

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 22 November 2020. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Authority of Scripture

2 Peter 1:20-21

We live in a day in which the Bible is attacked, mocked, and blasphemed without any sense of shame. There was a time, not so long ago, when people in Western societies were not so bold to mock God's Word; but Satan has been working overtime to harden men's hearts against this Book. It started in earnest about 250 years ago, when Western societies embraced **Deism**, and the principles of the so-called "**Enlightenment**." Deism denied that God is a personal God who is in control of man's affairs; and it therefore concluded that man must solve his own problems, by his own reason. About that time, a man named **George Hegel** told us that "truth" is found by mixing opposing beliefs, and by finding a "synthesis" between the two. (Of course, this philosophy assumes that there is no such thing as absolute truth in the first place.) Then came **Higher Criticism**, which seeks to find the "truth" of who *really* wrote the books of the Bible, through the work of the "scholars." (Of course, these "scholars" begin their search with the assumption that the Bible cannot possibly be God's Word.) Next came **naturalism**, **uniformitarianism**, and Darwinian **evolution**, which deny that the universe was created in six literal days by an all-powerful God. Instead, these philosophies assert that the universe "evolved" out of primordial chaos, over billions of years. Then came **Marxism**, which seeks to establish society upon the satanic principles of communism and socialism. This cruel, crushing boa constrictor called "communism" has already murdered hundreds of millions of people; and at this very moment, unspeakably wicked oligarchs all over the world are using the Covid-19 crisis to expand the power of the state; to shut down churches; to destroy freedom of speech and assembly; to destroy economies; to prepare us for a cashless society, a "universal basic income," and detention camps; and, ultimately, to bring in the "Great Economic Reset" (in other words, "world-wide communism").

While the baby serpent of Marxism was emerging from its egg, the **godless psychology of Freud, Jung, and Rogers** was emerging, as well. These wicked men denied that man's real problem is sin and separation from his Creator. Instead, they alleged that man is a mere chemical machine, who can be taught to "cope" with life through mind-altering drugs, and psychiatric techniques such as hypnosis. Then came **rock and roll**; the **drug culture**; the perverse entertainment of **Hollywood** (most of whose moguls and stars are, by open admission, at war with God); and countless other godless movements, such as a revival of Gnosticism, occultism, and witchcraft. All these movements have one thing in common: they deny that this Book is the divine Authority for our lives.

Today, an army of godless rebels from all nations, armed with the indoctrination that they have received from false religions, from Luciferian secret societies, from socialist governments, from secular schools, from the God-hating media, and from the reprobates in Hollywood, are joining in unison to mock, shout down, and vilify the Bible. Yet, no matter how vehemently men may try to undermine and discredit this Book, and to deny its authority, they cannot destroy it. The Bible stands; and, far from being broken, the Bible continues to break to pieces every false way of man.

This morning, we are going to see what the Apostle Peter had to say about the authority of the Word of God. If you do not know Christ as your Saviour, you need to hear this message, because some day, you will be judged by the words of this Book. You need to realise what this means for you! If you *do* know Christ as Saviour, you need to be even more firmly established in the truth that *this Book alone* is the Authority for every area of your life! The title of this message is ***The Authority of Scripture.***

Read 2 Peter 1:20-21.

From our passage of Scripture, I would like to point out three truths about the Scriptures. First of all...

I. No Scripture is an island to itself (v. 20).

In **verse 20**, Peter makes a powerful statement about the authority of Scripture. He says that “**No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.**” Now, what does Peter mean by “**private interpretation**”? Well, the Greek word for “private” is *idios*; and *idios* means “its own,” or “separate.” What Peter is saying is that no Scripture stands on its own, apart from other Scriptures. There is no Scripture that has its own unique interpretation of truth. There is no part of the Bible that doesn’t jive with the rest of the Bible. Not one book, chapter, verse, or single word of Scripture teaches anything that *contradicts* or *disagrees with* the rest of Scripture. There is not one verse or passage of Scripture that is like a little “island” in the middle of the ocean, separated from the “mainland” of the rest of Scripture. All Scripture agrees with all other Scripture, 100% of the time!

This Book is amazing! It was written by about 40 authors, from every walk of life--from shepherds, to farmers, to fishermen, to priests, to governors, to kings. It was written in 3 languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), over a period of 1,400 years, on 3 different continents. Yet, it all agrees together. The Bible forms a single theme; and that theme is the salvation of mankind through the God-Man, Jesus Christ. All 66 books agree with each other, because they are not merely the words of men, but the words of the living God! You may be sure, as you read this Book, that you will find no “exceptions” or contradictions. If this Book were the mere words of men, then there would be *many* exceptions and contradicting statements. However, such is not the case. Every so-called “contradiction” dissolves when we carefully compare Scripture with Scripture, and find how it all harmonises. The words of the wise men who wrote this Book are like “**nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd**” (**Ecclesiastes 12:11**). The “**one shepherd**” who gave the words of this Book to the “**masters of assemblies**” (the human authors) is the Son of God!

The most vital message of the Bible is the message of salvation. Brethren, aren’t you glad that there are no “exceptions” in God’s salvation plan? Wouldn’t it be confusing (and scary) if there were some people who were saved in a different way from the way that everyone else is saved? How could you be sure which is the *right* plan of salvation—the one that is going to get you through the pearly gates?

I once talked with someone who believes that salvation *today* (in the New Testament age) is by faith in Christ alone; yet, he believes that salvation in *Old* Testament times was *not* by faith in God alone, but by faith *and* the performance of the Law (especially the performance of the animal sacrifices). In other words, he believes that there was a long period of history when salvation was obtained by faith *plus* good works! A brother in Christ who was with me at the

time asked this man, “If salvation *were* partly by good works in Old Testament times, then how do you explain these verses?” Here are the verses that he showed him.

Read Romans 4:1-8.

Read Genesis 15:1-6.

Read Galatians 3:6-9, 13-16.

These verses are very clear. Abraham (an *Old Testament* saint), was justified on one condition: **faith**. Faith in what? Faith in God’s promise that a particular “Seed”—a particular Descendant of his—would one day come to earth to bring salvation to mankind! *Christ* is that Seed! Abraham’s good works and performance of rituals didn’t save him. His good works were the *product* of his faith; but it was his *faith* in the coming Saviour that God accepted.

Now, when my brother presented these verses to the man, and asked him what he made of them, he sheepishly said, “Well, there are sometimes *exceptions* in the Bible.” When my brother pressed him to answer what he meant by “exceptions,” he replied that salvation was *normally* by “faith and works” in Old Testament times, but that in Abraham’s case, in David’s case, and a few others, there were “exceptions.” In these “exceptional” cases, he said, salvation was by faith alone; but normally, it was by faith and works.

Whether this man realised it or not, he was saying that there *are* some Scriptures that are of “private interpretation.” He was saying that there *are* some Scriptures that stand by themselves, and which say things that contradict the rest of Scripture! If this be true—if there really be “exceptions” in this matter of salvation—then how could you be sure of anything? Might there not be exceptions *today*? What if there be certain people *today* who must perform good works to be saved (even though the Bible says that salvation is *not* by our good works)? That would be extremely confusing and frightening, would it not?

God’s Word *always* agrees with itself: thus, we may be sure that God’s plan of salvation has *always* been the same. In **Hebrews 11**, we are told that Abel was accepted by God on the basis of his *faith*. Noah built the ark *by faith*. Abraham left his home country, and received the promise of a son in his old age, and offered up his son Isaac, *by faith*. Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthae, David, Samuel, Elijah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the Shunamite woman, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and many other unnamed saints, all “obtained a good report” *by faith*. It is by faith alone that these Old Testament saints were saved, and produced spiritual fruit that pleased God.

Read Romans 1:16-17.

Paul says that “***the just shall live by faith.***” Now, there are many people who don’t like this statement, because they believe that salvation is by faith *plus* works. Incredibly, there are people who call themselves “Christians” who explain away verses such as **Romans 1:17** by saying that this is just a “Pauline” doctrine. But where did Paul *get* his doctrine? Did he pull it out of thin air? No! He got it from the Old Testament! Let’s look at the Old Testament Scripture that Paul was quoting.

Read Habakkuk 2:4.

My friends, Paul didn't make up the doctrine of "justification by faith." He didn't give us some new, unique teaching that contradicted the teaching of the Old Testament. There never was a works salvation in the Old Testament, or in *any* age of history; and there never will be! **Habakkuk**, an Old Testament saint, declared, by the Holy Spirit, that the just shall "**live**" (receive spiritual life) "**by his faith.**" **Moses** wrote, in **Genesis 15:6**, that Abraham was declared righteous by *faith*. We may be absolutely, 100% sure that *no* prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. God's Word is perfect; and it all stands together!

Now, make no mistake about it: even genuine Christians are often perplexed as to why there are so many different interpretations of Scripture. How do true Christians come up with different understandings of Scripture? Well, one thing is for sure: the problem is *never* on God's end: it is always on our end. God's Word is perfect. By direct command or by principle, the Scriptures tell us everything that we need to know in order to discern God's will. God, by His divine power, has given us "**all things that pertain unto life and godliness**" (**2 Peter 1:3**). **First John 2:20** says that God has given us "**an unction from the Holy One**" (in other words, the Holy Spirit), and that we therefore "**know all things.**" In other words, we are able, through the Holy Spirit, to understand everything that God has revealed to us. We have been given the "**mind of Christ.**"

Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-16.

Why are there different interpretations of Scripture, even among Christians? Well, the problem is *not* that God has failed to reveal the truth. The problem is either that we have not studied it out thoroughly, or that we do not *want* to see the meaning of what we are reading. (In other words, our fleshly desires can blind us.) It doesn't have to be this way, though. We *do not* have to be in the dark about God's will. He has given us the "**mind of Christ**" (the ability to discern the things of God). The same Holy Spirit who wrote the Scriptures lives within every believer; and He enables us to understand "**all things**" that He has written. If this were not so, God would not *judge* us according to His Word. Jesus said, "**The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day**" (**John 12:48**.) A just God would not judge us according to something that He has not equipped us to understand!

What does all this mean? Well, first of all, if you are unsaved, it means that you have no excuse for rejecting Christ. God's Holy Spirit is convicting you and showing you the meaning of God's Word, so that you might understand how to be saved. If you end up in the Lake of Fire, it will not be because the Scripture was "unclear," or because it contradicted itself, or because it was confusing. It will be because you ignored the teaching of God's Word. And what about those of us who *are* saved? What does this teaching mean for *us*? Well, we know that as Christians, we will not have our sins held *against* us when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ; however, we *will* suffer *loss of reward* for not believing right doctrines, and not practicing all that God commanded us. We have the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to help us understand His Word, and discern His will. There is *no* private interpretation of this Book! It all agrees with itself. We must simply receive it by faith.

II. Scripture is *not* the ideas of men (v. 21a).

(Read verse 21 again.) In this verse, Peter explains *why* no Scripture is of any private interpretation. Simply put, no part of Scripture is the mere idea of man! No part of Scripture is man's own fallible opinion. Not even one "snippet" of Scripture is of human invention. If any portion of this Book *were* merely of human origin, then it would not be authoritative. We would not have a book upon which we can rely. We could take it or leave it. But thank God, such is *not* the case! *Every word* of Scripture is given to us by God. This is true of both the Old Testament *and* the New Testament Scriptures. Peter said, "**No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.**" When Peter wrote this letter, the New Testament books were still brand new; yet, Peter considered the Apostles' writings to be just as authoritative as the Old Testament writings! Let's see what Peter said about Paul's writings.

Read 2 Peter 3:14-16.

Did you notice that Peter referred to Paul's letters as "***scripture***"? He put it right on par with the Old Testament. Paul's letters aren't a collection of Paul's opinions; they are the very Word of God. And if they be the Word of God, then God's people *are able* to discern them, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There may be some teachings in Paul's letters that are "***hard to be understood***"; but for Christians, these teachings are *not impossible* to be understood.

Now, unfortunately, even genuine Christians can come up with wrong interpretations of Scripture. Why is this? According to Peter, it is either because they are "***unlearned***" (in other words, they haven't studied the Scriptures thoroughly enough); or, because they are "***unstable***" (in other words, they are not spiritually strong and discerning).

What happens when "***unlearned***" or "***unstable***" Christians misinterpret Scripture? The result is spiritual "***destruction***" (hurt, ruin) in our lives. What are we to do, then? Should we keep our Bibles closed, and not try to understand the Bible, and let the Pastor spoon-feed us everything? Not at all! As believers, we have the Spirit of God to show us the correct meaning of all Scripture. Therefore, we have the *responsibility* to seek and find the correct meaning of Scripture, and to practice it. Godly pastors and teachers are there to help and guide; but *all* God's people should be carefully studying God's Word.

Let's face it: the real reason that some things in Scripture are hard for us to *understand* is that we simply don't want to *believe and accept* them! In fact, some statements in Scripture are so hard for worldly-minded Christians to accept, that they simply choose to *deny* that those particular statements apply to them! How do they deny it? Believe it or not, there are some who say, "Well, in *this particular* verse, Paul was just giving his *opinion*." I'm not kidding, folks! I actually heard some professing Christians make a statement like this years ago; and they used Scripture to try to "prove" their claim. Here is the Scripture that they used.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:10-16.

What is Paul saying in this passage? To begin with, Paul reminds his readers that "***the Lord***" Himself addressed the issue of divorce when He was on earth. Jesus' statement on divorce was clear. Jesus said, "***Let not the wife depart from her husband. But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.***" Now, in this letter to the Corinthians, *Paul* is the one giving this command; but he is simply re-stating what Jesus said in **Matthew 19**, **Mark 10**, and **Luke 16**. That is why Paul

says, “***Unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord.***” In other words, “The Lord already gave this command when He was on earth. I’m merely repeating what He said.”

Now, look at what Paul says next. (**Read vv. 12-16 again.**) In these verses, Paul is clearing up a question that the Christians in Corinth had asked concerning the subject of divorce. Their question was, “What about cases where the husband is a believer, and the wife is *not* a believer (or *vice versa*)? Is it O.K. for the saved spouse to divorce his (or her) unsaved spouse, since they are going different directions?” Paul’s answer to this question was simple. He said that if your spouse be unsaved, you should stay with your spouse, anyway! If your unsaved wife (or husband) be happy enough to dwell with you, then stay with your spouse, and do your best to make your marriage work! However, if, against your will, your spouse decide to leave you, then you are not obligated to run after your spouse. Let your spouse go, and let there be a physical separation. However, even in this case, do not seek to *end* the marriage. Instead, pray that somehow, someday, your spouse might be saved, and you might be reconciled.”

In a nutshell, that was Paul’s answer to the Corinthians. Paul did not, in any way, contradict what the Lord Jesus had already said on the matter of divorce: he simply clarified the question of what to do if you have an unsaved spouse. Paul’s answer isn’t difficult: it’s very clear. Yet, sadly, there are some Christians who try to excuse themselves from Paul’s mandates in these verses. How to they justify it? They say, “Well, this isn’t a command from *the Lord*; this is simply *Paul’s opinion*.” Their “proof text” is **verse 12. (Read verse 12 again.)**

What is Paul saying, here? Is he giving a disclaimer on what he is about to say? Is he saying, “Now, what I’m about to say is my own personal *opinion*, folks; so you don’t necessarily *have* to follow this, if it doesn’t suit your situation.” Not on your life! When Paul says, “***But to the rest speak I, not the Lord,***” he is simply saying that the Lord Jesus did not, *while He was here on earth*, address this specific issue. This question about unbelieving spouses was an issue that had sprung up in the churches since Christ had gone back to heaven; and *new revelation was needed* in order to clear up the matter. Paul is merely informing us that *he* was now the human instrument that God was using to give us this revelation!

Christ *could* have addressed this issue when He was on earth; but He chose to give this revelation to Paul, years later. What Paul is writing here is not his opinion; it was *new revelation* from God. My friend, if you doubt this, then you are in danger! If you believe that there are portions of Scripture that are merely the human author’s opinion (if, for instance, you think that Paul was prejudiced against women when he said “***I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man***”), then you will reason away any part of Scripture that you don’t like. That, my friend, is a *dangerous* spiritual position to be in!

Brethren, we *must* believe and accept what the Scripture teaches about itself! The Bible, with its 66 divinely-inspired books, is *not* like any other book. This Book declares the end from the beginning. This Book rings with authority, because it has proceeded forth from the mouth of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus spoke on earth, people were always astonished, because He spoke as One having authority. The same is true of every word of Scripture, because every word is given by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the “***power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth***” (**Romans 1:16**). It is “***sharper than any two-edged sword***” (**Hebrews 4:12**). It is not the word of men; it is the Word of God!

III. Scripture is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (v. 21b).

(Read verse 21 again.) In this verse, Peter uses a strong word to describe the process by which God gave us the Scriptures. He uses the verb *pheromenoi*, which means “carried, driven, or rushed along.” The idea is that of a strong current in a river, which carries branches, leaves, and debris whichever way it pleases. *That* is how the Scriptures were written! The holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures were “carried along” by the Holy Spirit as they wrote. They wrote exactly what the Spirit put into their minds. As they wrote the words of Scripture, they were unable to exert their own will, or to assert their own fallible opinions. The Apostle Paul called this process “**inspiration**.”

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

What does the word “**inspiration**” mean? Well, let us first make clear what it does *not* mean. “**Inspiration**” does *not* mean “having a brilliant idea,” or “being motivated by something.” People often speak of “inspiration” when they say that a painter was “inspired” by a beautiful sunset, or that a musician was “inspired” by the sound of the birds. However, when the Apostle Paul talks about “**inspiration**,” he’s talking about something radically different. The Greek word for “**inspiration**” is *theopneustos*, which means “God-breathed.” God *breathed* the very words of Scripture into the minds of men; and they wrote them down precisely. Oftentimes, the authors understood little about what they were writing (especially if they were writing prophecies of the future)! Sometimes, they spoke words that they didn’t even *desire* to speak! Yet, the writers of Scripture were not in some kind of trance. They were fully aware of what they were writing. God allowed human authors to use their own vocabularies, and to speak from their own experiences. Yet, every word came directly from God. Before we close this morning, let’s look at an example of how inspiration works.

Read Jeremiah 36:1-4.

God didn’t give Jeremiah the “general ideas” of what to write, and then let him write it down any way that he chose. No, God gave Jeremiah the *very words*. Jeremiah dictated these words to his scribe, Baruch; and Baruch wrote them down precisely as given. Now, God did give Jeremiah the words in Jeremiah’s own personal style and vocabulary; but they were God’s words, nevertheless. By the way, take a look at what happened soon afterward.

Read Jeremiah 36:14-28, 32.

King Jehoiakim didn’t like to hear about his sin; and he didn’t like those condemning words about impending judgment on the nation of Judah. So, what did Jehoiakim do? He cut up the scroll, and threw it in the fire! However, Jehoiakim’s wrath could not destroy God’s Word: instead, God’s Word was glorified even more! *God repeated every word to Jeremiah, exactly as it was originally written*; and He gave him some new Scripture, besides! Jeremiah didn’t have to string all those prophecies back together from memory, because the words weren’t his words in the first place! They were *God’s* words; and it was no problem for God to give Jeremiah His words again. Man may shred God’s Word, and throw in the fire (as the Catholic Church did during the Middle Ages). Man may throw God’s Book in heaps, and burn it in bonfires, and stomp upon its ashes (as the Antifa anarchists did in Portland this past summer). The intellectual “elites” may pooh-pooh the Bible, and mock it, and shout it down. Sinful men

may ignore the Bible, disregard it, or misinterpret it. However, God's Word can never be broken. On the contrary, *it breaks us*, because it is the Authority for our lives.

Conclusion: The Lord said to Jeremiah, "*Is not my word like as a fire...and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?*" You may try to live your life according to your own will; but you cannot avoid the authority of this Book. Someday, we will be *judged* according to this Book. When you stand before the Judge, will He have to judge you guilty, because you refused to believe on His Son? If so, resist Him no longer. Come to Christ in faith today! **Now, perhaps you are saved already.** If so, are you submitting fully to God's Word? Will you hang your head in shame at the Judgment Seat because you lived life largely by your own wisdom, and not by God's wisdom? If so, today is the day to get right with the Lord! Stop leaning on the fallible words of men, and set your feet solidly on God's Word!