



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Peter 1:12-21

“The Dependability of Prophecy in the Days of Heresy”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Again Father, we commit the hour to Thee. We ask Thy blessing upon us as we look into the Scriptures. We remember that the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. That it pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. It is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And it is that with which we ultimately have to do. We pray that our studies tonight may enable us to understand it and may the Holy Spirit give us the enablement to respond to the things that we read and understand. We commit now this hour to Thee. We pray Thy blessing upon each one present. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We continue our study of 2 Peter and our subject for tonight is “The Dependability of Prophecy in Days of Heresy.” And for our Scripture reading I want to read verses 12 through 21 of the 1st chapter.

“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of those things, though ye know them, and are established in the present truth. Yea, I think it fitting, 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. 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; unto which 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 at any time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

We have been saying in our preceding studies in 2 Peter that Peter wrote a tract for his times and a tract for our times. His adversary was a form of primitive Gnosticism. And while Gnosticism has been the object of renewed interest among the scholars due to some recent finds, Gnosticism today survives as a living religion only among the Mandaean marsh-dwellers of the land of Iraq.

It illustrates for us a very important principle. As Dean Inge, the famous “red bishop” of the Church of England, expressed it once truly, “He who is wedded to the spirit of this age will find himself a widower in the next.” It is true of all the heresies that sooner or later they leave us and we leave them and they pass into the realm of the relics of the past.

The enemies of the truth change but the enmity does not. We do not any longer grapple with Gnosticism. That is not really an issue today. As a matter of fact, we do not even grapple very seriously with its modern cousin, Christian Science. I was very happy to notice in the religion section of *Time* magazine just last year, less than a year ago, that Christian scientists are having a little bit of a problem. I'm delighted over that [Laughter]. They have now constructed a very large building in Boston near the mother church and it evidently is a model of modern architecture, and last June about thirteen thousand devoted scientists from twenty-five countries gathered at their church to

attend its annual meeting and to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the publication of its major text, Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy’s *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*.

The interesting thing about it is that the membership in Christian Science and its denomination is slipping. We read, “That despite a spurt of growth in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, the number of branch churches in societies has fallen by about 5% over the past decade to some three thousand today. The role of Christian Science practitioners, healers, authorized to help members overcome illness by prayer has dropped considerably. Incoming Board Chairman Otto Bertschi reported last week that administrative expenses are being slashed by 20%. Last April the church’s respected but stodgy daily newspaper, the *Christian Science Monitor*, cut back to a more economic tabloid size.” All of this I’m rejoicing in, really [Laughter]. It also reduced its staff and raised subscription and advertising rates in an effort to shrink its seven million annual deficit. And then some of the best news is later. It says here that, “Christian science experienced its greatest membership surge during the depression when thousands looked to it for spiritual help. Now the crowd is dying off,” a phrase no good Christian scientist would ever use, of course.

As you know, Christian scientists do not believe that there is such a thing as death and sin, these are simply errors of the mortal mind. As Chairman Bertschi puts it, “Today more of the faithful are going off than are coming on the rolls.” May that trend continue and increase. Notes one younger member, “It is largely a grey haired group now.” Well Christian Science never was anything to speak about. It’s not Christian and it’s not science. It has been said it’s like Grapenuts, which is neither grapes nor nuts [Laughter].

We are not concerned today with Christian Science, really, because it is a cousin of ancient Gnosticism. It just reappeared in a new form, and consequently the Christian church is not really struggling with Christian Science. With the world we struggle over the possibility of a divine revelation in our colleges and universities. When the subject of Christianity comes up the question that usually comes up is do we have any assurance that we have a divine revelation? Is it possible for us to believe that God has spoken?

Or perhaps the question of the relationship of science and religion comes up. Is it possible to be a Christian in the light of the discoveries and the philosophies of modern science? Within the church we are caught up in the issue of the Bible. Just what is the Bible? Is the Bible the inspired word of God? If it is the inspired word of God, of course, it is therefore authoritative, but what kind of inspiration do we have in the Bible. Is the inspiration a relative kind of inspiration or is it an absolute kind of inspiration that guarantees the inerrancy of the Scriptures.

Now this is a very important struggle and I would, without any question, affirm that it is the basic struggle in the Christian church. It's a fateful death struggle. And even those who do not hold the view of the Bible that I would hold affirm that. Professor Emil Brunner, professor for many years of systematic theology at the University of Zurich of Switzerland, said some years ago, “The fate of the Bible is the fate of Christianity.” And so if we lose the battle of the Bible in the church of Jesus Christ we can be sure that the truth of Christianity is going to suffer.

This passage that we are looking at tonight contains an answer to the question of the Bible and particularly a great encouragement to the study and belief of the Bible on the part of those who are convinced that it is the word of God. We turn now to the apostolic witness, or the apostolic desire I should say, for an establishment in the truth.

Remember, Peter has told us in the first part of this chapter that God has given us the gift of faith. The gift of faith is the means by which we come to believe in the Lord Jesus. No man ever comes into Christianity who has not received the gift of faith from the Holy Spirit. The gospel is preached that Christ died for sinners, that he was buried, that he was raised again from the dead, that his death is a substitutionary sacrifice. He took the place of sinners. He died under the penal judgment of God and the offer of eternal life is given to all men. That is the gospel.

But now if we are to receive that gospel, we cannot receive it of ourselves. There must be a divine work in the heart of every individual who comes to believe in the Lord Jesus. You may not have felt it but it nevertheless has come to you. If you have responded to this gospel and you have believed in our Lord Jesus as a sinner and have received the salvation that he offers, you have been

the recipient of the gift of faith. Peter speaks about it right here in the opening verses of this second letter that he wrote. He also speaks of the gift of life in the 3rd verse. He speaks of the gift of promises that lead to the sharing of God’s own life. Now the kind of promises that he refers to he describes as, “Exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these we might be partakers of the divine nature.” We tried to point out that this does not mean that we become little gods in spite of the fact that some of the early church fathers expressed it that way. They didn’t mean what we would mean by that, but nevertheless they did use that terminology and it became a little confusing.

We are not little gods. We do not possess any omniscience, or omnipotent, or omnipresence. We are not self-existent. We are not totally unified. We do not possess the unity that the Godhead possesses. We are not as the Godhead possessed of a sovereign power, but we do have certain aspects of the nature of the divine being. In the possession of the Lord Jesus we do possess some of the relative attributes in measure. And so that is what Peter is speaking about when he says, “We have become partakers of the divine nature.” We have been given eternal life. We have the life of God. It is a gift of grace to us. It marks us out as those who have been regenerated. We have been born again. The first exhibition -- the first expression I should say -- the first expression of our regeneration through the Holy Spirit is the response of faith to the word of God. And then having been born again we possess the life of God.

Now Peter has, in the next section, emphasized the responsibility for holy living that arises out of these great promises that we have because the messianic kingdom is coming someday. And he wants us, as he says in the 11th verse, to have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. The Christian life, then, is not to be an initial spasm followed by chronic inertia which is so characteristic of so many of us and even in evangelical churches. As I’ve said already in this series one of the saddest things is to enter an evangelical church and find a group of people who are satisfied with the level of spirituality to which they have attained. There should never be satisfaction in the Christian life, never. It’s impossible for us to come to the place where we

know the truth of God, or where we have attained to the spiritual life that distinguishes us as being the kinds of persons who have no more possibility of development.

Even the Apostle Paul who spoke of himself in Philippians chapter 3 as a Christian who was perfect or mature then said that he gave all diligence to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God and Christ Jesus. So if you have a complacent group of Christians who say, “Well in our church we have the truth,” or, “In my Christian experience I have arrived,” generally we wouldn’t say that, we just imply that by the way that we live, then we are in danger of falling. So Peter urges us here in our faith to add these virtues that he speaks about, the climax of which the peculiar Christian love.

Now he desires that we remember and realize what we have. And so he writes in the 12th verse, “Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and are established in the present truth.” Incidentally, this expression, “The present truth,” here is not some special kind of truth that is applicable to this age, as if it were dispensational truth that pertains to the church. I’ve heard that interpretation but that is not really the sense of the original text at this point. He means when he says, “The present truth,” in our Authorized Version, he means the truth that is present to his readers, or therefore the truth that they have. And if you have a modern version you probably have that correction made in your text. So this should read, “Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and you are established in the truth that you have come to possess.”

Now when he says that he wants them to be put in remembrance he means that he wants them to realize the truth that they have. And incidentally here we have something I want to stress because there are people who somehow or other seem to think that Christianity is an experiential thing almost entirely. But there can be no real true experience of Christianity if we do not have the truth of Christianity. And you can tell from this statement that Peter has written here that he thought that there was a well-defined corpus of truth that was a part of Christianity in which all Christians ought to come to know. Christianity is first of all doctrinal and then ethical.

So he says, “I want you to be put in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and you have been established in the truth that you have.” All of this then implies that there is a doctrine which we can call Christian doctrine. There is a corpus of truth, there is a body of theology, put it that way if you like. Paul calls it over in Romans chapter 6 that form or type of doctrine to which you were delivered. In other words, the limits of our practical growth in Christianity are prescribed by the entrance into the doctrines of the word of God that we have. It’s impossible to have a Christian experience that is beyond our knowledge of the basic structure of the doctrines of the word of God, Christian truth.

“Indifference to doctrine,” J. Gresham Machen once said, “makes no heroes of the faith.” So whenever you hear anyone say, “Now it’s not so important that we know the truth as it is that we experience it, you can just mark it down that that person has an inadequate understanding of Christianity.” It is impossible for anyone to make a statement like that and truly appreciate the relationship of doctrine and ethics in the word of God.

I’m reading a very complicated book on Paul written by an outstanding continental scholar at the present time. Scholars have interesting ways of making simple things very difficult. They like to speak about things that are curious. They’re not curious to anybody but to them [Laughter]. They like to think of the discoveries of truth. When I was living abroad at one time I listened to some lectures in one of the universities in which some of the elite scholars of our day were lecturing, and they often spoke of the discoveries of truth. In fact, they were using German words. One, the word *entdeckung* means discovery and this was one of their favorite words. And one of the simple Christians of the city in which I was staying, a very learned man himself who had his doctorate in Chemistry and is an executive in one of the leading chemical companies of that part of the country said to me after one of the meetings, he said, “You know, over at the university where I went for six or seven years, over there they’re always talking about *entdeckung*, discoveries.” But he said, “When you read the Bible you discover that those things that they call discoveries are the simple things that we’ve known all along.” [Laughter]

It is possible to obfuscate the teachings of the word of God by technical terms, but in this book that I have been reading the author has been making a distinction between the indicative of truth and the imperative of truth. And what he is trying to say is that there is a doctrinal content in the word of God and that's the indicative. Those are the positive declarations that God makes concerning truth.

Now there arises out of these positive declarations of truth, these indicatives, the imperatives of what we ought to do in the light of those things. And then this author goes on to say that the imperative is always built upon the indicative, that you cannot have any imperative that is a true imperative which is not grounded in some indicative. And what he means is simply that you cannot have any exhortation to do anything that is not grounded in the unfolding of positive doctrinal truth. All of Paul's exhortations grow out of doctrines. So that's why it's so important that we know doctrine. Peter is urging his readers now, I want you know I want you to remember these things, in the sense of to realize them.

And, of course, this involves not only the knowing positively of truth but it also involves the rejection of that which is error. Mr. Spurgeon said, “It's the preacher's duty to expose error, even though it is held by saintly believers.” I believe that. I think that's true. The Christian church is often put on a sidetrack by the simple fact that when they hear error they don't say anything about it because the person who uttered it is such a sweet fellow. But if it's error, it's wrong, it doesn't come from God, it doesn't come from the Holy Spirit, it ultimately comes from the individual or from Satan and therefore it should be exposed. Because it is entirely possible that error should mislead some of the saints, or others. That's why it should be exposed.

And you're not doing anybody any favor in covering up error because the person who utters it is a sweet person, Mr. Spurgeon was right. Some of you are looking at me so strange, I don't know what's going to happen when I leave Believers Chapel. I believe you're just going to ride off into error if you don't get this kind of attitude of observing what's truth and what's error. It's important that you be able to distinguish the truth from error. The perception of the word of God,

discernment is extremely important, trying to develop your senses of discernment so you can sense what is wrong.

Now Peter goes on to say, “Yea, I think it fitting, as long as I am in this tabernacle.” Incidentally, isn’t that a beautiful expression for the human body? A tabernacle, that’s a very temporary kind of dwelling. We don’t build tabernacles. This word means a tent, incidentally, it doesn’t mean the kind of tabernacle that we call tabernacle, a building without much furniture in it. This was a tent. That’s what he spoke of his body as being, a tent. And that’s a beautiful description of the body because tent is something that you fold up and move constantly. And it doesn’t have a great deal of stability. Well that’s what we have. We have a tent. I rather like that expression and the older I get the better I like it. And I like this about it, too, that Peter knew that he was going to die and he knew that he was going to die in a certain way. That’s evident from John chapter 21, verses 18 and 19, and he knows he’s going to die and he thinks of it and expresses it as putting aside, “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 tent, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me.” Beautiful attitude toward death and a beautiful description of what it is to die. “Lay aside the tabernacle in order,” as Paul tells us, “that we might have a building from God, eternal in the heavens.” That’s the resurrection body that we’re going to have.

Seneca said, “Christians and idiots do not fear death, why cannot reason attain to the same assurance that folly has?” Well if Seneca had been a Christian and if he knew what hope was he wouldn’t have made a stupid statement like that, “Christians and idiots do not fear death.” Idiots because they don’t understand anything, of course, and Christians because they know that death is not something that will gain the ultimate victory over them because they have conquered death in Jesus Christ.

I read something that was very humorous. I have a little book which I bought a year or two ago and it’s entitled *To Die with Style*. Now you know why I bought that, because I was getting near sixty years of age [Laughter]. I began to think seriously about this. I face this someday, you don’t of

course, but I do. I bought this book and I read a story in it that was so interesting and this chapter was entitled “Dying Humorously,” I think [Laughter]. I hope I have the grace to die with a little bit of humor. Well this man, Dr. Samuel Upham died with humor. He was from a theological seminary, incidentally, and as he laid dying upon his bed his friends and relatives gathered about the bed and the question arose whether he was still living or not. He had his eyes closed, appeared as if he had died, and someone said, “Feel his feet, no one ever died with warm feet.” [Laughter] And Dr. Upham opened an eye at that point and said, “John Haas did.” [Laughter] And those were his last words [Laughter]. That’s one of the six lifestyles of dying in that book, dying humorously.

The author goes on to say, “This story suggests several things about the humorous lifestyle. There is the wonderful play on words, ‘Feel his feet, no one ever died with warm feet.’” Of course not, most of us get cold feet figuratively as well as literally when we approach our death. No pun intended, perhaps, but there is for us to enjoy. Then for dear Dr. Samuel Upham there is the satisfaction of the joke itself, what a marvelous gift as he was dying, one of his friends without realizing it played straight man for that final punch-line [Laughter].

Well I imagine that’s a little too whirly for you people in the audience to enjoy but I must confess I rather enjoyed that. I don’t really think that’s what Peter is speaking about. He’s talking about this matter of death very seriously. And he’s saying, “The Lord Jesus has told me I’m going to die and I’m going to put aside my tabernacle very shortly, but I have something very important to say to you before I do die and it is that you keep the things that you have been taught in memory.” Now the dying utterances of men are extremely important and the things that they say before they die are as important as the nearness of that death exists. And so it’s evident that Peter thought this was extremely important. That is, that they should have these things in remembrance.

Well having said that he wants them to remember the truth and realize it in their lives he turns to the dependability of the apostolic witness. Why should I remember the truth? Why should I make all of this truth that I have come to hear a part of my being so that it is really something that I know and realize in my experience? Why, because it’s reliable. It has been authenticated by the

transfiguration. It is grounded in history. Notice what he says in 16, 17, and 18, “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.” In other words, when we preach to you the coming kingdom of the Lord Jesus, that he was going to come at his Second Advent and institute a messianic kingdom over the face of the earth and at that time the promises made to Israel, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to David, and to Jeremiah and the new covenant, those promises are going to be fulfilled. We were not following cunningly devised fables, we were telling you things that are true because we were eyewitnesses of his majesty on the mount of transfiguration.

“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.”

This is a most interesting experience and in order to understand the full force of Peter’s statement here in 2 Peter we need to understand what the transfiguration signified. Remember, the Lord Jesus took Peter, James, and John and with him went up into a high mountain and there he went off by himself and he began to pray. Now I think I know what he was praying because in the preceding context he had announced the fact that he was going to Jerusalem to suffer and to die and to be raised again from the dead.

Now it seems evident, and clearly evident, that he must therefore have been praying about his death that he was going to accomplish. Because, you see, when a few hours later, a few days later, he goes into the garden at Gethsemane and he phases this death, again he gets down upon his knees, finally falls upon his face, and cries out, “O my God, if it be possible let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” And again, the cup is a reference to Calvary. And finally on Calvary itself he cries out, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”

The Lord Jesus feared death, if we may use that term with reference to him, simply because he was bearing the curse for sin. Peter did not bear any curse for sin and so he could look at death in an entirely different way. But it seems that on the mount of transfiguration, having announced that he was going to suffer and die he begins his initial praying that reaches its climax in Gethsemane and Calvary about the necessity of the suffering and the shedding of the blood on Calvary.

And so as he is praying to God, the transfiguration occurs. What is that? Why, that's the Father's answer to the Son's prayer. The answer is this, there is no avoiding of the crucifixion. Rather beyond the crucifixion, the kingdom. And in the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus described as, his face shown, “His garments became white and glistening,” magnificent appearance, the apostles were given a picture of the coming messianic kingdom and how our Lord would look in it. And Moses and Elijah were with him in the mount, representatives of the law and the prophets, for they all speak of that great kingdom that is to come.

Now the proof that that is a reference to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus and the Father's answer is there is no avoiding the cross, you must face the cross, but a kingdom lies beyond it is the statement that precedes the transfiguration in which we read, “There are some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” And the some who had special privileges that they all did not were Peter, James, and John. And when they went up into the mount with the Lord Jesus and saw him transfigured they received a foreview of the kingdom of God upon the earth. They saw the Lord Jesus in his kingdom. So, you see, that was an anticipation of the kingdom. That's what Peter is talking about when he says in verse 16,

“We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came that voice to him. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.”

So you see, Peter is saying, “We have already seen his kingdom. We are not following fables, we’re not even interpreting words from the Old Testament, merely, but we are telling you what the Old Testament says and what we have seen.” Now then, if that’s true, if it is true that they have seen the fulfillment of these great promises concerning the kingdom then how much more important is it that we give heed to the word of God? That’s why, you see, he says or speaks of the dependability of the apostolic witness. What we are telling you is reliable because we have seen the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom. That’s a great incident in our Lord’s life, great incident. And you’ll notice that the indicative of the picture of the kingdom is followed by the imperative of the necessity to obey the word of God. And that follows in the third division here in which Peter speaks of the dependability of the prophetic witness, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy.” Literally rendered in the Greek text which reads this way, “And we have the prophetic word made more sure.”

Now why is the prophetic word made more sure? One would think, “How can you make the word of God surer?” Well in one sense, of course, you cannot. The word of God is true, it’s faithful, it will be fulfilled. He’s talking about it from the human standpoint again just as he said in the preceding passage, “Give heed to make your calling and election sure,” looking at election from the standpoint of the human being involved. So here he says, “We have the word of prophecy, or the prophetic word made more sure in the sense that we had read of these prophecies of the kingdom and we had believed these prophecies of the kingdom but now we have actually seen the kingdom. We’ve been given a foreview of it and therefore we have in the word of God now something that is not only word but confirmed by the experience on the mount of transfiguration. In other words, faith is now accompanied now by sight and the prophetic word has been made more sure.

The divine revelation has certified the promise of the messianic kingdom, in other words. Now we look at the certainty of this word, verse 19, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy;

under which ye do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your heart.”

The false teachers had evidently encouraged neglect and misuse of the word of God. And Peter is attempting to bring his readers back to the promises of the word of God. I do not think that we have any stronger words anywhere than here in these verses regarding the necessity of paying attention to the word of God, “You do well to take heed to this prophetic word.” Now I know you’d pay a lot more attention to this if the Apostle Peter were here himself. But that is what he is saying, that we do well to take heed to it.

Now what does that mean to take heed to the prophetic word? Why it means to study it, of course. It means to hide it away in your heart so that you know it. It means to put it into application in your life. It means to feed upon it. It means to make it your daily food. It means to spend at least as much time with the word of God as you do with the *Dallas Morning News*. It also means that if you do this you’ll find it the most interesting thing, really, that you’ve ever done in all of your life. It means that your family life should be regulated as much as possible by the importance of Holy Scripture. And that your children should in your prayers be the objects of prayer that they may grow spiritually. And furthermore, I think all of you ought to pray if you have any men in your family, little men, that they become preachers and theologians. Maybe I better change that around, theologians and preachers [Laughter].

A few weeks ago, well really I take it back, it’s almost nine months ago now, I received a letter from a friend of mine, a former student of mine. And he is now in Tunisia as a missionary and he told me in the letter of the birth of his first child, a boy, and he named that boy Samuel Lewis Cooper. Isn’t that a beautiful name? [Laughter] At least the first two names, Samuel Lewis Cooper. And incidentally, I am so proud of this, you’ll pardon me, that’s the third child I’ve had named after me. And strikingly enough all three of them were named after me with the hope that they might be preachers. My daughter named her son, my only grandson, my only one [Laughter] -- do you hear Sam and Grace? -- [Laughter] my only grandson is named David Lewis. And Gracie told me, “I

hope, I’m praying, he’ll become a preacher.” I can remember her growing up as a teenager, “One thing I’ll never do, I’ll never marry a preacher.” Constantly she said that. Now she has a little boy and she says, “I’m praying the he’ll become a preacher.”

And then I have another little namesake in the Sunday school here, and I hesitate to mention his name because he’s been known to cut up a little bit at the Sunday school classes [Laughter]. But his father named him after me with the express hope that he might become a preacher and a theologian. Now Richard Cooper who named this boy after me wrote me and this is so funny because Richard is very serious about this and he has a little wife, she’s a very lovely person, I’ve known her family for many years, they’re from Charleston, South Carolina, she’s a very sweet, loving person. And he wrote this letter, “I shall train him to be a theologian. And I have already given instructions.” Notice that, “I have already given instructions.” What is that kind of language is that? “I have already,” he’s only been married two or three years, you understand, “I have already given instructions that he be trained in Greek, Hebrew, and doctrine should something happen to me and prevent me from schooling him myself. I shall see to it that he receives a thorough biblical training. I now pray that God will give the boy a deep conviction of sin, a new heart, and an unquenchable desire to serve Christ at all costs.” Well aside from the humor of it that really is a beautiful expression of desire on the part of a father for a child, first child.

Now finally, Peter comes in the last two verses here to what is really the most important thing of our study tonight. And here he speaks of the divine origin of the prophetic word. He said, “You ought to give heed to the prophetic word for the simple reason that it is true and we have seen it fulfilled in history on the mount of transfiguration. We know it’s reliable.” But furthermore he said, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.”

Now we must stop at this point because this passage has been misunderstood. It has been interpreted in three different ways. Let me give you these three different interpretations. It has been interpreted as meaning no Scripture may be interpreted by personal whim. Now you can see that that interpretation is based upon this rendering of the Authorized Version. “No prophecy of

Scripture is of any private interpretation.” In other words, “No Scripture may be interpreted by personal whim.” This word occurs one hundred and fourteen times the word translated private in the New Testament. This is the only time it’s rendered private. So it’s unlikely that that’s the correct rendering.

But what is made of this interpretation is something like this, “No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, we should not interpret the Bible by our personal whims, but we should listen to the voice of the Spirit and we should listen to the church,” and particularly the church. The Roman Catholic church lays a great deal of stress upon this because on the basis of this text, primarily, they say it is wrong to attempt to interpret the Bible on your own, what you should do is listen to the authorities, the fathers of the church. No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. We cannot interpret by personal whim.

I am sure that most of you in this room, of course, realizes that that interpretation goes contrary to many of the other passages of the New Testament. This is a relinquishing of our responsibility before God to have the church interpret the word for us.

Reminds me of a story of Andrey Vyshinsky who was the Russian foreign minister at one time. He was walking down the Champs-Elysees in Paris, France. Bright sunshiny day, he had an umbrella over his head. Someone said, “Mr. Vyshinsky, why have you got your umbrella up?” He says, “Radio Moscow says it’s raining.” [Laughter] And those who allow someone else to interpret the Bible for them are not acting a whole lot differently from just that. We are to interpret the Bible for ourselves. We should listen to the teachers of the word of God, of course, but in the final analysis we do have the Holy Spirit and we are to study the Scriptures ourselves. This interpretation is not true to the context. It’s not true to the force of this verse which really should be rendered something like this, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture comes from ones or its own interpretation.” The word private is not really in the text.

The second interpretation that has been suggested is that no Scripture may be interpreted in isolation from other Scripture. You’ll find that interpretation in the Scofield Bible. I haven’t read the

new Scofield note on that so that may have been changed. But in the old edition that was the interpretation placed upon it. No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, we should compare Scripture with Scripture.

Now there is contained in that a very important biblical principle, this is why people go astray. They take some text out of its context, read it absolutely without reading the other things that the author and the other biblical authors have said in other contexts and they come to a false interpretation. Let me give you one illustration. There are people who read the texts concerning prayer this way. They’ll read the text, “The Lord Jesus said, If you ask anything in my name I will do it.” I had a friend in California, a very godly man. I admire this man very much. He’s a very intelligent man. He was a banker, vice president of a large bank in Southern California, avid student of Scripture. But he had never been trained in the kinds of classes that you are being trained in right here in Believers Chapel. And he certainly had not been to a Bible institute or a seminary. He did not know those rules of interpretation too well. He spoke to me about that verse once in California and he said, “You know, that verse is a very important verse.” And I just fell right into the trap, I said, “It certainly is, it’s very important.” He said, “It’s so important that I rarely ever use that particular verse in my prayer life, ‘If you ask anything in my name I will do it.’” He said, “That’s such a solemn promise, such an absolute promise, that I think very carefully before I ever pray for something specifically in the name of the Lord Jesus because God doesn’t.”

He was very serious about this. Now the fact that he was Prussian doesn’t have anything to do with the way he interpreted the Scripture. I’m not positive about that however. But anyway, I said to him, “Fritz, you are [Laughter],” -- that was his name [Laughter]. You’d laugh even louder if I gave you the last name [Laughter]. I said, “Fritz, you are interpreting that passage without comparison with another passage, that’s very important. This is the confidence we have in him that if we ask anything according to his will he heareth us. Now you are taking that promise over in John and you are not comparing it with the promise in 1st John.” The promise is that if we ask anything according to his will. True, it says over there, ‘If you ask anything in my name I will do it,’ but in the

Scriptures we are to understand these things in the light of the total revelation. We should compare Scripture with Scripture. That’s what the reformers were speaking about when they spoke about the analogy of faith, comparing Scripture. So when we pray we should never say, “Lord, do this,” and he won’t do it either, he’s going to do his will. We should buttress our prayers, guard our prayers by the expression, “If it is your will.”

Now this is a biblical principle then, that no Scripture should be interpreted in isolation from other Scripture. To put it very simply it is *Scripturam ex Scriptura explicandam esse*, remember? Scripture is to be explained by Scripture. But now, is that what Peter is speaking about? I think not. The context, again, doesn’t have anything to do with comparing Scripture with Scripture. That doesn’t have anything to do with why we should give heed to the word of God, because we ought to compare Scripture with Scripture.

Furthermore, the word “is” is a word in the Greek that means springs from or comes from rather than simply “is”. So this interpretation, while it expresses a truth, is probably not what Peter is speaking about. There is a third interpretation which the majority of the interpreters now follow.

That is, that no Scripture arises from the prophet’s own interpretation. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture springs from its own interpretation. In other words, the prophets did not arbitrarily unravel what they wrote. If this is what it means, then the prophet is speaking about the origination of Scripture, not the interpretation of Scripture. No prophecy of Scripture springs from its own interpretation. That is, it does not arise out of the prophet.

Years ago I visited Dr. Barnhouse’s church in Philadelphia on a Sunday. He didn’t know I was in the audience, I came in, I wanted to see how he preached when I wasn’t there. And so I went in and I sat down and he was reading the Scripture. He had a habit that I used to have in reading Scripture. When you have an hour on Sunday morning instead of just forty minutes you can do this, take ten or fifteen minutes to read the passage in Scripture. They read through the text of Scripture, chapter after chapter, in that church through the years and he would give a little running exposition

of it as he read it. That was the Scripture reading. It was really a reading of the text with explanation and comment. Then later in the service he preached for forty-five minutes.

Well this morning he was reading this passage and when he came to this verse I was interested very much in what he was going to say about it because I had been teaching the exegesis of Greek text of 2 Peter at the seminary for some time and I'd come to this interpretation and I wondered what he was going to say. And when he came to it he said, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.” He said, “That means this, that Moses did not say, ‘I will write a book.’ In other words, the book was given to him by God. No prophecy of Scripture comes from its own interpretation, or its own unfolding. The prophets did not originate it, it came from God.” Now then, the context suits this beautifully because the preceding verse says, “We ought to give heed to the word of God.” Why? Because it doesn't come from the prophets. And then verse 20 says it comes from God. That's why we ought to give heed to it.

So what we have, then, here is a statement of the origination of Scripture, its divine origination. That's why we ought to give heed to the word of God. Calvin said, “They did not blab their inventions of their own accord or according to their own judgments.” He's saying much the same thing.

Now I want to close with a few comments concerning the Bible because that's the thing with which I introduced the message. You can see from this that Peter believes that the prophetic word is reliable and furthermore, it is something we ought to give heed to because it is a divine word.

As he concludes, “The prophecy came not at any time by the will of man.” No man like Moses said as he looked out on the human scene and attempted to interpret it, “Oh I think there has come to me an unusual understanding of matters, I'm going to write a book and I'll call it Genesis.” And when he finished that he said, “I'll write another book and I'll call it Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy.” He did not do that. The prophets, the Old Testament writers, all the writers of Scripture are moved by God. That's why we ought to give heed to the word of God. It's not a human book, it's a divine book.

There's a three pronged attack on the Bible today. There is the Barthian attack. The Bible is not really the inerrant word of God. It's not a word of God without error. In fact, the Bible is only authoritative when it finds me. In other words, if its truth comes home to me with real significance then it's authoritative. If it doesn't it's not authoritative.

Some of you have heard of George Buttrick. He is the general editor of the multivolume Interpreter's Bible, one of the leading religious leaders of the United States for many years. Dr. Buttrick is an eighty-three years old, eighty-four now, United Presbyterian clergyman. He was pastor of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, he has been in many of the most important positions in the religious world in the last thirty or forty years. Dr. Buttrick spoke last year in a Southern Baptist seminary and these are some of the things that he said, “Biblical literalism accuses God of using men as tape recorders; a notion that dishonors God and destroys men. Literalism barter inspirations from mechanics.” Illustrating problems involved with a literalist approach to the Bible he asked, “Which of the three thousand manuscripts shall we call infallible?” Incidentally, there are far more than three thousand manuscripts. “And which translation does the sky rest on a pillar or set on a flat earth, the literalist squirms and dodges then he ends in blind assertion. Nothing could be more ignorant than that attack on the infallibility and inerrancy of the word of God.” It's amazing and yet this was reported in North Texas Methodist paper with no comments or no criticisms at all. And incidentally, in this book, in this article, he says, “The fundamentalist really has some kind of truth he's trying to say, and what he's trying to say is the book is scientifically inerrant. He's trying to say that but he's wrong. But what he's really trying to say is that God finds me in this book.” And what's so interesting about that is Dr. Buttrick thinks that's a very modern expression, but Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a hundred years ago, spoke about the Bible as being true when it finds me, the very same thing that our new orthodox friends have been using over the past generation. That's one attack on the bible.

Then there is attack by those who claim to be believers such as Dewey Beegle. Mr. Beegle says, “The Bible is authoritative when it speaks of faith and practice. But when it doesn't speak of

faith and practice then it's not infallible.” He doesn't tell us, of course, of how we can distinguish those parts of the Bible that are infallible from those that are not infallible.

And then there are in evangelicalism attacks being made along these lines, the Bible when it contains revelational material is inerrant, but when it speaks on matters that are not revelational -- such as history, archeology, science -- it's not inerrant. Now these are attacks that are being made on the Bible in the Christian church. Dr. Buttrick's type of attack is, of course, the most blatant. Then the orthodox attack is less blatant. Dr. Beegle's is probably in the orthodox. And then the latter is the least dangerous, but all are dangerous because any time the believing body of Christians begins to lose confidence in the Scripture then loss of confidence pervades the Christian life of the believers. And it's not long before they're not taking the word of God seriously.

Notice what Peter says in the last verse, his three pronged answer, I don't have time to do anything more than just say it, “For the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man: but holy men from God.” So the Bible is divinely originated, it is from God. Second, it is through human instrumentality, holy men from God. Men wrote the Bible. Their personalities affected the word of God. They were not tape recorders, they were prepared from the time they breathed their first breath and their heart beat its first beat in the womb of their mothers, they were prepared by the Holy Spirit for what they were to do. But they were human instrumentalities.

And finally he says, “Holy men from God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” Through the direct agency of the Holy Spirit, the word of God has come to us. Incidentally, to be born along is to be carried by someone else's power. And when you are carried by someone else's power, the ultimate determination of what takes place is not in the hands of you if you are the one being carried along. So what we are saying is that the Bible is an inerrant product. It does not have any errors in it because it comes from God, and God is a perfect, holy, righteous, inerrant God. So that inerrancy is an essential concomitant of inspiration, therefore the word of God is reliable. And we'd do well to give heed to its teaching.

May God enable us to give heed. Let's bow together in prayer.

“The Dependability of Prophecy in the Days of Heresy” by S. Lewis Johnson
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