

**LESSON 8: OUR RELIABLE FAITH****INTRODUCTION**

Key Words:

- **Bibliology** — the doctrine or study of the Bible
- **Sola Scriptura** — the battle cry of the Reformation, meaning, "Scripture only"
- **Revelation** — God's communication to man, both generally (in nature) and specially (in Scripture)
- **Inspiration** — the influence of the Holy Spirit on the writers of Scripture, whereby they set forth without error or omission the communication that God gave them
- **Inerrancy** — the teaching that God's Word is without error
- **Infallibility** — synonymous with inerrancy, but used by liberal scholars today to sound orthodox while cloaking their belief that the Bible is reliable only in matters of "faith and practice"
- **Authority** — indicates the understanding that the Bible alone must be the primary principle of Bible study and final rule for faith and practice
- **Authenticity** — the teaching that all the books of the Bible are written by their professed authors
- **Canon** — the term meaning "rule" or "standard" used to describe "those books which have been measured, found satisfactory, and approved as inspired by God"

The past many centuries have been filled with attacks on the authority and veracity of Scripture. Nevertheless, God had appointed men throughout these darkened years to witness powerfully to the truth and authority of His Word. Francis Turretin (1623–1687), Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), Charles Hodge (1797–1878), Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921), and J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937) are just a few of these godly and scholarly men. These men defended and pushed forward the view of Scripture recovered by the Reformers—the view that God's Word was totally supreme and sufficient.

*The Reformers believed Scripture to be God's Word written. It was trusted, not doubted. It was studied, not ignored. It was taken as the final authority with regard to those matters on which it spoke or made affirmations. God had not revealed everything. The Bible did not expressly contain all the truth that could be known. But what the Bible did teach was believed to be completely trustworthy. Truth in any other area would not contradict biblical truth. Starting from Scripture, one could find the true knowledge of reality.<sup>2</sup>*

Our passage is one of the clearest biblical passages that deals extensively with Bibliology—the doctrine of the Bible (cf. also 2 Timothy 3:16-17). 2 Peter 1:16-21 is a foundational text in which God Himself attests to the reliability of His Word (cf. Matthew 5:18; 24:35). This text is simply an echo of many Old Testament passages.

*The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. (Psalm 19:7-9)*

*For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater: so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)*

*The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the Word of our God shall stand for ever. (Isaiah 40:8)*

*For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven. (Psalm 119:89)*

While it admittedly sounds a bit circular in its reasoning to defend Scripture with Scripture, we insist that it is rather a faith-filled commitment to a sure starting point. Everyone has a starting point as one seeks to make sense of this world; because no human is omniscient, everyone must start somewhere, and every starting point is going to have to be accepted by faith because we only know and experience so much. It is our firm belief that God, in His grace, has given to man a reliable starting point in His Word. Unlike any other philosophical system, God's Word not only never contradicts itself in its worldview, but also always provides meaningful and satisfactory answers to life's questions (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

For the believer, this starting point also reveals his necessity to depend upon God and not Himself for direction. God's Word is indeed reasonable, but it must ultimately be accepted through humble faith (not only at the beginning, but also throughout its study). Therefore, an individual is confronted by his own limits when He chooses to accept God's Word as his starting point. It is when we have questions that we are given the opportunity to again wait upon God, search His Word, and allow His Spirit to do through its pages that authenticating work that no human can do.

Therefore, in evangelism, while the inquirer may indeed be hung up by questions about the Bible's authenticity and reliability, only God through His Word can ultimately convince the individual to claim this Book as His starting point. Therefore, God doesn't ask us to defend His Book (i.e., through the Holy Spirit, He's far more capable of doing that than we can) as much as He calls us to explain His Book and to defend from it why we have hope (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). That Bible-centered defense, complemented by a life lived under the lordship of Jesus Christ, will shame the opponents and adorn Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Peter 3:15-16; Titus 2:1-10).

So, if you're weak in apologetics, that's okay—man's need is not fundamentally intellectual, but spiritual. C. S. Lewis said that you defend God like you defend a lion—you unlock the cage and let the lion defend itself. Therefore, be strong in evangelism. Know the Bible so that you can use it to speak to people about Jesus, and allow that message itself to be what breaks down their hangups about the Bible (e.g., **Illustration**: Dr. Whitcomb's testimony). NOTE: This is where a planned Bible study, like *The Exchange* or *Christianity Explored*, is helpful, for it keeps the unbeliever immersed in God's Word and its gospel message of Jesus—the very tool that God can use to validate Himself to the individual.

Today, we're going to carefully consider this important passage, discovering in it the foundation for everything we learn about our precious and productive faith in verses 1-15. If this passage was not true, then verses 1-15 would be meaningless. On the contrary, this passage argues for its veracity, showing God's Word to be a reliable basis for our precious and productive faith.<sup>3</sup>

### THE RELIABLE BASIS OF OUR FAITH (vv. 16-19a, 20-21)

The passage contains a noticeable progression as it teaches us about the reliable basis of our faith.

#### 1. *Our faith is not based on fables (v. 16).*

Verse 16 literally read,

*For we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

*NOT by having adhered to cleverly concocted fables,*

*BUT by having become eyewitnesses of That One's grandeur.*

Peter wants his readers to be assured that when he taught them, it wasn't a scheming, manipulative con. He and the other apostles hadn't "followed" (lit. pursue, obey, accept as authoritative) after artfully and craftily created (Gk. *sophizo*) stories. These stories do indeed have a guise of wisdom, but not the wisdom that leads to salvation (cf. same word in 2 Timothy 3:15). Instead, such fables are intrinsically destructive (cf. 1 Timothy 1:4; 4:7; 2 Timothy 4:4; Titus 1:14). "Following" such fables leads to "following" perversion (cf. 2:2, 15).

History books are filled with men—religious and otherwise—who have written great tomes to delude and destroy men's lives (e.g., Hitler in *Mein Kampf*). Peter assures us that everything he's written about true faith finds its basis on solid ground. It's not a ploy; it's not a ruse; it's not based on the manipulative schemes of a man or council; it's not grounded on make-believe and sentimental stories. Fables are false and foolish, and they have no bearing on the foundation of our faith.

**Application:** Is your faith grounded on modern-day fables—speculations, rumors, gossip, Christian rhetoric, blog chatter, etc.? Are you more up to date regarding the most recent Christian scandal than you are with the next chapter in your Bible reading plan? Are you more into the most recent Facebook banter than you are into your personal Bible reading? What preoccupies your "spiritual conversations"—personal theology (e.g., "well I just think that..."), meaningless speculations, other peoples' issues, the most recent Christian controversy, the new hip Christian practice, etc.? Brothers and sisters, we must have a better, more reliable, more effective foundation to our faith than these things.

## **2. *Our faith is based on eyewitnesses (vv. 17-18).***

Against these fables, Peter states next that our faith rests on reality. Indeed, in part, he has been an eyewitness to such reality.

Peter and the other apostles had, at some time, taught these believers about Christ's second coming (i.e., "the power and coming [Gk. *parousia*] of our Lord Jesus Christ," v. 16). This had become a doubted topic among his readers, as is evidenced by his clear teaching on it in chapter 3. He assures them here, that, not only was he not making up fantastical, science-fiction sounding stories, but also he was simply telling them what he had seen firsthand (i.e., actual "science"—observable knowledge). When Peter was "with Him in the holy mount" (v. 18) of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-6 (the event that Peter alludes to here), Peter actually saw "the Son of man coming in His kingdom" (cf. Matthew 16:28) in full "majesty" (v. 16) and "honor and glory" (v. 17). Therefore, when he wrote and taught about it, he was sharing something that was observable, audible, and real.<sup>4</sup>

Now, this basis is obviously more trustworthy than #1, but eyewitnesses have been known to be incorrect. For example, two eyewitnesses can see the same accident, but rehearse the details in two different ways depending upon their perspective and attention to detail in their observation. So, while Peter's personal testimony is helpful, it's still not the most reliable basis for our faith.

Peter agrees. That's why in verse 19, he continues, "We have also a more sure Word of prophecy" (or lit., "But, we possess the prophetic Word as even more reliable").

## **3. *Our faith is based on God's revelation (vv. 19a, 20-21).***

While the interpretation of this first phrase in verse 19 is debated (i.e., "more sure" or "very sure"),<sup>5</sup> I believe that Peter is building upon what he just shared and even contrasting that with the far more reliable nature of God's testimony (i.e., "more sure"). While Peter is certainly not lying about what he saw, he understands that God's eyewitness account is indeed infallible. Therefore, since God's Word is this ultimate basis for our faith, our faith indeed has a reliable (or "sure") foundation.

The word for reliable was used back in verse 10 where we noted a legal connotation to it in its Hebrews 9:17 usage; it speaks of validity or confirmation. In the context, it is the Old Testament Scriptures (i.e., "the Word of prophecy") that Peter views as ultimately reliable and sure. The reason for his confidence is what he says about this "Word of prophecy" in verses 20-21. These two verses are grammatically dependent upon verse 19a, which lends support to our interpretation that Peter sees the credibility of God's Word as superceding the credibility of his own eyewitness report.

Consider what Peter says about the firm basis of God's revelation. Literally rendered, we could translate verse 19a and 20-21 this way:

*But we possess the prophetic Word as even more reliable...knowing this principally,  
that not any prophecy of Scripture comes about from one's own explanation,  
for no prophecy was ever conveyed by the will of man,  
but being conveyed by the Holy Spirit, men from God spoke.*

Peter is not talking about hermeneutics or Bible interpretation here. According to the context's emphasis on a "reliable" basis for our faith, Peter is still establishing God's Word as the reliable basis for our faith in verses 20-21. It would be premature shift for him to transition to issues of hermeneutics or Bible interpretation. Notice how he supports his assertion that God's revelation is reliable.

**a. *God's revelation is not from man's imagination.***

Echoing what he already said in verse 16, Peter highlights the non-human origin of God's Word. Our faith finds its basis on the reliable Word of God, who is not a man that He can lie (Numbers 23:19). While brilliant men can be creative, conniving, and convincing, the Bible is not the product of such a process. God abhors such a process (cf. Jeremiah 14:14; 23:16-25, 32; Ezekiel 13:2-3).

**b. *God's revelation is not from man's impulse.***

Neither was "God's Word" the false advertising label thrown upon a book that was initiated by men. It was not men's will, whims, wishes, or desires that produced the Bible. "What human beings might think or want has absolutely nothing to do with divine prophecy."<sup>6</sup> God was simply pleased to reveal Himself (Deuteronomy 29:29).

**c. *God's revelation is from God's Spirit.***

According to verses 20-21, men themselves did not "convey" (Gk. *phero*—KJV, "came") the divine Scriptures (v. 21a); the Holy Spirit "conveyed" (Gk. *phero*—"moved") His Word (v. 21b).<sup>7</sup> While verse 21 leaves a sense of mystery (e.g., how did He convey his message through men?), we at least are led to conclude that God Himself was in complete control of what was recorded in His divine Book—indeed, He breathed it out (2 Timothy 3:16). And this is good news, for "the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11), and He has now accurately and sufficiently revealed Himself to us in a book.

**Application:** 1 Corinthians 2:12-3:3 builds up to a climax of confusion—Paul, in essence, asks, "If you've received this precious Book with the accompanying indwelling of its Author, why is your life so Book-less?"

**Transition:** This very concern leads us to our second point from verse 19—our reasonable response to this reliable basis of our faith.

## THE REASONABLE RESPONSE TO OUR FAITH (v. 19)

Verse 19 shows how our reasonable response naturally springs from a reliable basis—in other words, because our faith is grounded on the trustworthy foundation of divine revelation, our reasonable response is to give ourselves to it (i.e., because it is “God-breathed,” it is therefore, “profitable” [2 Timothy 3:16-17]). “But we possess the prophetic Word as even more reliable, to which you do well by taking heed as to a lamp shining in a gloomy place until that day should dawn and the morning star should spring up in your hearts” (lit.). Let’s consider this reasonable response (i.e., “you do well”).

### 1. *What? We should follow its teaching...*

The word “take heed” (Gk. *prosecho*) is a strong term throughout the New Testament. Jesus’ use of it in Matthew can be exclusively translated “beware” (6:1; 7:15; 10:17; 16:6, 11, 12; cf. Luke 12:1; 20:46; Acts 5:35; 20:28), as He cautions people to be concerned and careful about self-righteous practices, false prophets, hateful men, and the leaven of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes. When used in regards to a message, it certainly means “to pay attention to” (NET, NASB, ESV, NIV), but intensifies it with the sense of “adhering to” (or “applying oneself to,” “occupying oneself with,” “devoting oneself to”). When Philip preached Christ in Samaria, the people had been enraptured by (“giving heed to”) Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:10-11); now, they begin to pay attention to (“give heed to”) Philip’s message (Acts 8:6). Their careful attention was more than just listening intently and observing diligently (vv. 6-7); it included the devoting of themselves to his message through belief and baptism (vv. 12-14). So, when Peter tells us to “pay attention to” God’s reliable Word, he speaks wholistically—he wants us to devote ourselves to this book (attention and action).

Lots of different messages vie for our devotion today, including fables (cf. the use of “taking heed” in 1 Timothy 1:4; 4:1; Titus 1:14), but the wise Christian whom God has already enabled to “take heed” to God’s Word in salvation (cf. Acts 16:14), will continue to “take heed” to it. In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul urges us to “take heed” or devote ourselves to God’s reliable Word corporately and publicly, through reading it, teaching it, and applying it. In fact, “paying attention to” is contrasted with “neglecting” in Hebrews 2:1-3, and the author there earnestly warns us against such neglect—Christians will “hold on to” God’s Word, and if a person “lets it slip,” it indicates that his hold on salvation is in question. No matter what you might say, your “devotion” to God’s Word (Hebrews 2:1) is a reflection of your “possession” of salvation (Hebrews 2:1) (cf. 2 Timothy 3:15). A Jesus-saved individual will be a Word-saturated individual.

**Application:** What are some tests by which we can examine our own “adherence to” God’s Word?

## 2. **How? As we would follow light in a gloomy place...**

You've undoubtedly been in a dark, gloomy, murky, foggy place before, where the slightest flicker of light immediately arrested your attention. You were naturally drawn towards the light, because we know that light is good; it offers safety and clarity in the midst of such gloom.

God's Word is good; it is light (Psalm 43:3; 119:105, 130; Proverbs 6:23; Philippians 2:15-16). As light, it is powerful, for darkness can never put out the light (John 1:5). As light, God's Word releases men from blindness and darkness, giving them clarity to see and know the saving Christ (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

And since we should be adding to our faith the excellence and knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 1:5), for that is the very substance of our faith (2 Peter 1:2), we are foolish to not "give heed" to our Bibles. In His wisdom and grace, we see now how this all fits together. Without the light of God's Word, there would be no precious faith (cf. Romans 10:17), there would be no standard of Christ for our faith's production (2 Corinthians 3:18), and there would be nothing powerful and transformational to repeat and remember (Psalm 119:99).

**Application:** What is your darkness right now? The gloom of sin, suffering, and confusion grip our world in many different ways. Have you been "blinded" (2 Peter 1:9) to your incredible position and potential in Christ, and therefore feel discouraged, discontented, and doubtful? There is one Light that breaks through the gloom and powerfully transforms the one who "takes heed" to it. Run to Jesus ("peace of Christ," Colossians 3:15), let His Word rule your life ("Word of Christ," Colossians 3:16), clothe yourself with the godly garments of His salvific victory (Colossians 3:12-14), and make His honor your highest priority ("giving thanks...through Him," Colossians 3:17). What light will shine through darkness then!

Create some case study scenarios in which a believer is succumbing to darkness. What rays of light in God's Word will help dispel that gloom and transform the soul?

## 3. **How long? Until it comes to completion.**

Never does a day go by in this dark world that you don't need Light. Returning to the theme of Jesus' coming (the central doctrine discussed in chapter 3), Peter tells us to adhere to God's reliable Word "until that day should dawn and the morning star should spring up in your hearts." In other words, "give heed" to the light of God's Word until a better and complete light comes (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:9-12).

That Peter uses these terms (i.e., "that day dawning" and "the morning star springing up") to describe Christ's coming is consistent with the rest of Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

*On the dawning of the day of the second coming see Romans 13:12 ["The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light"]. On the phōsphoros, 'the morning star'...in Christian writings, the Messiah is seen in the star symbolism of Numbers 24:17 ["There shall come a Star out of Jacob"]...and the rising Sun of righteousness of Malachi 4:2. In the*

*Benedictus, Christ is “the Day Star from on high” or “the Morning Sun from heaven” (Luke 1:78, av, neb); the primitive hymn enshrined in Ephesians 5:14 says that Christ will shine on you, and in Revelation 2:28; 22:16 He is called the “Morning Star.”<sup>9</sup>*

The phrase “in your hearts” doesn’t undermine Christ’s literal and visible coming; it complements it.<sup>10</sup> Yes, Christ will indeed return in full visible glory for all to see (Revelation 19:11-16; 20:11; 21:1; cf. 2 Peter 3:10-13), but His return will also transform believers completely “into perfect reflections of the truth and righteousness of Christ and make them into the image of His glory (Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:1-2). At His second coming, Christ will replace the perfect temporal revelation of Scripture with the perfect eternal revelation of His person. He will fulfill the written Word and write it forever on the hearts of the glorified saints.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, light will give way to greater light!

In the meantime, Christ aims to push forward our transformation now through the reliable and powerful light of His Word. Therefore, until His prophecy is completed and His work is climaxed, we “do well” (probably one of the greatest understatements in Scripture) to adhere to God’s Word.

**Application:** “Whatever the precise details, the main emphasis is manifest: we are on pilgrimage throughout our lives in this dark world. God has graciously provided us with a lamp, the Scriptures. If we pay attention to them for reproof, warning, guidance and encouragement we shall walk safely. If we neglect them, we shall be engulfed by darkness. The whole course of our lives ought to be governed by the Word of God.”<sup>12</sup>

How has this study of Bibliology from 2 Peter 1:16-21 affected your confidence in God’s Word?

How should this study affect your response to God’s Word?

## **CONCLUSION**

“If believers are going to stand [in the sufficiency of their true faith and] against the errors of false teachers, they must seek to know, accept, and obey the totality of Scripture, even as the apostle Paul did in testifying before the Roman governor Felix, ‘But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they [the Jews] call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing *everything* that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets’ (Acts 24:14, emphasis added).”<sup>13</sup>



## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The entire series is available at [singlefocusindy.org/2-peter](http://singlefocusindy.org/2-peter).

<sup>2</sup> L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, Chicago: Moody, 1980, 175, quoted in *ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>3</sup> If the basis for our faith is unreliable, then our faith is certainly not precious, its production is rather meaningless, and the remembering of it is vain.

<sup>4</sup> The effect of that incredible experience seems to linger in Peter's spirit, for in reverence here, he refers to Jesus Christ as "That One" in verse 16. Furthermore, "we heard" in verse 18 is literally, "we ourselves heard," further stressing Peter's assurance that he really witnessed these things firsthand.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the NET Bible note #60 on verse 19.

<sup>6</sup> MacArthur, 65.

<sup>7</sup> "Luke twice used this verb (Acts 27:15, 17) to describe how the wind blows a sailing ship across the waters. For Peter, it was as if the writers of Scripture raised their spiritual sails and allowed the Spirit to fill them with His powerful breath of revelation as they penned its divine words (cf. Luke 1:70). When Jeremiah said, 'The word of the Lord came to me saying' (Jer. 1:4), he spoke for all the Old Testament writers and, by extension, all the New Testament writers who followed them. The only one who knows the mind of God is the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:10-13; cf. John 15:26; Rom. 8:27; 11:34; cf. John 3:8), so only He could have inspired the Scripture" (*Ibid.*)

<sup>8</sup> "The reference to *the morning star* constitutes a double entendre. First, the term was normally used to refer to Venus. But the author of course has a metaphorical meaning in mind, as is obvious from the place where the morning star is to rise—"in your hearts." Most commentators see an allusion to Num 24:17 ('a star shall rise out of Jacob') in Peter's words. Early Christian exegesis saw in that passage a prophecy about Christ's coming. Hence, in this verse Peter tells his audience to heed the OT scriptures which predict the return of Christ, then alludes to one of the passages that does this very thing, all the while running the theme of light on a parallel track. In addition, it may be significant that Peter's choice of terms here is not the same as is found in the LXX. He has used a Hellenistic word that was sometimes used of emperors and deities, perhaps as a further polemic against the paganism of his day" (NET Bible note #64 on verse 19).

<sup>9</sup> Green, 109-10.

<sup>10</sup> "The phrase *in your hearts* is sometimes considered an inappropriate image for the *parousia*, since the coming of Christ will be visible to all. But Peter's point has to do with full comprehension of the revelation of Christ, something only believers will experience. Further, his use of light imagery is doing double-duty, suggesting two things at once (i.e., internal guidance to truth or illumination, and OT prophecy about Christ's return) and hence can not be expected to be consistent with every point he wishes to make" (NET Bible note #65 on verse 19).

<sup>11</sup> MacArthur, 64.

<sup>12</sup> Green, 111.

<sup>13</sup> MacArthur, 65-66.