

## 2<sup>nd</sup> PETER BIBLE STUDY

2 Peter 1:16-21

Lesson #2

### Introduction

As an introduction to this lesson, I'd like to make some observations. As human beings it's probably impossible to survive in this world without some degree of trust. Even those who say they don't trust anybody, actually trust a lot of people. For instance, every time we get in our car and drive on the road, we trust that the other drivers won't head on collide with us at 70 miles an hour. We eat foods that are packaged, or canned in places we don't even know. We climb onto contraptions made of aluminum that holds thousands of gallons of flammable fuel, ascend to 30,000 feet above the ground, travel at nearly 600 mph, and are prepared and piloted by scores of people that we don't even know. If that's not trust then what is? Now let me say that I think I've heard other preachers use some of these examples before, so please excuse me if I'm borrowing from someone else's material. But the point I'm making is that trust is a part of life.

In these examples that we've just made, any one of them has the potential to be harmful, or even fatal to us, but yet we consider them acceptable risks. We have the ability to test them through experience, and we see others driving cars, eating canned foods, and flying on airplanes and there's very rarely a problem. So our trust grows with experience.

But what about something that we can't test by experience? Something that we can't see with our eyes, or hear with our ears, or touch with our hands? Something that we can't actually see demonstrated by somebody else as an example for us? How would we know that we could trust such a thing? And what if we were asked to trust our very lives to such a thing as this, wouldn't it be irresponsible to do so? Wouldn't this be like buying a pig in a poke, as the saying goes? Well, it sounds like it would, but what if there were credible corroborating evidence to support this invisible commodity? And therein lies our question, is it possible to establish a reasonable and sensible trustworthiness in a completely invisible, intangible, and untestable thing like those premises and promises of the holy Scriptures? Or, is it as our critics declare, just a bunch of foolish myths and fantasies, fit only for the weak and feeble minded? (As my Harvard grad father-in-law once said to me.) Let's examine the evidence and see what conclusion we come to. Lesson title:

### Can We Trust the Scriptures?

*16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17 For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"— 18 and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.*

*19 So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. 20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*

2 Peter 1:16-21 (NASB)

For a Christian, can there be a more important subject than that which these verses address? In the previous verses Peter has just told us that he knows that he's about to die, so he wants to leave us something that will encourage and strengthen us even after he's gone. He knows what's at stake, he understands the importance, and he's well aware of the obstacles and the perils and the trials that are sure to come upon all those who follow after him. Although the physical trials of Peter's time were extreme and severe indeed, nevertheless Peter, and the apostles, and all those who saw and heard Jesus in person, and witnessed His miracles, did indeed seem to have an advantage. The only question they had to answer was regarding whether or not this man was really the promised Messiah, and was He truly the divine Son of God?

Now these are no small questions for sure, and the vast majority who saw Him, and heard His words, and witnessed His miracles, still failed to believe that He was who He made himself out to be, the Son of God. Concerning this, the Lord Jesus himself said that no one *could* believe what He was saying unless they were specifically taught of God the Father. (Jn 6:45)

When Jesus asked the disciples who He was, do we remember what Peter's answer was? Peter's answer is very well known, and often referred to, where he said *"you are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* This is a popular verse, but Jesus came right back with a comment to Peter telling him that he was blessed, because his own flesh and blood faculties wasn't what revealed this to him, but rather it was God who is in heaven. (Mt 16:17) Countless thousands had heard Jesus' preaching and witnessed His miracles, and yet, amazingly, couldn't come to the conclusion, with their own human mental faculties, that this man actually was the Son of God. They simply could not, and many adamantly would not, believe. (Jn 6:44,64-65)

I said that those who were alive during the day of Jesus had an advantage over those of us who came later, but I've mentioned the foregoing to show that this advantage didn't seem to make much difference. When it came right down to it, a few people believed, but the vast majority did not, and all the miracles that they witnessed with their own eyes, did not persuade them that Jesus was the Son of God. They believed He was special, and that He could actually do miracles, and they were mystified as to how He could do this, but they could not believe that He was of divine origin, that He was actually and truly the very Son of God. Miraculous works were not the deciding factor that determined **belief** in the time of Jesus, and they are not the deciding factor today. There are many who believe, and I myself might have been one of them back when I was just a baby Christian, that if we were just able to do the miracles that Jesus did, then we could persuade thousands upon thousands to believe, but Jesus himself told us, and personally demonstrated, that this is not how it works. It didn't work for Him, and it would not work for us. Because, that is **not** how God the Father has chosen to implement **saving faith** in His beloved Son.

In the final analysis, it always comes back to one single issue, believing the words of the Lord Jesus. Believing that He is the Son of God, believing that He has the authority from God the Father to forgive the sins of mankind who are willing to repent and believe these things about Him. The Father demands that we believe all the words of His Son if we are to be forgiven of our sins, and adopted into His own family. The Lord Jesus said: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the **words** that I have spoken to you **are** spirit and **are** life. John 6:63 (NASB)

If this is so, then the holy Scriptures, which are the inspired writings of the Holy Spirit, are themselves the sole source in the universe of that Spirit and that life which is the gift of God. Nowhere else can it be found. The flesh profits us nothing, meaning, no amount of works, no human achievements, no intellectual realizations or decisions, will be effectual in the securing of that life which is in the Spirit. Hearing the words of Christ, and believing them, is the means that God the Father has chosen to implement His gift of forgiveness, and regeneration, and sanctification and glorification in His eternal kingdom with Him.

If these things are so, and it's the word of God, through His Son Jesus, and not the miraculous deeds that He did that is the means of salvation, then what was the point of all those miracles? Why did Jesus do all these miraculous signs as they're called? And why are they called signs in the first place, and not just miracles? What does it mean by signs? Jesus answered this question for us, and it's recorded in the Scriptures. In the gospel of Mark, chapter 2, there is an account where a young paralyzed man was lowered down on a stretcher through the roof in front of Jesus. When the Lord saw this He said **"son your sins are forgiven."** Then the Scriptures go on to say:

*6 But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said\* to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? 9 "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'? 10 "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said\* to the paralytic, 11 "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home."* Mark 2:6-11 (NASB)

This account, related to us by Mark, is by far the clearest and most straightforward pronouncement by the Lord Jesus of precisely why He did miraculous works. And why they were called signs as well as miracles. They are clear signs (evidences) that the words that He speaks carry the divine power and authority of God. His miraculous signs authenticated the words that He spoke, this is *why* He said that did them. His words were just as true without them, but for those who believed His words, these signs were a wonderful and marvelous validation of what they already believed. They weren't

the reason that they believed, but they certainly were a marvelous authentication. And, they left the unbelievers with absolutely no excuse, because there was no other reasonable alternative to the source of this miraculous power that He repeatedly demonstrated in their very presence.

So now we see what Peter is getting at. He's giving them assurance that the prophetic word, the gospel of Jesus Christ, that they trust as their hope and their life, is absolutely trustworthy. It's not something that was made up by men. It's not just cleverly devised myths and fantasies as many claim, even to this day. It is of the utmost importance to those of us who believe, and trust the prophetic Scriptures, that they are entirely trustworthy. We are betting everything on their authenticity, and accuracy, and verity. And therefore, Peter does exactly what he saw his Lord do, he recounts a situation where he himself saw something with his own eyes, and heard something with his own ears, that serves to further authenticate the trustworthiness of the prophetic Scriptures. He, and two of his companions, were eye witnesses of the glory of the Lord Jesus, and heard the audible words of God coming out of the heavens with their own ears, declaring that Jesus is the beloved Son of God, and we should listen to Him. (Mt 17:5; Mk 9:7; Lk 9:35)

So therefore, just as the miraculous signs of Jesus made His words more sure and more trustworthy to those who believed Him, now Peter says that he also has additional eyewitness testimony to add to that prophetic word of Jesus Christ, to serve as a further corroboration of its trustworthiness and authenticity. This is clearly the point that Peter is making by using this account of the situation on the mountain, he's using it to substantiate the trustworthiness and authenticity of the prophetic word of God. Peter says that the word is made even more sure by the corroborating evidence. Because of the specific grammar in the original text, some believe that he's trying to establish a priority of importance between experience and word. While I do agree that there is a priority, and the word is certainly a higher priority than experience, nevertheless, the context of this whole account is clearly regarding furthering and supporting the authenticity and trustworthiness of the gospel, preached by Jesus Christ, and conveyed to them through the preaching and writings of Peter and the other apostles. His intended point, notwithstanding any difficulties of grammar, is that the gospel message that we've heard through their preaching is true, and that it's authentic, and we can trust it, even with our lives, just as Peter himself, and countless thousands of other precious saints, have already faithfully demonstrated themselves.

In my introduction, I asked the question, whether it was possible to ascertain, with reasonable certainty, the trustworthiness of a completely invisible and intangible commodity. This is a question we all have to answer, concerning the authenticity and trustworthiness of that book that we call the Bible. Is it the divinely inspired and holy words of God, or, is it just a collection of foolish myths, suitable only for the feeble minded? The vast majority believe the latter, and will never be persuaded otherwise, but those who were taught by God, (Jn 6:45) that small remnant who are called according to His eternal purpose, (Rm 8:28; 2Tim 1:9) and blessed by God with that gift of saving faith, (Eph 2:8-9) will find the evidence compelling; they will appreciate the corroborating testimony, **and** they will believe it, unto the eternal salvation of their souls. To the unbelieving, the words of Scripture will remain utter foolishness, (at least until they die and finally meet the writer) but to those who believe, it is the power of God unto salvation. (1Co 1:18) With this I believe we can move on to the next verse:

### **Verse 19:**

*19 So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.*

After presenting his case for the trustworthiness of the gospel, Peter says they will do well to pay attention to it as to a lamp shining in a dark place. Throughout the Scriptures the examples of light and darkness are used as metaphors for truth versus ignorance. These are very apt metaphors, as they describe the situation with considerable clarity. Darkness indeed captures the essence of spiritual ignorance. It is a condition where nothing can be seen clearly, the eyes yield no meaningful information. Nothing can be seen clearly or examined closely. It is a hopeless condition with no way out. One who is caught in this condition is helpless and impotent to affect his own rescue, because he doesn't even know where he is, or perceive clearly the condition that he's in. One who is in darkness cannot even see the light, and isn't even aware of what the light is. And such is the case of one in spiritual ignorance. They usually don't even believe that they are ignorant, and are very often angry if someone suggests that they might be.

But Peter's talking to the believers here, so, to apply this verse to believers, Peter is telling them that they would do well to pay attention to the prophetic Scriptures until those Scriptures have thoroughly enlightened their hearts and minds, and dispelled all the former darkness of spiritual ignorance that is in them, and the morning star arises in their hearts, meaning essentially, until Christ is fully formed within them. An ongoing process that lasts a lifetime and requires the continual and repeated use of prayer and the holy Scriptures.

**Verse 20:**

*20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*

Peter starts this sentence with the declaration "but know this first of all" There's something that he wants us to know *before* we do anything else. There's a piece of preliminary information that's essential before we even approach our study of the holy Scriptures. And what is that essential information? It is, that no prophetic Scripture is a matter of anyone's own interpretation. In other words, Scripture is not about specific people's own interpretations, and natural understandings, and personal insights about God. Scriptures are **not** the best understandings of the brightest and most educated men, as other written documents tend to be. No; the holy Scriptures are in a class totally by themselves. There is no other recorded documents, or writings in existence that is anything like them.

And this is why we have what we call a closed canon of Scripture. By that we mean that after the book of Revelation, there are no other writings that will ever be considered to be inspired by God in the way that the holy Scriptures were inspired. The recognized 27 books of the New Testament canon comprise the complete inspired word of God. They tell us everything that the Lord wants us to know until the time of His return. Any and all other writings that claim divine inspiration are fraudulent. Any self-proclaimed prophets claiming that they've received additional inspired writings are false prophets. The writings of John Smith, and Ellen G. White, and Mohammed, and countless others are not authentic Scriptures, and they must not be treated as such. Every time they are, the result is heinous error and heresy.

It is only through our strict adherence to this principle of a closed canon of Scripture that affords us stability and steadfastness in the truth. I have heard men claim that they have been personally visited by God, and that He audibly spoke to them and gave them instructions. Some claim multiple visits. Now if this were Moses, or Daniel, or the apostle Paul, I don't suppose I would have a problem with this. So why do I find it difficult to believe these men, and women, when they make the very same claims? Certainly not because I have anything personally against them, but because it violates everything that I understand about the canon of Scripture. The book of Revelation presents itself as the final book in the canon of Scriptures, and warns against the attempted addition of more writings. The Holy Spirit acts through the application of the existing canon of Scripture. He teaches us, and reminds us, of the things that Jesus told us. He isn't inventing new things, He's reminding us of existing things, which things are those recorded in the holy Scriptures.

And this is what keeps us grounded and anchored to the existing body of truth. This is what keeps false teachers from presenting new Scriptures, year after year, and leading people away from the truth. We regularly hear people speak about preaching which is fresh and new, but that is exactly what the canon of Scripture was written to prevent. Fresh and new is **not** biblical, its secular, its worldly, it's fleshly, it's everything that the Scriptures tell us to resist and avoid. It's the terminology used by pseudo-Christians, who have no appetite for repentance from sin, and no desire for holiness of life. It's the popular cry of the cultural Christian, who wants to be entertained, not convicted, because he/she's never been regenerated by the Spirit of God. And this is the traditional playground of those who claim to have seen and heard from God, and have a fresh new word for us, something to tickle our ears and stir up our emotions. And it always seems to involve the necessity of our sowing a seed, spelled (m-o-n-e-y) into their ministry, to get our share of this fresh new word from God. It's the Protestant version of indulgences, and why not, it certainly worked for the Catholics?

And these are just some, of a whole host of reasons, that the credible theologians with whom I'm familiar, agree on a closed canon of Scripture, and the cessation of direct verbal revelations, now that the New Testament Scriptures are complete. It is impossible to verify the authenticity of claims of verbal revelations. Anyone may claim that God told them anything they want, and you can turn on your television and find men and women doing exactly that, every single day.

Therefore, as a protection of the truth, the Lord gave us a fixed and closed canon of Scriptures. If it's not in there, then it's not from God. But if it is in there, then it is the binding and eternal word of God, and it's not negotiable, and it's not alterable, and it's not unimportant. He's not ever going to give us instructions, or allow us any leeway whatsoever to ignore it, or change it, or tweak it just a little to accommodate our "modern enlightened" cultural preferences.

I hope we can see the importance of the concept of a totally closed and sealed canon of Scripture. Humanity drifts, and sways, and evolves from generation to generation. If one takes a panoramic view of planet Earth, they will find every form of social ideology, of economic policy, of governing authority, and of religious theology. It's quite apparent that humanity cannot reach a consensus of opinion on any of the grand issues of human life. On the issues that we all consider the most important issues of human existence, issues over which we are willing to fight, and even die; we are as divided as a human species can possibly be.

So, if the Scriptures were still open to new input, what would become of those traditional grand truths that Jesus declared, and the apostles presented? Obviously, without any existent means of authentication, this wouldn't work. It is absolutely imperative that the things that Jesus spoke with His own lips, and all the apostles taught to the Christian churches immediately after His ascension, remain *intact* and *unaltered*. Every word that these men spoke, and wrote in their letters, means exactly the same thing **today** that it meant on the day that they said it. Absolutely nothing has changed concerning the holy Scriptures, because they are not the words of men, but the eternal, unalterable, and inspired, word of God. And, as that word tells us, the grass withers, and the flowers fall off, but the word of The Lord endures forever. (1Pe 1:25) Which means - ***it applies forever***, to every people, to every culture, to every ethnic group, and to every time period, until the end of this age and the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth. (Rev 19)

#### **Verse 21:**

***21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.***

Peter goes on to say that no prophetic Scripture was ever made simply by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. Now there might be a lot of questions as to just how this works, but the ramifications are crystal clear. Regardless of exactly how the Lord works this out, through the intellects and personalities of His various prophets, nevertheless, it's absolutely clear that the final result is not the word of man, but the word of God. When one reads prophetic Scripture, truly what he reads is "Thus saith the Lord." When reading the holy prophetic Scripture, we are reading quite literally the word of God, and this is why Jesus could say that the very words that He spoke, they were spirit and they were life. (Jn 6:63) The life is in the Spirit, and the Spirit is in the Word.

Now we could spend a lot of time trying to figure out whether God dictates word for word, or exactly how He interfaces with the individuals, but the Scriptures themselves don't make any attempt to tell us this, so why do we want to spend a great deal of time speculating on matters that are not in the Scriptures, when we could spend our time studying those things which are? The simple truth is, I don't know exactly how He did it, and neither does anyone else except the prophets themselves, and they've all passed away. What matters is that we are told with full assurance that the holy Scriptures are entirely and inerrantly the word of God, written by the hand of man, but not by the will of man.

The apostle Paul, who was a prolific writer of holy Scripture, also affirms this very same teaching when he declared:

***16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be [complete] adequate, equipped for every good work.*** 2 Tim 3:16-17 (NASB)

This would have been an excellent place for the apostle Paul to have told us exactly how the Lord inspires His writers of the holy Scriptures, if he thought there was any need to do so, seeing as how he wrote these very words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But you see, inspired holy Scriptures don't include useless trivia to entertain the minds of men, but only serious information and revelation from the heart and mind of God. And the holy Scriptures declare themselves to be the inspired word of God.

If someone is a critical thinker, they might rightly, and reasonably, ask if accepting the claims of the holy Scriptures themselves as being inspired doesn't amount to circular reasoning. This is a fair question, and the answer is, if that were the only evidence that we had, then it would be circular reasoning; but we have the personal testimonies of both Peter and Paul that the holy Scriptures are inspired by God. But that's not all, we must examine the content itself, and see if it lives up to its claim. On this count the holy Scriptures stand completely alone in the universe as a literary work. Those who are familiar with them will freely declare that if there is anything that has ever been inspired by God, it is the holy Scriptures; they do, without doubt, live up to their claim of inspiration. So, we have their own declaration of inspiration, we have their content proving worthy of the claim, and we have the personal testimonies of its writers, all unanimously testifying to the divine inspiration of the holy Scriptures.

And furthermore, if the preceding isn't sufficient, we have the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds as we read the sacred words and behold the effects that they have on our heart and on our mind. Now the world is filled with literary works that stir the emotions, so we can't let this be the primary evidence, but nevertheless, if the words are truly the inspired words of God, then we would expect that they would have a significant impact upon us when we read them, as our hearts and minds are impressed with their majesty, and truth, and compassion, and righteousness.

And having said this, I can now add, that how one reacts to holy Scriptures is one of, if not the most reliable indicator of genuine regeneration by the Holy Spirit. If one is born again, they have the ability to see, that is to perceive, the majesty and truth recorded in the Scriptures. (Jn 3:3) The words will have deep and profound meaning, because the words are spirit, and the words are life, to the ones who are truly born again. (Jn 6:63) If the Scriptures do not evoke such a reaction in you, if they are mostly unintelligible, and make little sense, and evoke little or no passion, if they're even just plain boring, then it is highly likely that the Holy Spirit is not resident within you.

If this is so, if this is an honest description of you, then you have two distinct possibilities before you. You can be angry, because you think you've just been insulted, or, you can be profoundly grateful that someone has been honest enough to lovingly tell you the truth. Because, **genuine** salvation begins with the knowledge of the truth. (1Tim 2:4) Salvation begins when one realizes, and is willing to confess, that they are deceived, and lost, and not what they thought they were, or claim to be. It is only from this position that one is ready, and willing, and desirous, to cry out to the Lord for forgiveness, for repentance, for that gift of saving faith in Jesus Christ that regenerates the soul, that changes the mind and renews the heart. That gift that opens the eyes to the kingdom of God, and generates a passion for His kingdom and His righteousness, as described in those holy and divinely inspired Scriptures.

What we've just said here is pretty much what Jesus said, as He roamed the countryside throughout Israel. And I suppose the reactions will be the same as they were in His day. When He preached to the masses, the vast majority found His preaching very interesting, but they never really did anything about it. They never came to any conclusion as to who He was, or exactly what it was He was telling them. After all, they had herds that needed tending, and crops that needed attention, and jobs and homes and families to take care of, and this Jesus guy spoke some interesting words, and did some amazing things, but He didn't seem to offer them much help with any of these tangible earthly things.

Then there was the religious ones, who felt like they had been insulted by this guy, who had the audacity to insinuate that God was His actual Father, and all of them were sinners. Who did He think He was anyway? And they harbored varying degrees of anger and animosity towards Him, from just general annoyance, all away to raging hatred.

But then there was a **very small minority**, made up of every diverse group, and type, and most of whom were outcasts, but who seemed to understand what He was saying, and believed His testimony. Their reaction to Him was immediate submission. Some walked away from their jobs to follow Him, some even had to leave their families to follow Him, but all were willing to fall at His feet and worship Him. All were willing to confess their sins before Him, and plead for His forgiveness. All were eager to repent of their sins and follow Him in total submission. So, the question is - When **you** hear the Scriptures, the divine and inspired word of God, what's **your** reaction?