter's commitment and persistence in teaching the gospel shows us two things. First, the divine power of God that worked to save us and now works in us to sanctify us is the entire foundation of the Christian religion. The gospel is far too vital for us to ever neglect. We can never wear thin the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is a spiritual feast for the Christian that never ends. The gospel is the cup of spiritual blessings that runneth over in the life of the believer. If we neglect the gospel, then what we practice is not Christianity. The trappings of Christianity without the gospel is merely a form of moralism. It is the gospel that gives spiritual life. The gospel must never be neglected. We can never be too often reminded of the gospel.

Our growth in the practical living out of the gospel is also a vital topic and cannot be separated from the gospel itself. Where there is life, there will be the effects of life. We have been given spiritual life in Christ. Now we are called to grow in our Christ-likeness. We are to be making forward steps in sanctification. We should often meditate on verses 5-7 and other passages like it and be reminded of our Christian duties. We should gladly receive instruction from teachers and preachers about how we are to advance in the Christian faith and grow in our walk with the Lord. The gospel is foundational, vital truth and Peter was committed and persistent in teaching the gospel.

Second, there is an application here for ministers of the gospel, and anyone who is in a position of spiritual authority over others. That position of spiritual

authority could be in the church as an elder or deacon, or it could be in the family as the husband is the head of the house or as the mother shares in the responsibility to teach and train up the children in the fear of God. Those who are in a position of spiritual authority must constantly teach spiritual truth and bring to remembrance things already taught. This is our duty before God. We must examine ourselves and see if we are faithful in our responsibilities before God. God forbid that we would negligent this sacred duty.

If you neglect the responsibilities of your spiritual authority, then what possible hope can you have that those who are under your authority will be faithful? Peter wrote in verse 12, “I will not be negligent.” May we all be committed to fulfill our responsibilities before God. Peter was committed and persistent in his responsibility to teach the word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The importance of the gospel makes frequent reminders prudent. The second part of verse 12 goes on to say something that might puzzle us: “Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, *though ye know them, and be established in the present truth*” (emphasis added).

The present truth is the gospel now present within us. For the Old Testament believers, the gospel was a promise they looked forward to in faith. In the New Testament era, the gospel is the present truth in which we are established.

Peter talked about this in his first epistle. Peter is talking about the gospel in the first chapter of I Peter, and in verses 10-12 he says, “Of which salvation the

prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.”

Old Testament believers looked forward to the prophesied salvation. We, as New Testament believers, are established in this present truth.

And so the question might arise, “Why teach someone, why remind someone, of that which they already know?” Peter’s audience knew the things Peter was teaching. Peter’s audience was “established in the present truth.” Peter wasn’t breaking new ground here. These people already knew the things Peter was teaching.

These things are not new to most of us either. If you are a Christian, if you have been reading your Bible, if you have been sitting under good instruction and preaching from the Word of God, then these things are not new to you. These are things you should already know. These are things that you should already be established in. Why then does Peter remind us of these things?

There are several reasons why we all need to be reminded of these things. First, we tend to be very forgetful. Just as the rest of sin-marred creation trends

toward decay, so do our memories. We are slow to learn and quick to forget.

Though we may be established in the truth, there is always the danger that we will forget. It is important that we be constantly reminded of these things that are most needful in the Christian walk.

Another reason we need to often be reminded of these things is so that we can be firmly established in the truth. We can never out study the gospel: the doing, the dying, and the rising of Jesus Christ. We will never reach a point where we know so much about the gospel, justification, sanctification, and glorification, that we will not benefit from hearing it again. We will never know Jesus Christ with such clarity and depth that we will say, “That’s enough. I’m ready for something else.” We can never be too firmly established in the truth of Scripture. We may hear over and over again things we have already been taught, truth that we have already been established in, but through that repetition we are more firmly established in the truth. This both strengthens our own faith and equips us to share our faith with others.

One writer commented on this verse: “The great doctrines of the gospel, *that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved, and all that believe in God must be careful to maintain good works*—these are truths the apostles insisted on

in their day; *these are faithful sayings, and worthy of all acceptance* in every age of the Christian church.”<sup>1</sup>

We can never know the truth too well. We benefit from constant reminders.

As Peter neared the end of his life, he sought to leave a record of the truth. In verses 13, 14, and 15 Peter says, “Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shown me. Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.”

When Peter says, “As long as I am in this tabernacle,” he is talking about his physical body. Some Bible translations use the word “body” instead of tabernacle although this is not the word normally translated as “body” in the New Testament.

Peter also says that the Lord has shown him that he will soon “put off” his “tabernacle.” Peter is talking about the time when his physical body would be laid aside in death. Peter is probably around 70 years old when he wrote this epistle. The persecution of Nero is about to begin and church history records that Peter died in that period of persecution. Peter is approaching the end of his life. What is more, Peter knows that he is approaching the end of his life. There is much we can learn from how Peter speaks of life and death in these two verses.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry’s Commentary on this passage.



Peter calls his physical life, his physical body, a tabernacle. The physical body is just a temporary structure that holds the soul. Like the tabernacle where the Israelites worshipped in the wilderness, so are our bodies. They are temporary. On this side of the resurrection, our bodies are not permanent. They are weak, restricted, and easily taken down and removed. The mightiest human bodies are no more secure than a tent in the wilderness. This leads us to the next lesson we can learn about life and death from these verses.

In verse 14 Peter says, “I must put off this my tabernacle.” If the Lord tarries, the day will come for each one of us when this tabernacle must be put off. We will die. Our physical lives will end. But death is not annihilation, we will not cease to exist. Death is separation. At death we will be separated from our physical bodies. For Christians, this separation will last until the resurrection when we will be given glorified bodies, perfect and free from the corruption of sin.

In verse 15 Peter says, “after my decease.” That word “decease” is only used two other times in the New Testament. It is used in Luke 9:31 speaking of Christ’s death. And it is used in Hebrews 11:22 in reference to the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt, the departure out of a place of bondage and into a place of promised rest. What a beautiful comparison that is to the death of a believer. In death are delivered from the corruption of this world, delivered from any vestige of bondage to sin, and we enter into promised rest.

If you are in Christ, then death has lost its power over you. In I Corinthians 15:20 Jesus is called the firstfruits of the resurrection. Jesus died, he laid aside his physical body. But 3 days later he rose from the dead, he was resurrected, and possessed a glorified body. That is our hope in Christ.

Like our Lord, there will come a time when we will lay aside this tabernacle, this body of flesh. But also like our Lord, there will come a day when we will be resurrected and given glorified bodies. Like the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:55 we can confidently say, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” For us to live is Christ, to die is gain (Philippians 1:21).

This passage also reveals who is in control of the duration of our physical lives. Look again at verse 14. Peter says, “Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shown me.” As far as we know, when Peter wrote this epistle he wasn’t awaiting a sentence of execution ordered by some man or government. Peter hadn’t received bad news about his health from a medical doctor. Peter hadn’t reviewed his family history and come to the conclusion that he probably didn’t have much time left. The Lord had revealed this to Peter. God, in His infinite wisdom, told the apostle Peter that he would not remain in his physical body much longer.

God knows our frame. He is intimately acquainted with each speck of dust that composes our physical bodies. He is the one who gives us physical life. And ultimately, He is the one who is in control of when our physical lives will end. We

can rest in the knowledge that the number of our days are, ultimately, in the hands of God.

The final lesson about death from these verses is possibly the most helpful as we consider the temporal nature of our physical bodies. In verses 13 and 15 we see what Peter desires to accomplish with the short time he has remaining. The nearness of death makes Peter diligent in the business of life.

In verse 13 Peter says that it is his desire to stir the church up by reminding them of the gospel. Peter knew his time here on earth was short. Peter didn't have many days left to invest into eternity. How did he choose to spend his time? Peter invested it in ministry. The shortness of life should lead us to be diligent in service to the Lord.

Our enemy understands this principle. The second part of Revelation 12:12 says, "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." The devil knows his time is short, and this knowledge stirs him up against the church of God. Knowing the shortness of our time here on earth, are we stirred up to serve the Lord?

In verse 15 Peter says, "Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." This word "endeavor" is the same word that is translated as "diligence" in verse 10. Peter was committed to be diligent in the work God had set before him. The work God had tasked Peter

with was a preaching and teaching ministry to the church. In John 21 Jesus said to Peter, “Feed my lambs. . . Feed my sheep. . . Feed my sheep.”

It was Peter’s ambition that even after his death we would remember the doctrine that he delivered to the church. To that end, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter committed his exhortation to writing. Those who have the written word of God are equipped to remember, to meditate on, and to share the truth of God.

Peter’s desire was that the church would be established in the truth of the gospel, and in view of the shortness of his life, Peter diligently set himself to this great work. May we all follow the example of the apostle Peter and be diligent in serving the Lord with the days He has given us.

Peter goes on to explain why he was so committed to the gospel. He was committed to the gospel because it was truth. He knew it was the truth because he was an eyewitness.

## **II. Peter’s Eyewitness Testimony (v. 16-18)**

This passage begins by setting the gospel in contrast to heathen mythologies. Verse 16 begins “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In these few words the full force of the gospel. Peter says, “We (the apostles) made known

unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the gospel: Jesus Christ, the long-promised Redeemer, came from heaven, put on our flesh, lived in the world without sin, died and rose again.

Why did Jesus do these things? So that he could be Emmanuel, “God with us.” So that he could cleanse us from sin by his grace and consecrate us as temples to God. To deliver us from hell and raise us to heaven. To reconcile us with the Father. To become the author of life and righteousness to all those who will call upon his name for salvation. This is the “power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the gospel. Peter sets this gospel up in contrast to heathen mythologies.

The world is full of religious myths. Some are so fantastic that they seem ridiculous. Others are carefully crafted, cunningly devised, in order to deceive. The Christians who first received this letter were living in a culture inundated with such myths and fables. There were all the myths that surrounded the gods of the Greeks and Romans and other Mediterranean cultures. The Gnostics were beginning to gain traction on the outskirts of Christianity with their fables and genealogies that came from a blend of Judaism and Oriental philosophy. Paul had to warn Timothy about this in I Timothy 1:4. In contrast to these heathen myths, Peter sets forth the gospel.

Peter knew that some people thought the gospel, was an unbelievable story. A fable. A myth. Critics of the gospel are nothing new. Critics of the life and

ministry of Jesus are nothing new. Sometimes we think that if we just had the miracle ministry of Jesus or the apostles, then people would flock to the gospel. That is simply not consistent with what we see in the Bible. Even Jesus, with all his miracles, was rejected by the masses.

Jesus faced criticism during his earthly ministry. There were Jews who said Jesus was a raving mad-man, a demon possessed lunatic. John 10:20 tells us, “And many of [the Jews] said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?”

The apostles also faced this sort of criticism as they preached the gospel. If you remember, the scholars and philosophers in Athens listened to the gospel Paul preached until he got to the resurrection, then these men became critical. Acts 17:32a says, “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked.” Paul had just called them a very superstitious people, but even they thought the resurrection was too far-fetched to believe and they mocked the gospel Paul preached.

In our time, some people who call themselves Christians have even adopted this view. They preach the gospel of Jesus Christ as if it is nothing more than a nice story, a fable, a religious myth from which we can learn moral lessons.

Peter was familiar with criticism like this: criticism that compared the gospel to any other religious myth. In response to this criticism, Peter gives his eye-witness testimony. Peter knew the gospel was true. Not merely because he believed it to be so, but because he had lived it. He knew Jesus. He had walked with Jesus.

He was an eye-witness to the life, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Peter sets the gospel up in contrast against cunningly devised fables because he is an eye-witness who can personally testify of the truth of the gospel.

Peter and the other apostles were eyewitnesses to the majesty of Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated as “eyewitnesses” is only used one time in the New Testament. It is a very interesting choice for a word because of its use in Greek culture.

The word itself speaks of an eyewitness, but not just a person who saw something. It is stronger than that. It means someone who carefully watched and observed. Someone who paid close attention to what they saw. But this word had another meaning in Greek culture.

The Greeks used this word to describe a particular group of people. It was used to describe people who had advanced to the highest level in certain pagan religious ceremonies.<sup>2</sup> They had advanced as far as was possible for them in that religious system. They had seen things that no one below them had seen. They had knowledge that others did not have. They were “eyewitnesses” to the mysteries of this Greek cult.

This is the word the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to use when talking of the apostles as “eyewitnesses.” To someone familiar with Greek culture at the time,

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<sup>2</sup> *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, W. E. Vine, p. 65.

this word would have communicated that the apostles didn't just see something with their eyes, but they had special revelation given to them. What were the apostles eyewitnesses to? Peter describes it with one word at the end of verse 16: "Majesty."

The apostles were eyewitnesses to the majesty of Jesus Christ. All the apostles had witnessed many miracles that revealed the glory of Jesus Christ. In fact, the same word that is translated here as "majesty" is used in Luke 9:43 in reference to the miracle ministry of Jesus. After Jesus had cast a demon out of a boy the Word of God records for us, "And they were all amazed at the mighty *power* of God" (emphasis added). That word "power" is the same as the word "majesty" in our text.

All the apostles were witnesses of the resurrection. They had all seen Jesus after the resurrection. They had the resurrection as the most remarkable evidence of Christ's divinity.

The apostles received assurance from the things that they had witnessed; from the power, the majesty, they saw in and through Jesus Christ. All of this serves to illustrate that the gospel was not made up of vague rumors, but that the apostles were the authentic preachers of what they had witnessed. In particular, Peter goes on to relay his eyewitness account of the transfiguration.

Peter, James, and John were the three disciples who were present with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. On that mountain, they saw the glory, the



majesty, of Christ revealed. The transfiguration was a glimpse of the glory that will be revealed to all men at the return of Christ. Peter tells us that on that holy mount Jesus received from the Father honor and glory. He received honor in the voice that spoke to Him. He received glory in the light that shone around Him.

Peter goes on to describe what happened, “There came such a voice to him from the excellent glory.” We know from Matthew 17 that a cloud of glory descended on the mountain during the transfiguration. Throughout the Old Testament we see the presence and glory of God manifested in this way.

We are told in Exodus 24:15 that when Moses went up mount Sinai to meet with God a cloud covered the mountain.

When the children of Israel finished building the tabernacle in Exodus 40:34 we read, “Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”

In Leviticus 16:2 God said, “I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.”

When Solomon’s temple was dedicated in I Kings 8:10-11 we read, “The cloud filled the house of the Lord, So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord.” This was the cloud of excellent glory that descended on the mount of transfiguration.

Out of this cloud came the voice of God which said of Jesus, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Here we have, from the mouth of the

Father, confirmation that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. All that the Old Testament contains about the Messiah is here declared by the Father as belonging to Jesus Christ. God was well pleased with Jesus Christ, the Messiah that God the Father had appointed. Just as God was pleased with Christ, so God is pleased with us when we are in Christ. All who believe in Him will be saved, they will be accepted by the Father.

See here the necessity of Jesus Christ. God's love dwells and centers around His Son. God's love can't be sought anywhere else. God's love doesn't dwell in good works we can do. God's love doesn't dwell in good people, for there are none righteous, no not one (Romans 3:10, Psalm 14:3). There is only one way for us to be in the love of God, only one way for us to be accepted by the Father, only one way for us to be "well pleasing" to God, and that is through Jesus Christ, God's appointed Messiah.

In verse 18 Peter reiterates that he was actually there. He was with Jesus at the transfiguration. He heard God's voice from heaven. He was an eyewitness to the majesty of Jesus Christ.

Peter has great confidence in the gospel, and he committed to the spread of the gospel, because he was an eyewitness. He was there and saw these things first-hand. But Peter doesn't stop there. He goes on to share another proof of the veracity of the gospel.

### III. The Sure Testimony of Scripture (v. 19-21)

The Old Testament prophecies have been confirmed. It seems that Peter has saved his strongest argument until now. What is more reliable than the eyewitness account of any person? What is a better foundation for our faith than the spectacular experience of witnessing the transfiguration? The written word of God. Peter makes his final appeal to the written word of God.

Why is the written word better than experience, even the experiences of the apostles? Look at the first word in verse 19: “*We* have also a more sure word of prophecy” (emphasis added). When Peter spoke of eyewitness experience, he was limited to the apostles or even just the inner circle of himself, James, and John who were present at the transfiguration. But all believers have the testimony of God’s Word before us.

Consider how this passage describes the Old Testament as “a more sure word of prophecy.” It is prophetic in nature. The Old Testament as a whole prophetically declares that a Messiah is coming. The Old Testament prophesies who he would be, where he would be born, the ministry he would accomplish, how he would live, how he would die, how he would be resurrected, and how he would be glorified. The New Testament is a history of that which the Old Testament prophesied. The accomplishment of the Old Testament by the New Testament, the

agreement between the Old Testament and the New Testament, demonstrates the truth of both.

It is a “more sure word.” Before the coming of Christ, assurance in the prophecies was held in faith. Now we have a double assurance, we are “more sure” because of the prophecies that were fulfilled in the life of Christ. This is why the apostles preached from the Old Testament and faithful hearers went and “searched the scriptures” to see if they confirmed the gospel the apostles preached (Acts 17:11). Calvin commented, “The apostles had the prophets as the patrons of their doctrine; the faithful also sought from [the prophets] a confirmation of the gospel.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus taught in Luke 16:31 that Moses and the prophets had more power to persuade the hearts of men than even the most impressive miracles.

Verse 19 continues this discussion about the Word of God: “whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” When Peter wrote this he was referring to the Old Testament, but it is appropriate for us to apply this to all the Word of God. The New Testament certainly shines brighter in its revelation than the Old Testament, but it is still just a lamp compared to the brightness and clarity there will be at the return of Christ. The Psalmist did not have the complete word of God, but with the Psalmist we can say, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a

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<sup>3</sup> John Calvin’s commentary on this passage.

light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105). We have a brighter light, but we do not yet dwell in the eternal day.

Peter says, “Ye do well that ye take heed.” It is good and necessary for us, as believers, to take heed to the written word of God. We should apply our minds to understand the Word of God. We should apply our hearts to believe the Word of God. We should allow the word of God to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ. The Word of God should have authority in our lives to regulate our thoughts, our words, and our actions. Why? Why should the written word of God have such authority in our lives?

Verse 19 goes on to describe the word as “a light that shineth in a dark place.” The dark place Peter is talking about is this world. The world is dark because of sin. Sin pervades the world. Creation groans under the curse brought by sin. Every human being is in bondage to sin both by nature and by choice.

The world is also dark because of ignorance. The Bible says that there is no man that seeks after God (Romans 3:11). The revelation of God in creation and in our conscience is not sufficient to bring us to a saving knowledge of God. Apart from the light of the revealed Word of God, the world stumbles about in spiritual ignorance.

The light spoken of in this passage is the Word of God. This word “light” is the Greek word for lamp. The Word of God shines like a lamp to show us our way in the darkness. If we are unwilling to submit to the light of the Word, than we can

hope for nothing better than to dwell in the darkness of the world. John Calvin said, “The church cannot follow God as its guide, except it observes what the word prescribes.”<sup>4</sup> If we are not walking in obedience to the word of God, it is vanity to imagine we are walking with God.

We are to diligently heed the Scriptures until “the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” This is speaking of the Lord’s return. We are to give careful attention to the word of God until either we go to be with our Lord or he returns to rule and reign here on earth.

When the Lord returns believers will be made like him (I John 3:1-2). In the new heavens and new earth where we will dwell for eternity we will have perfect knowledge and the need for prophecy will be abolished (I Corinthians 13:8). One day the written word will be superseded by the full revelation which is to come. But until that day, we walk by the light of the sure prophetic word, the written word of God.

The written word testifies to the truth of the Gospel. Peter points to a “more sure word of prophecy.” The eyewitness testimonies of the apostles do not stand alone. They stand supported by the Old Testament which is confirmed by the life of Jesus Christ. Now we have both the Old and New Testaments, the complete word of God. It is written down, inspired and preserved, for us. It is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16).

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin’s commentary on this passage.

We can have great confidence in the gospel as we see in the written word how the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in the New Testament revelation of Jesus Christ.

Verses 20 and 21 teach that the Holy Spirit is the source and interpreter of Scripture. Verse 20 begins: “Knowing this first.” These two verses are about to lay down a principle that is to be our first consideration when we study the word of God. What is taught here is a reality we must never lose sight of as we study Scripture. There is one truth that we must have settled in our hearts in order to spiritually benefit from the Scriptures. What is this principle? What is this truth that we must know and have settled in our hearts?

Look at the next part of verse 20: “No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.” There are three common interpretations of this verse.

The first is that the average person, lay people in the church, should not take it upon themselves to read, study, and seek to understand the word of God. The Scriptures are too difficult to understand on your own. You can’t subject the Scriptures to your interpretation, a private interpretation. The Scriptures must be interpreted for you by the church. This is a blatantly false position. It does not line up with the rest of Scripture. It does not fit the context. Clearly, this is not what this verse is teaching.

Others believe that this verse is teaching that this verse teaches that we must not lean on our own understanding when we study the Bible. Reading the word of

God is only profitable when we renounce the flesh and are willing to be taught by the Holy Spirit. If we think that we are sufficient in our strength and our knowledge to understand the Scripture, then we do not understand the true nature of the word of God.

That's true and biblical. When we come to the word of God we can't lean on our own understanding. We must submit to the Holy Spirit and pray, "Lord, teach us what you have for us from your word." But as you look at this verse in its context, that application doesn't seem to fit.

The final common interpretation, and the one I believe is correct, is that prophecy (and by extension, all Scripture), is of divine origin. The men who wrote the Scriptures were not giving their own private interpretations of events. They were not delivering their own conclusions. Verse 21 goes on to tell us that they "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." All scripture is divine in origin.

This fits perfectly with what this passage teaches. The difference between the prophets of the Lord and false prophets, is that false prophets speak their own words. Jeremiah 23:16 says this about false prophets: "They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord."

In contrast, the prophets of God spoke the words God gave them to speak. Over 3800 times in the Old Testament the prophets refer to their writings as the words of God.<sup>5</sup> For example, Moses said in Numbers 16:28b, "The Lord hath sent

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<sup>5</sup> John MacArthur's Study Bible, notes on verse 21.



me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind.” The prophet Jeremiah said, “[God’s] word was in mine heart” (Jeremiah 20:9).

The Scriptures are the very words of God. The Bible is of divine origin. The Bible is the very words of God, inspired and preserved for us.

Verse 21 describes how the word of God came to us. First, we are told that it did not come by the will of man: “For the prophecy came not in the old time by the will of man.” No part of the Scriptures are the opinions of the human writers. The Word of God is not a collection of people’s private religious journals where they record their personal experiences and beliefs. The Word of God is not a progressive refinement of human religion as a society gradually refines a form of monotheism. The Bible isn’t merely a record of religious experiences, thoughts, and opinions of men. The Scriptures are not the opinions of the human authors.

Nor was any part of the Bible produced as a result of the will of the human writers. In fact, many times the writers didn’t understand what they were writing. Peter spoke of this in I Peter 1:10-11 where the Bible says the prophets “enquired” into what they had prophesied. They sought to understand what God had spoken through them. All of this serves to illustrate that the word of God did not come to us by the will of man.

Rather, “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” The writers of the Bible were “holy men of God.” They were the emissaries of God. They were holy because they were under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Although Scripture at times records the deeds and words of unholy men, it was written by holy men. Matthew Henry commented, “If Balaam and Caiaphas, and others who were destitute of holiness, had any thing of the spirit of prophecy upon occasion, yet such persons were not employed to write any part of the scriptures for the use of the church of God. All the penmen of the scriptures were holy men of God.”

They were holy men, and they were “moved by the Holy Ghost.” The Holy Ghost was the primary agent in the writing of the word, the holy men were but the instruments God used. The Holy Spirit engaged these men to speak and write the mind of God for His people. Because of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration we can be assured that they did not misrepresent God or His will on any point.

In faith we can embrace the words of Scripture as the very words of God Himself. The Bible is worthy of a place of reverence and esteem in our lives because it was written by holy men, inspired, influenced, and assisted by the Holy Ghost.

In our text this morning the apostle Peter defends the veracity of the gospel. How do we know the gospel is true? How do we know the gospel is reliable? How can we be assured that the gospel is a worthy cause to devote our lives to?

The apostle Peter was convinced. Peter was committed to the gospel. He presented two proofs of the veracity of the the gospel: the eye-witness testimony of the apostles and the confirmed prophetic word of God.

If you have been convicted by the word of God this morning and you are not yet a Christian, turn to Christ! Call upon the name of Jesus Christ for salvation and you will be saved.

If you are a Christian, I hope this passage was as great of an encouragement to you as it was to me. What glorious assurance we have in the truth of the gospel! What an incredible thing it is to read the eyewitness account of Peter, and then to see prophecy made and prophecy fulfilled in the written word of God.

May each one of us leave here today with a renewed commitment to make the gospel known. May we say like the apostle Peter, “I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”