

**PETER'S PRESENTATION OF THE
INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE IN**

2 PETER 1:16-21

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“This is the foundation of our faith, that this Book is divinely inspired. Suffer nobody to make you doubt concerning this matter; for you must give up Christianity itself if you give up the inspiration of this Book” (Spurgeon). If one were to wring out the passage of 2 Pet. 1:16-21 like a wet sponge, what would pour out from this letter is Peter’s presentation of inspiration. Peter makes a defense for the faith by highlighting two key concepts when it comes to revelation and authority: the testimony and trustworthiness of the apostolic witness (v.16-18) and the divine origin of Scripture (19-21). Before dissecting our passage it will be helpful to outline the chapter as a whole in order to understand the context more robustly.

In the verses leading up to our passage, Peter tells us about the abundant resources and gifts we have been given in Christ (v. 1-4). Verses 5-9 could be summed up as growing in knowledge and faith in Christ, and the believer’s need to grow in spiritual maturity. He gives us eight qualities to develop alongside each other: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love (v.5-7). The following two verses refer to the adequacy of what Peter has just outlined for the believer in v. 5-9, “...if you practice these qualities you will never fall” (v.10). Verses 12-15 Peter returns to “these qualities” emphasizing the importance of the holiness of the believer as well as his angst in writing this epistle. This can be felt in statements such as, “I intend *always* to remind you of these qualities... (v. 12), “I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to *stir you up* by way of reminder (v.13), and “...I will *make every effort* so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things (v.15).” Peter knew he was going to die soon (12-15) and was taking steps to ensure we would be reminded who we are, what we must do, and our future hope. Then the Biblical author moves to establish what the foundation of our Christian faith is based upon and our passage for consideration here (2 Pet. 1:16-21).

The Testimony and Trustworthiness of the Apostolic Witness (v.16-18)

Peter says, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (v.16). What is taking place in this verse is a transition, in light of preceding verses, to the beginning of Peter’s defense of the faith (against false teachers which continues throughout the rest of the letter, Constable, p. 22). The apostles were either telling the truth, or they were making up everything they saw. These are the only two options with an eyewitness account. Fabrication or truth. What Peter is claiming here is that what he saw was neither fiction nor fantasy, but reality and truth. This is not the only place in scripture where an eyewitness claim is made. Consider 1 John 1:1 and Acts 10:41:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.” (1 Jn. 1:1)

“He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen--by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” (Acts 10:41).

Charles Spurgeon commented on this verse preaching that, “The truths taught us in God’s Word are not fables, myths, or merely parables, but they are matters of actual fact. The apostles were eye-witnesses of ‘the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ’-‘eyewitnesses of his majesty.’” What Peter is claiming is that what the apostles have made known about God, is only what had been revealed to them through Jesus Christ. This speaks to special revelation and inspiration.

Matthew Henry adds,

“...it was he (God) that invented this way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ, whose power and coming are set forth in the gospel, and the apostle’s preaching was a making of these things known.”

Perhaps knowing the mere claim to have been an eyewitness, though powerful, would be insufficient for some. Like a good teacher, Peter provides an example. What better illustration than, “The Mount of Transfiguration.”

“For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain” (2 Pet. 1:17-18). Here Peter is referring to the events that transpired on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-9; Mk. 9:2-9; Lk. 9:28-36). Dr. Constable of Dallas Theological Seminary adds that, “This is the only explicit mention of the Transfiguration outside the Synoptic Gospels” (p.22). This would make sense if Peter, James, and John (the three apostles to witness the event) had actually seen what they saw and heeded the advice of Jesus when he said these words after the experience occurred, “...‘Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead’” (Mt. 17:9).

Peter picked this event to demonstrate a couple of things. First and foremost, Peter picked this illustration because it depicts Jesus’ power, glory, and honor. In the gospel of Luke it is written in regards to Jesus, “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him” (17:2-3). Perhaps for Peter, what happened was too wonderful to not be true. Constable adds to the discussion,

“The apostles' message was essentially that Jesus was the Christ (i.e., God's promised Messiah; cf. 1 John 5:1). God had revealed this clearly at Jesus' transfiguration, when He had announced that Jesus was His "beloved Son" (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). Peter referred to that event to establish the credibility of his witness and that of the other apostles. The terms "honor," "glory," "Majestic Glory," and "holy mountain" all enhance the special event that was the Transfiguration.” (p. 23)

Peter uses this example as well to show us that he wasn’t the only one that saw this event. In Jewish law there had to be two or three eyewitnesses for something to be legitimate or to have backing for a case (Dt. 19:15). Peter is saying essentially, “I wasn’t alone and I saw Jesus glorified and heard the voice of God the father (Majestic Glory) revealed to me, John, and James.” That is, who Jesus was, the son of God. How amazing it must have been to see this picture of Moses (associated with the law), Elijah (the prophets), and Jesus (the New Covenant, final revelation).

So we're back to our prior predicament. Either Peter is telling the truth or he is a liar. The apostles are the only people in history to have ever seen Jesus physically and to have lived under both the Old and New Covenants, through the course of their lives. They lived without the Holy Spirit, and with him. Peter is attempting to get his readers to realize that the basis of the Christian faith rest in part on the testimony of the apostles, which Jesus knew would be the case,

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me *through their message*, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn. 17:20-21).

Jesus knew that through the apostles' teachings many would come to faith. Peter is seeking to establish authority and authenticity. He has seen Jesus, heard the voice of God, and has been commissioned to make disciples, teaching everything that Jesus commanded (Mt. 28:18).

The Divine Origin of Scripture (v.19-21)

Verse nineteen reads, “And we have the prophetic word *more fully confirmed*, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts...” (My italics added) Within our English translations of this particular verse, there are some different renderings, especially within the first statement of the verse. For example the above quotation is from the ESV while the NIV reads, “We also have the prophetic message as *something completely reliable*...” the NASB speaks, “So we have the prophetic word *made more sure*...” the KJV, “We have also *a more sure word of prophecy*...” Peter has already established that he and others had physically seen and heard and touched Jesus. The “And” here is a conclusion that Peter drew (Constable, p.23). It is also another example to add to the authority of what the apostles are teaching. Peter is saying in all of these various renderings essentially this: if you don't believe an eyewitness account, look at the prophecies which are in harmony with what I'm saying; I have seen on the mount regarding who Christ is. Albert Barnes is helpful here,

“... the evidence of the prophecies, embracing many points in the same general subject, and extending through a long series of years, would be more satisfactory than any single miracle... The general meaning is, that the fact that he had come as the Messiah was disclosed in the mount by such a manifestation of his glory, and of what he would be, that they who saw it could not doubt it; the same thing the apostle says was more fully shown also in the prophecies, and these prophecies demanded their close and prolonged attention.”

The prophecies are made more sure, because of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Peter is making the appeal that he himself and the apostles are not making up these stories, but what they are sharing is simply what has been revealed to them by God himself in the miraculous, and through the prophecies of the Old Testament. In both cases Peter is crediting the origin of these truths to God as divine orchestrator. What they saw and heard on the mount Peter connected with the fulfillment of OT prophecies in Christ. Spurgeon said of this verse,

“...Surer than the light he saw, which dazzled him; surer than the voice he heard, which he never failed to remember, and to which he ever bore unfaltering witness; surer even than these things is that divine Book which is still preserved to us.”

The latter part of the verse speaks of paying attention to this prophecy because it is as light in a dark place, a dark heart, as prophecy always has been. Dr. Constable adds that the phrase, “You [will] do well’ was a common way of saying “please” (p.24). One can feel the heart of the author here. He longs for his people to cling to these truths until the consummation of all things, because false teachers were perverting them. Again Constable is helpful in summing up our brief look at verse 19 here,

“The morning star in the physical world is the star (actually a planet, usually Venus) that appears late at night, just before dawn, and announces the arrival of a new day. Just so, Jesus Christ's return at the Rapture will signal the beginning of a new day, the day of the Lord.... The truth that Christ is coming again must first arise in their hearts, like the morning star (Rev. 22:16), giving inner assurance that that day is coming. Assured of His impending return, they will be alert to detect the gleams of dawn breaking through the darkness.” (p.24).

In verses 20-21 Peter makes a massively important statement about God’s self-revelation and tells us why scripture can be trusted as ultimate authority. And this is due to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit working through man. 2 Pet. 1:20-21 reads, “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of

man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Inspiration is the coherent work between the Holy Spirit and a human author in which the Holy Spirit so moved the human author that God got exactly what he wanted without destroying the personality or experiences of that human author. John Calvin said once of this idea, “...the prophets did not blab their inventions of their own accord or according to their own judgments.” This is also not the only place we find this idea in scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-7; 1 Corinthians 2:13). These verses speak of Scripture being “All...breathed out by God” (2Tim.) and “words not taught by human wisdom” (1 Cor.). What is Peter then saying Scripture is? Peter is claiming that Scripture is the very word of the living God. And he is also saying that God uses humans to communicate his words to man. Hiebert agrees stating that, “Peter's statement recognizes both the divine and the human element in the production of Scripture” (p. 166). Ultimately Scripture is what the human authors decided of their own accord to write, but what God moved them to write. Constable and Hiebert shed light here as well,

“The prophets did not simply give their ‘own’ views (“interpretation”) of how things were, or would be (v. 20). They ‘spoke’ as God's mouthpieces, articulating His thoughts in words that accurately represented those thoughts. The Holy Spirit ‘moved’ the prophets to do so, just as the wind moves a sailboat (cf. John 3:8). The same Greek verb (phero) occurs in Acts 27:15 and 17 to describe that action.” (Constable, p. 25)

“The Spirit, not human volition, is the originating power in prophecy.” (Hiebert, p. 166).

Scripture is then ontologically, in its very nature or essence, inspired. However, inspiration does not take away the necessity or need of interpretation. Nor does it mean that Scripture can only be interpreted by an ecclesial or authorized interpreter. Hiebert speaks to this fallacy, “Peter is not here warning against personal interpretation of prophecy as the Roman Catholics say, but against the folly of upstart prophets with no impulse from God” (p.81-82). Constable adds, “In this section (vv. 12-21), Peter reminded his readers that they had adequate resources for their own spiritual growth in the apostles' teachings and in the Old Testament” (p.27). I would take this further though and say far more than “adequate”, these teachings, these Holy Scriptures were and are life giving, true, and trustworthy.

As a result of inspiration, God can be encountered in Scripture, and Scripture may be applied to current circumstance. This is of massive importance, because the Bible is the predominate way in which God has chosen to reveal himself to man. We know God primarily, because he has revealed himself to us in Scripture. And to know God is to have eternal life as Jesus said in John 17:3, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” Inspiration harnesses the interpreter, and God’s people to Scripture as the very words of the living God. May our view of Scripture be as Paul to Timothy, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

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