

Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "The Bible: Why Believe It?" (2 Peter 1:20-21)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: 2/15/2009 under the title, "The Only Supernatural Book" Page 1 of 10

The Right View of the Bible

True believers must be united in submission to the inspired and inerrant Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which are the only authoritative rule of faith and practice given by Christ to His Church. True believers must be united in the belief that the only infallible rule for the interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself.

That is the right view of the Bible. Why do we believe that? How are we sure of that? We find the answer right here, in Peter's second epistle.

Peter is making two points. His first point, in chapter one verses 16 through 19, concerns the witness and testimony of the Apostles. They saw Jesus Christ with their own eyes. They saw all the Old Testament prophecies about His first coming fulfilled. And Peter himself, along with James and John, was on the mountain as we read in the gospel accounts. They saw Jesus Christ transfigured before them. They heard the voice of God the Father from Heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

In other words, Peter is saying, the facts verify prophecy. But then in verses 20 and 21 he goes on to say that there is something even more important – something even more important than an eyewitness account – something we must understand first. And that is the nature of prophecy itself. And not only the nature of prophecy, but also the nature of Scripture as a whole. Notice how Peter says it — "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture..." Prophecy is a part of Scripture, so what is true of prophecy is true of Scripture as a whole. "Knowing this first," he says, "that no

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prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

How you look at those two verses determines what kind of religion you are going to have – God-centered, and therefore true, or man-centered, and therefore false. All the way through church history, these two verses are at the center of every division that we encounter between the orthodox and the heretic. The great division between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism hinges on these verses. The great division between authentic Biblical Christianity and every other kind of religion in the world, every false religion, hinges on these verses. These are key verses in the Word of God.

Wrong Views of the Bible

Now many churches, and many cults, look at verse 20 by itself. They lift it out of context. Rome, as we have said, looks at verse 20 and says that it means that it is wrong for anyone to interpret the Bible for himself. Only the church can interpret the Scriptures. "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation." Period. Protestantism, on the other hand, claims the universal priesthood of all believers, not just a certain class of men who are called priests. But Rome declares that it is dangerous for church members to try to understand the Bible for themselves. So there is only one safe thing to do. Go to the church. Go to the priest. And the ironic thing is that when men go to seminary to become priests, the thing they don't study very much is the Bible itself. Instead, they spend years studying church tradition.

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It all comes down to this: Do you believe that the church has to interpret the Bible according to its traditions or some other standard, or do you believe that the Bible itself is the final authority? And do you believe that the church, rather than standing in judgment over the Word of God, must be judged by the Word of God?

How the Bible Came Into Existence

Now as I said, the Roman Catholic church and many cults take verse 20 by itself – “No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.” Period. They stop there. But that’s not the complete thought. Verses 20 and 21 form a single thought, and verse 20 is not complete without verse 21.

The word “for” at the beginning of verse 21 links the two verses together. “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” Verse 21 explains verse 20.

We also need to take a closer look at some of the words that are used here in our English Bibles. In some cases, it’s difficult for translators to find a concise way of saying in English all that is said in the original. And this is one of those places.

The Authorized Version and the New King James both use the word “is” in verse 20. “No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.” Some other versions render it “comes” or “came about.” Those words are closer to the original, but still not quite enough. In the original language, the word actually speaks of how Scripture “originated”, or “came into existence”.

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Another word we need to understand more carefully in verse 20 is the word "interpretation". This is the only place in the entire Bible where this particular Greek word is used. The word in the original language has to do with "determination" – the way in which something is determined to be true or not true. So the idea of verse 20 is this: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture originated as the result of any private determination of what is true or not true."

In fact, it would be closer to the original language to say it like this: "Knowing this first, no prophecy of Scripture originated in the human writer's own personal determination of what is true or not true." And if we say it like that, we see better how it connects to verse 21: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture originated in the human writer's own personal determination of what is true or not true, for this reason, verse 21 – prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

And as we see it in this light, it connects us back to what Peter has already said in verse 19: "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed..." Why should we pay attention to Scripture? Why should we study it? Why should we meditate on it? Why should we base our lives, and the life of the church, and our hope for eternity, on this Book?

The answer is that Scripture is not a mere collection of the words and ideas of men. It did not originate in man's understanding of things. The Bible is not the record of man's views, man's perspectives, or man's interpretation of events. Man did not

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decide what is true and what is not true. "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

There is one other word we need to deal with in order to understand these verses completely, and that is the word "moved" in verse 21. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Some Bibles render it "carried along," and that is closer to the original. But it is still not the full force of what is being said. The word translated "moved" or "carried along" is better yet translated, "driven along". Driven along. Driven along by an outside force.

The same word is used in the book of Acts, chapter 27, where we read the account of the shipwreck of the Apostle Paul and those who were with him. Luke wrote the account, and Luke really puts you in the ship with Paul and himself and the others.

There they were, on their way through the Adriatic Sea. A huge storm came up. It went on for over two weeks. The ship was so badly beaten by the wind and the waves, that it was ready to break up and sink. The captain and the crew made desperate efforts to save the ship. They took down the sails. They ran cables under the ship to try to keep it from breaking apart. And finally, they threw the cargo overboard to try to lighten the ship and keep it from sinking. They did everything they knew how to do in order to save the ship. But still the storm raged on.

And when there was nothing else left to do, Luke tells us in a very graphic way, that they stopped trying to steer the ship – and, he says – "we let her drive". There was nothing else we could do. We just gave up and let the ship be driven along by

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this mighty wind. "We let her drive." And that is the very same word that is used here in verse 21 of Second Peter chapter one — "holy men of God spoke as they were driven along by the Holy Spirit."

The Only Supernatural Book

So, here is what Peter is telling us. We must never think of Scripture as a collection of the thoughts and ideas of men. But more than that, when we read the Bible we must always keep in our minds the fact that the men who wrote the words of the Bible were driven by the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit came upon them. God took hold of them. He gave them the thoughts. And without obscuring their personalities in the writing, He gave them the very words to write. And He drove them along as they wrote them down. It's always "thus says the Lord" – "the burden of the Lord" – "the word of the Lord came to me" and so on. And often, we find that they actually wrote the message against their own will. And sometimes, Peter tells us in his first epistle, they didn't entirely understand what they were writing, because they were writing something for a later time. But they were driven to write the Word of God.

So here we have, in one short passage, a statement of the two great doctrines concerning the nature of Scripture. The first great doctrine is this: That the text of the Bible, the content, the very words, are revelation – they are from the mind of God, not the mind of man. And the second great doctrine is this: The way in which the Spirit of God used men to record the words is inspiration – men driven by the Holy

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Spirit. Revelation, and inspiration – these are the two great words that tell us the nature of the Book we hold in our hands this morning.

This Book is absolutely unique. It is almighty God speaking directly to man. Every other book in this world is the word of man, the conflicting opinions of man. But the words of the Bible are the very words of God. The Book you hold in your hands this morning is a supernatural book from beginning to end – and it is the only supernatural Book.

And because this Book is revelation given by inspiration – then certain other things follow. And they follow in an unbreakable chain of logic. First, this Book is inerrant, because God, the Author, is inerrant. Second, this Book is infallible, because God, the Author, is infallible. Third, this Book is therefore absolutely reliable. It is reliable in matters of doctrine, yes. But it is also absolutely reliable in matters of history, science, and geography. And that is because God, the Author, and God alone, is absolutely reliable. He cannot lie, and He cannot, and would not, give us a record that is in any way untrustworthy. And fourth, this Book contains no contradictions, because God, the Author, is not double-minded. And fifth, because this Book is the only Book from God the creator, from Christ the Lord of the church, from God the Holy Spirit, this Book is uniquely authoritative for the individual Christian, and for the church as a body of believers.

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A Scripture-Driven People

The men who wrote the Scriptures were driven men. They were driven by God to write Scripture, so that we might be driven by Scripture. The church of Jesus Christ must be the Scripture-driven church. Peter says in verse 19, that this is the word "which you do well to heed" – "you do well to pay attention to it." Once again, this is one of those places where it's difficult to put the full force of the original into a few words. The sense of that phrase in the original is something like this: "You do the right thing, and there can be no room for blame, if you take the responsibility to hold firmly to the Word, if you give yourselves over to it, if you submit to it, if you say "Yes" to it."

Christians are to be driven by this Book. All of our lives must be lived according to this Book, and nothing else. How can we possibly do anything else? This is the only Book that tells us the truth about God. This is the only Book that tells us how mankind and this world came into existence. This is the only Book that tells us how this world came to be in the condition it is in – because of man's sin. This is the only Book that tells us that God has done something about the sin problem, and only He could do it. As we read and understand this Book, we are confronted, from the early chapters of Genesis all the way through the end of Revelation, we are confronted by the person and work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This is the only Book that gives us a reliable account of human history, from the first day of creation to the very last day of time – and on into eternity. This is the only

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Book that tells us what is going to happen in the future. In fact, Peter's main theme in this second epistle is the great fact that that God is still in control of all things, that Jesus Christ is coming again, that we as believers have nothing to worry about. How do we know that? Our authoritative answer is this: The Bible says so, and we believe that this Book is not the imagination of man, but the very Word of God.

You see, we have a choice. Either we accept this Book in its entirety as the Word of God, and we base our lives and our future on it, or else we base our lives and our future upon an understanding of things that originates in our own sinful hearts.

If you are a Christian today, I trust that you will say a wholehearted "Yes" to the authority of the Word of God. Confronted by these alternatives, I trust you will say, for yourself, "Yes – I am driven to believe this Book. I understand that this is not a Book that came about by man's will. I believe that this is, in fact, the very Word of God. This is not human understanding. This is the God of the universe speaking. I will not be driven by the word of man. I will be driven by the Word of God. I will say, with Joshua of old, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' And I will say with Peter in the book of Acts, 'We must obey God, rather than men.'" It was on that basis, that the early church turned the world upside down with the Gospel.

And if you are not a Christian, I encourage you also to say "Yes" to the Word of God – but in a different way. You need to begin at the beginning. You need to say "Yes" to what the Bible says about you – that you are a sinner. You are under God's wrath. You are bound for Hell. You are in need of saving. You need to say "Yes" to

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what the Bible says is the only cure for your problem – placing your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your only Savior from sin. Don't delay saying "Yes" to God's Word.

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to preach the Gospel to the lost, and to equip believers to stand upon and live by the sole authority of God's Word, to the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The prayers of our listeners and supporters are vital to this ministry. Thank you for praying for us.

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of His inspired, infallible, inerrant Word.**