

Scripture

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[0 : 00] We shall now turn to this chapter which we read together, 2 Peter chapter 1, and our text for this evening is verse 21.

1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 21. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

As Christians, it is essential for us to know what we believe, to be clear about the truths that we hold to.

We must, if we are going to survive, be well grounded in the faith. And this is what Peter says to us in his first epistle, chapter 3 and verse 15.

He says, be always ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you. We must always be ready to give an answer, to speak for that hope that is in us, to answer the questions that people will ask.

[1 : 37] And before we can answer their questions, we must, of course, know the Bible ourselves. Because when we know it ourselves, then we will be in a position to answer the questions that others will raise.

There are many false cults around today. Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Hare Krishna, Munis, all types, each one claiming our ear.

And then there are so many heretics around, and false teachers, coming along with their views, taking a little bit away from Christianity here, adding a little bit to Christianity there.

Each one trying to present their own views and their own ideas. Therefore, it's important for us to know what we believe, to know the truth, to know what the Bible teaches, to stand fast and firm upon the rock.

And what rock do we have on which to stand? It's a Bible. Jesus speaks of a man building a house upon the sand.

[2 : 57] And everything went well with him until the flood came and washed it away. That's somebody who's building his religion and his life on human ideas.

But he talks of another man who dug deeply and built his house upon the rock. That's the one who listens to Christ and who obeys God's word.

His house will stand forever. But even if you're not a Christian, it's important for you to know what the Bible teaches. It's important for you to know what the Bible teaches so that you will know what you have been asked to believe.

Because Christians and the Christian church is asking of you faith. They're asking you to believe.

And you ask the question, well, what?

What am I to believe? And it's only by searching the scriptures and by studying the Bible that we find out the things that it is essential for you to believe.

[4 : 06] And even if you don't want to believe Christianity, surely you want at least to know what you are rejecting. Surely it's important to study the Bible to know what you are not believing.

So no matter what our position is, whether we are Christians or not Christians, it's important for us to study the Bible. And I would like us over the next few Sabbath evenings to study the central doctrines of the Bible.

To study them following the order in which they are presented to us in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Westminster Confession is a summary of the Bible's teachings.

And it's also, of course, a summary of the beliefs of our own church and of all those who hold to the Reformed and Presbyterian position.

So I would like us to study these central doctrines that are presented to us so carefully and so well in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

[5 : 37] And yet, I don't want to base our sermons on the Confession. Because we must remember that the Confession of Faith is something that man has made.

It's a human document. We must base our sermons and base our theology firmly and squarely upon the Bible. And so I would like us to preach from a variety of texts and scriptures, in the scriptures, these central doctrines that are presented to us in the Confession.

Now, the first chapter in the Confession of Faith deals with what is basic to any theology and to any true Christianity.

It deals, of course, with the Bible. And that is the very subject that is presented to us in our text here tonight. Verse 20 says, Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

These scripture prophecies came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

[6 : 52] The Apostle Peter is here writing at the end of his life. He says that soon he will be putting off his tabernacle. That's the way he speaks of his body.

It's like a tent in which his soul dwells. And he's saying, I will soon put off this tabernacle. Meaning that he will soon die. But first of all, he wants to bring before the church once again the great truths of the gospel.

And he says to them, I want you to hang on firmly to the gospel truths. Because what I gave to you was not cunningly devised fables.

It was not myth. It was not man-made stories, fairy tales that I preached to you. I preached to you the truth. I remember, he says, standing on the mount, the holy mount, the mount of transfiguration, and hearing the voice of God say with regard to Jesus Christ, This is my beloved Son.

Hear ye him. That was great, says Peter. And that gave me great assurance in listening to Christ. But then he turns and he says, Verse 19, We have a more sure word of prophecy than that.

[8 : 17] I'm not asking you to believe on the basis of my visions or the things that I saw. He says, We have a more sure word of prophecy. Whereunto you do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.

And that more sure word of prophecy is the Bible. Our faith is not dependent upon rumours or stories passed on to us by different individuals, second hand and third hand.

We all know how stories change as they're passed on from person to person. Our faith is based upon the written word of God, which is inerrant, inspired by the Lord himself.

So first of all tonight, a question. Do we need the Bible?

Some people argue that we don't. They speak of how you can see God in the world around you.

The heavens God's glory do declare, the skies as handworks preach.

[9 : 34] And they say by taking a walk in the country, they can feel really close to God. Perhaps fishing beside a loch, maybe hill walking on the top of a mountain, they can feel really close to God.

Why do we need the Bible? Paul agrees with them. God does reveal himself to us in nature. And he says we can see from the things that are made, the glory of our creator.

We can see his power making this world. We can see his wisdom. And the world that is made with all its varied forces all working together.

We can see the glory of our God in the glory of the world. And Paul goes further than that. And he says, God has given us all, no matter who we are, where we are, he has given us all a conscience. So that each of us have at least some sense of what is right and wrong. Why then do we need the Bible? If we can know God, his power, his Godhead, his glory, if we can know what is right and wrong without the Bible.

[10 : 57] The problem is, though, that no matter who you are, every single one of us do things that we know we shouldn't do.

No matter how ignorant our conscience is, at some point in our lives, our conscience will condemn us.

No matter who the person is, everybody knows that sometimes they do things that they shouldn't do. and therefore, each one of us stand guilty before the great God who reveals himself in creation, the great God whose glory we can see in the world around us, in the stars, in the sun, in the moon, in the forces of nature.

All of us stand guilty because deep down inside us we know that we have done things that we shouldn't do. We are guilty. We stand condemned.

And we are conscious that God is not pleased with us. And if God is so great and so powerful, what hope is there for us if we have broken his law?

[12:20] And there is, of course, where the Bible comes in. The revelation that we have of God in nature, natural revelation, as it's called, tells us about the holiness of God, the power of God, the glory of God, but it tells us nothing about the way of salvation, the way of pardon, the mercy and forgiveness of God.

And without the Bible, we would never know of Jesus Christ. Unless we had the Bible, we wouldn't know those words, Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

The only way by which we who have sinned against God and who have done what is wrong can know how to get right with God and make our peace with God is through the good news that comes to us in the Bible.

And the central message of the Bible is Christ and him crucified. The way of peace, the way of pardon, and nobody who'll get their sins forgiven will get peace with God and will get pardon but through the message of the Bible.

that's why the apostle Peter speaks of a light that shineth in a dark place until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts.

[13:53] Darkness covers this world. Spiritual darkness. even though God reveals himself in nature, yet men and women are dark and we need this light to shine, the light of God's word to shine into our hearts.

We need that day star to arise. We need that dawn to come to break in upon the darkness of our soul and the darkness of our guilt.

we need that light to set before us the way of peace and forgiveness and salvation.

Do we need a Bible? Yes, we do.

And everyone who doesn't have the Bible who doesn't have the message of the Bible is perishing. And that's why it's so urgent for us as men and women as churches to send out missionaries to all wherever they are.

[15:10] The heathen cannot find God peace with God but through the message of the Bible.

Those who in Muslim lands worship Allah they are perishing.

700 million of them they are perishing without the message of the Bible. Two and a half thousand million people that is reckoned in the world today two and a half thousand million do not know the message of the Bible.

It's so urgent it's so essential to send out men and women bringing the good news of the Bible to perishing men perishing women.

Jesus says the harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few. All around Jesus could see men and women needing to be reaped for God and men and women rotting in their sins.

Do we need the Bible? Yes we do. But what is the Bible in the second place? Verse 21 speaks of it as that which has not come by the will of man but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

[16:52] It's not man made. It's not cunningly devised fables. Verse 16 There are some even leaders in the churches who talk that the Bible is a book full of myths.

Remember that book which came out recently entitled The Myth of God Incarnate The Fairy Tale that God became a man a myth written by leaders of the church in England.

But says Peter we have not followed cunningly devised fables and we have not presented to you myths of the church verse 20 No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

It's not our views about God. It's not our ideas our private interpretation. Many people speak of religion in these terms of the Bible in that way.

They say the Bible is man's thoughts about God. Man's ideas about the supernatural a history of the thought of man as it developed concerning God.

[18:21] But no says Peter knowing this first that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. It's not man made it's not man's ideas it's not private interpretations it's not views about God that man has developed.

What is it then? Well it's certainly written by men holy men of God. We're told that it's written by men the Bible and that's obvious as we read it.

It's written in human language it's written by different authors at different points in history over a period of a couple of thousand years. when we study it we see the different characteristics of

different individuals coming through.

Paul writes quite differently from Peter and Peter writes differently from James and James writes differently from John. They write differently to they are different from Isaiah Ezekiel Solomon Moses each writer has his own personality his own vocabulary his own way of expressing things.

The Bible is written by men but we're told more than that it's written by holy men not evil men not men who are out to mislead to deceive not men who are trying to pull the wool over other people's eyes eyes it's not written by men who were liars and inventors of fables and stories it was written by holy men godly men men who loved the Lord men who lived holy and upright lives men more more than that we're told that these holy men of God spake as they were moved by the holy ghost they spoke and wrote as they were moved carried along borne along by the holy ghost and that's why the bible is in man's word but god's word written in man's words but god's word because these holy men were carried along born along by the holy ghost so that the product that they produced is god's word 2 timothy 3 verse 16 speaks of this all scripture is given by inspiration of god and the word inspiration literally translated from the greek means god breathed all scripture is god breathed god has breathed into and through people through these holy men so that what they have written down is the breath of god it's the word from god that's why scripture is infallible inerrant without mistake will not mislead or misguide scripture is god's word written by men men used by god written at different points in time written from different perspectives and yet the end product is god's word holy men of god speak as they were moved by the holy ghost the holy ghost taking them over controlling them moving them using them and their personality to produce a word which is god's word this is what makes the bible so precious it's not like a theology book it's not like a poem it's not like a philosophy it's unique it's god's word the old testament was written in hebrew partly in aramaic the new testament was written in greek and in these languages as they were originally written they were without mistake without error the translations the good translations that we have present to us god's authoritative word you know

[23 : 47] how it is with the muslims they have their holy book the koran but the koran loses all authority when it is translated the koran is only authoritative in the original arabic but it's not like that with the scriptures the scriptures are just as authoritative in english as in hebrew or greek praise god they are and we possess in our own language language we can all understand god's word remember remember what the second catechism says the scriptures is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy god god we were created to glorify and enjoy god and the scriptures is the only rule the only direction the only map as it were that shows us the way not just to glorify god but also to enjoy him and true enjoyment can only be found in glorifying god the scriptures so essential the way to glorify and enjoy god the scriptures god's infallible word to be our rule of faith and life to keep us right we can trust it we can believe it it is god's own word to us then thirdly can we be sure that the bible is god's word prove it prove that the bible is god's word well there is certain evidence the majestic style in which it is written the heavenly matter that it contains the powerful doctrine that you find written in the bible the unity of the various parts of scripture written at different times and yet presenting one unified doctrine testimony of the church and of believers down through the ages who have accepted it as god's word god's and yet you cannot prove to people to the unbeliever that the bible is god's word you cannot prove it to somebody who doesn't want to believe it instead the bible proves itself to be god's word to be god's word its authority doesn't rest upon us its claim over men and women doesn't depend upon our powers of logical argument or reasoning the scriptures proves itself there's a self attestation in scripture because the scripture claims to be god's word and when you read it the scripture claims yes to be god's word and also the holy spirit speaks through scripture proving to the individual that it is god's word and so those of us who are christians who have the holy ghost dwelling in our hearts we have the witness of the spirit witnessing with our spirit god's holy spirit assuring us that the bible is indeed god's word and authoritative the roman catholics add to the scripture they have certain books which are known as the apocrypha first and second esdras tobit judith first and second maccabees and so on the roman catholics claim that these books belong to the bible but we don't accept them and we don't accept them because they're not inspired inspired ah yes you say you say that they're not inspired but so would you if you had the holy spirit you see how do we know that we are christians we know that we are christians because god's spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of god god's spirit shows us the evidence that we are christians god's spirit assures us of our christianity and makes us certain that there is a god certain that there is a saviour and certain that that saviour

is our saviour and that we are the children of god god's spirit is the one who gives us assurance but god's spirit also gives us assurance with regard to the scripture he witnesses to the truth of scripture and so john says to us you have an unction from the holy one and know all things you have this anointing of the holy ghost and anointed with god's holy spirit you recognise the bible to be god's word we mustn't add to the bible any book that is not inspired and we mustn't take from the bible any book that is inspired every book that is inspired belongs to the bible and we know that these books are inspired because of the witness of god's spirit to them in our hearts the bible is god's word god's spirit bears testimony to it we see the evidence as we read it we feel its power and god's spirit speaks through it assuring us that this is indeed the scriptures you cannot prove to somebody who is an unbeliever that the bible is not the word of god that the bible is the word of god but instead ask him to read the bible for himself and as the individual reads the bible who knows god's spirit might deal with him and open his eyes or her eyes to see that this is indeed the inspired word of god fourthly and finally how do we decide what the bible means many passages of the bible are very difficult the roman catholic church says to us the way to understand the bible is to listen to the church the church shall tell you what the bible means you mustn't interpret the bible yourself you must listen to what the priest says to what the church says jehovah witnesses witnesses they will tell you the way to understand the bible is to listen to their leaders to follow the teaching of the watch town no we mustn't look to any man whether he be a leader of the jehovah witness or a priest or bishop of the roman catholic church or a protestant minister or it doesn't matter who he is we must listen to god and to god as he speaks through the bible to god's word alone and we have a right to study the scriptures for ourselves and to listen to its message and to hear it ourselves we do not depend on anyone you have an unction from the holy one and know all things says john and you must know all things you must study all things you have this holy spirit to keep you right listen to the holy spirit listen to this anointing seek the illumination of god's spirit ask god to shine light upon the page of scripture so that you will understand it seek that illumination from god so that god is your teacher don't depend upon any man but do trust in god to teach you from the scriptures many passages of the scriptures are difficult but many passages of the scriptures are also easy to understand and the central doctrines of scripture are clear the basics are simple our duty is first and foremost to accept the basic simple clear message of scripture and then as we try and study the more difficult passages of god's word to use the simple passages to explain them to take what is taught in the simpler passages and to use that as a basis for digging into the more difficult passages one thing we must we must not do is to draw weird and wonderful doctrines and teachings and conclusions from difficult and obscure passages of scripture that's a sure way to heresy that's what the cults do mormons jehovah witnesses and all the rest of them you always find that they focus in on strange odd little obscure parts of the bible and they make a great thing of maybe one text but no we must accept the whole scripture and work from the simple clear teachings of scripture to the more difficult things and always base our theology on what is simple and clear and general and the main teaching of god's word rather than taking one little bit and putting it against the rest we're told here too that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation it wasn't given by a private individual it wasn't given in the sense of a man's own views or ideas about god but neither is it to receive private interpretations in the sense of me taking one thing out of scripture you taking another somebody else another scripture has one message the bible has one message it's not to have one message for you and one message for your neighbor and something else for somebody else the holy ghost speaks in the bible and he speaks as a person doesn't speak in a confused way saying a thousand different things at the same time no he speaks with one message and we must seek to get that one message from each text of scripture as we work our way through the bible it's not private interpretations that we're looking for but what we're looking for is God's interpretation on his own word what we're wanting is God's message God's holy spirit to shine into our hearts to open our dark hearts and minds to understand and to grasp the truths of the bible the bible is god's word we must treasure it as god's word fellow christian if you really believe that the bible is god's word why do you not study it more why do you not learn it off by heart passages of it why do you not fill your mind more with its great teachings just think god's word the great god creator of heaven and earth he has spoken and he has given to us this bible in order to teach us in order to keep us right should we then leave it collecting dust on a shelf should we not study it and meditate on it and use every opportunity and every means and every aid that we can lay our hands on to get to grips with the great message of this book and if you're not a christian it's vitally important for you too to study

the bible god has spoken it's possible for you to close your eyes to stick your fingers in your ears not to listen to god's voice to close your mind to the message that is written in the bible but if you do you will be the loser god has spoken what an insult it is to him to close your mind to his word no you must receive this message that he gives you this message of salvation this message of hope and accept what jesus christ has so clearly presented to us in the gospel this way of salvation this way of peace through jesus christ that is our hope that is the great message of salvation that no matter who you are the great message of the bible is that no matter who you are no matter what sins you have committed there is hope for you if you turn and receive the gospel if you receive the christ that the gospel presents let us pray gracious and ever blessed god help us to understand thy word help us to study it help us to come to grips with it help us to treasure it more to value it help us oh lord to dig deeply into it may we not weary and study thy word oh lord we pray that thou wouldst give us a great love for the truth give us a hunger for it a thirst for the great doctrines of scripture that we would come to know thee more and more the great and glorious god that we would come to know thy son jesus christ the savior that we would come to know the spirit and his power in our lives oh god open our ears open our eyes open our minds and give to us that real appetite for thyself that so we might grow in grace and in knowledge of the things of god for jesus sake amen