

Dear Friends,

In our study passage for this week, Peter briefly mentioned his experience with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. But then he directs us to something which he refers to as "...a more sure word of prophecy." He didn't reject his mountain experience. However, he did teach us to look to something "More sure" than our own personal experiences, the inspired and preserved writings of our New Testament.

Peter didn't reject authentic personal Christian experiences as of no value. He rather assigned them a lower priority than Scripture. Most of us have had those conversations with sincere Christian people who openly trust and appeal more to their personal experience than to Scripture. If they sense a contradiction between their experience and Scripture, they readily reject Scripture and rely on their experience. Peter taught us the mirror opposite.

In my youth, I heard certain preachers who built a reputation for being "An experimental preacher." The correct word is "Experiential." They typically introduced their sermons with a passage of Scripture. Perhaps they spent a few brief minutes dealing with the text, but the majority of their time in the sermon was devoted to some unusual personal experience they had. They spent far more time talking about their experiences than about Scripture. On second thought, perhaps the title "Experimental" may be more suited for their preaching that I thought. Scripture never condemns some reference to personal experience in preaching if it makes a valid and edifying point to the congregation. Twice in all of Acts' reporting of Paul's preaching, only twice, we read of him including a brief description of his Damascus Road experience in his sermons. I'd have a higher respect for those preachers from my youth had they devoted the brief time they gave to their text to their experiences and the larger portion of time they gave to their experience to their text.

Peter's mountain experience was true. Jesus personally invited Peter and two other disciples to join Him on the mountain. But, even considering that real experience, Peter taught his readers to look to that "...more sure word of prophecy," not to their own personal experiences.

In our New Testament, we have everything we need for "...all good works." Let's immerse our minds and bathe our hearts and emotions in that pure water of inspired Scripture so that we think and breathe Scripture when faced with errant ideas and enticing words that cannot claim their source in those inspired Scriptures.

Lord help and bless,
Joe Holder

“More Sure”—God’s Faithful Testimony

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 honour 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 heart. (2 Peter 1:16-19 KJV 1900)

Whenever someone tells you something with which you are not personally familiar, you want to know the basis of their claimed information. How did they come to know this idea? What proof do they have of its truthfulness? Ideas abound. Opinions are endless. And folks who hold them are normally convinced that their ideas are factual. The study of ideas and the basis or grounds of claimed knowledge is called “Epistemology.” On what basis do we claim to know a certain thing? Writing to the Corinthian Church, Paul reminded them and us of a major function of the gospel.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 KJV)

Walking in the flesh obviously refers to any form of moral (Morality based on Scripture, not ever-changing societal norms) idea or conduct. It no less also refers to any philosophical ideas not gleaned from and therefore based on New Testament teaching. This passage defines the Christian warfare which Paul described in the symbols of a Roman soldier’s armor and weapons. (Ephesians 6 KJV) Our primary battleground is not with “Them” “Out there.” It goes on daily in our mind. Before we contemplate any interaction with anyone or any idea, we have already either won or lost our spiritual war in our own mind. Underscore Paul’s identifying of the battleground of the Christian warfare, “**Casting down imaginations.**” Where do imaginations live? In our minds. The New Testament gospel confronts the stronghold of our carnal inclinations, effectively tearing down ideas that exist in our imagination, but not in New Testament teaching. For those bedrock ideas and world views that shape our life, the moment we must add writings, teachings, or ideas that are not found in Scripture, we surrender our Christian battle to the adversary.

Sadly, we observe far too much of this compromised faith in the Christian culture of our time. On one side, sincere folks will emphasize a “Burning in the bosom,” a strong emotional nudge toward a certain idea. On a different front, we hear sincere people talk about “The Lord gave me this revelation.” The Lord’s “Revelations” for His people since Jesus and the first generation of believers who were inspired to write our New Testament is the New Testament—the New Testament alone. That is Peter’s primary teaching in our study passage. Let’s explore his words. Much of both inclinations grows out of a naïve gullibility in our thinking, based on our

“imagination,” not on the ideas and behaviors we find in the New Testament. Jesus cautioned the disciples to be “...**wise as serpents...harmless as doves.**” (Matthew 10:16 KJV) Is it a challenge to practice both? Yes, indeed, but Jesus included both in His charge to the disciples. Contextually, He taught them the importance of this dual preparedness in the context of trials and persecution. Much of contemporary Christianity ignores “**wise as serpents**” and thinks only of being “**harmless as doves.**” In their minds, sincerity rules over all else, even over New Testament teaching. “...**wise as serpents**” is an unusual symbol. Normally in the Bible, serpents symbolize evil. Obviously, Jesus did not teach His followers ever to compromise their faith-ethic and think or act sinfully.

Because they could survive in harsh climates and move quickly without normal means of locomotion, serpents gained the reputation of being exceptionally sneaky, crafty, shrewd, and successful in their goals. (ESV Archaeology Study Bible Notes)

When we choose to live our life according to Jesus’ faith-ethic, we should not retire our mind. We need it in the faith-way more than ever. “But he is so sincere and devoted, and he said...” Scripture requires truth fully as much as sincerity. When Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that worshippers in His new way would worship in “...**spirit, and in truth,**” (John 4:23, 24 KJV) He didn’t teach that we may choose either “spirit” or “truth” for acceptable worship. We need both for true and acceptable worship. Further, contextually there is a strong link between “Spirit” and “spirit,” strongly implying that Jesus referred to the accompanying wise grace of the Holy Spirit in our worship, not our human spirit.

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. Any errant idea that teases our mind and entices us to believe it must be carefully framed to convince us that it is consistent with New Testament teaching. However, we observe many ideological “Wardrobes” that bootstrap themselves to New Testament teaching, but the idea fails to harmonize with those writings. Rather than accepting “Isn’t this idea consistent with...?” we should subject every “Imagination” of our own mind or any other ideas to the rigid test of New Testament teaching. Forget “Why can’t we...” If we can’t find strong and specific (Book, chapter, and verse only) positive teaching for the idea, we need to follow Paul’s teaching, classify it as an imagination stronghold, and “Cast” it down and out of our mind. Peter’s inspired ideological “Filter” rejects any idea, action, or philosophy not positively affirmed by those inspired eyewitnesses in our New Testament. “But this idea doesn’t contradict Scripture.” “Well, I can’t find anything in the New Testament that forbids this idea.” You hear—perhaps even think—these rationalizations all too often within the Christian community. When we feel the emotional tug that such rationalization imposes, we need to refresh our minds on the inspired description of Scripture and its divine purpose and function.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 KJV)

Obviously, Paul affirmed the divine origin of “**All scripture**,” contextually a likely inclusion of both Old and New Testament “Scripture.” Many contemporary Christian teachers fully accept this thought. However, they abandon the passage at that point. “But multiple copying and translation into different languages allowed some degree of corruption into that originally inspired text.” They ignore Paul’s simple in-English-two-letter word, “**is**,” not “was.” Not only did the Lord “inspire,” direct and control, the writing of Scripture, but He also continuously preserves its teachings for believers who live after the original writing. Critics occasionally object to this abiding divine preservation of Scripture by citing minor variations between translations, or even very minor variation between different publishers of our King James Bible. A different spelling of a proper name or similar minor variations in no way alters the specific message of Scripture.

As Paul further described the divine message of Scripture, he named four specific functions or purposes of these inspired writings, concluding the lesson with a bedrock divine objective of those inspired writings, “**That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.**” The Lord addressed these divine words to “**the man of God**,” not to mankind generally. The divine intent of these writing to and for “**the man of God**” informs the man of God perfectly thoroughly “**...unto all good works.**” Paul’s inspired description of Scripture does not teach that Scripture provides the man of God instruction for most good works, or for the truly important good works. The inclusive instruction of Scripture should not be denied or questioned, “**All good works.**” This teaching eliminates “But Scripture doesn’t specifically forbid this idea.” This faithless reasoning contradicts Paul’s inspired description of Scripture’s all-inclusive positive provision to the man of God. If God regards anything as a “Good work,” He included it in His inspired Scripture. Silence in Scripture is no approval of any idea or conduct. This passage rejects the “Silent” idea.

In our study passage, Peter takes us deeper into the details of this teaching. The writers of the New Testament were “eyewitnesses” of Jesus’ life and teaching. They faithfully communicated His teachings in their writings.

For he received from God the Father honour 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. Peter referenced his experience with Jesus on the Mount of transfiguration. Ponder prayerfully Peter’s distinction between any human idea and inspired Scripture. Despite having lived that extraordinary

experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, a real event that Peter consciously recalled, his highest reference, his exclusive “Epistemology,” was Scripture, that “...**more sure word of prophecy.**” Peter regarded inspired Scripture to be **more** reliable both to himself and to his readers than his memorable personal experience with Jesus on the mountain. Too often contemporary Christians reverse this logic and value their personal experience or sincere opinion above Scripture. No wonder contemporary Christianity is so anemic and superficial. When Jesus took those three disciples with Him to the mountain, He had a crucial lesson they needed to learn and never forget. His coming and all that He said and did carried the stamp of the Father’s approval. Further, they needed to learn this powerful reality of their Lord’s example and authority. When Peter suggested an equal tabernacle for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, the glory of God invaded the area, and they heard the voice of God.

And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. (Luke 9:35 KJV)

Underscore the thought, “...**hear him.**” Peter’s idea flourished with good intentions, but it put Jesus on an equal with Moses and Elijah, not their—and Peter’s—God. Peter must learn. He couldn’t even trust his personal eyewitness experience over Jesus and His words, His teaching and example.

No doubt, Peter and the other disciples had a profound love and respect for Jesus. They abandoned their careers to follow Him, no small commitment. However, they may not yet have grasped what they would come to believe and preach, that He was God manifest in human flesh, not another teacher or prophet like Moses or Elijah. Jesus nudged them to take that added step in their regard for Him.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. (John 14:1 KJV)

Jesus didn’t charge the disciples with wholly denying or not believing in Him. However, He did remind them. Their commitment to Him was strong, but they may still have thought of Him more as a wise and exceptional teacher than as God-in-human-flesh. Ponder the parallel in this verse. Belief in God was/is foundational for a spiritual lifestyle. Our belief in Jesus must be equal for a right-minded faith. In effect, Jesus was teaching the disciples to do something more than they had thus far fully embraced, “...**believe also in me** (As God).” When Paul described “**the mystery of godliness,**” His leading point was “**God was manifest in the flesh.**” (1 Timothy 3:16 KJV)

So, what was Peter's big-picture lesson in our study passage? 1 Peter's primary focus teaches us to maintain our faith, even when persecuted as a Christian, same as Jesus' warning in the "Wise as serpents harmless as doves" teaching. He wrote 2 Peter to the same people. When anger, chaos, and violence dominate the dark world around us, our New Testament charge is not to join the darkness, but to fulfill Jesus' dual charge. **Be both** wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Do not follow "...**cunningly devised fables**" that rationalize ungodliness in the name of Christianity. Keep your faith in Jesus in both your mind and in your conduct. Oh, how we need this lesson.

Elder Joe Holder