

You can't have your own Interpretation

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into the importance of interpreting Scripture correctly, emphasizing that no prophecy of Scripture is subject to private interpretation. It highlights the dangers of untaught and unstable individuals twisting the Scriptures to their own destruction, stressing the need for a solid foundation in understanding and applying God's Word. The speaker warns against the prevalence of false teachings and the responsibility of checking doctrine against orthodox beliefs to avoid falling into heresies.

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:16, 2 Peter 1:20, 2 Peter 3:16, Ephesians 4:14, Acts 17:11, Proverbs 3:5, 1 Timothy 4:16, Colossians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 3:11, 2 Timothy 2:15

Topics: "Correct Interpretation of Scripture", "Guarding Against False Teachings"

Description

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Transcript

So, 2 Peter chapter 1, reading 16 through 21. For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when such a voice came to Him from the excellent glory.

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And we heard His voice which came from heaven, when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to take heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

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. And so we're in verses 20 and verse 21 this evening, but let's just make a connection with last week on verse 19. And so we have the prophetic word, now remember we said that the prophetic word here is not just the prophecies that relate to Jesus' first coming and the prophecies that relate to His second coming, but this is the Word of God.

Clearly the way Peter uses it here, it's relating to the whole of the Word of God. Unfortunately the moment we see that word prophecy, we immediately think that this refers to a prediction about the coming of the Lord Jesus. And in fact it's very interesting on one of the websites that hosts the videos, this particular message from last week, because I titled it, A More Sure Word of Prophecy, that word prophecy gets people's attention.

And the views on that particular message was 10 times what it normally is. Just because people thought, oh we're going to hear some latest greatest stuff about prophecy, and I'm sure they were very disappointed. So the word prophecy does not just, but it relates to inspired speech.

Remember the word prophecy means inspired utterance, inspired speech. And so much of the prophecy of the prophets of the Old Testament had nothing to do with future events. It had to do with calling Israel back to God, calling Israel back to the law, calling Israel out of idolatry.

And so prophecy is inspired preaching. And as I said, the majority of prophecy in the Old Testament, just read for those who've bothered to read Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and these various prophets, you'll find that there's a little bit of prophecy speaking about the future. Most of it has to do with where Israel is at that particular time.

And obviously there's an element also of saying, if you don't come back to God, then this is what will happen. So that's not really prophecy in the sense of prediction. It is simply warning of saying these are the dangers of not obeying God.

And so the word is confirmed, and we looked at the various ways in which the word is confirmed in the Old Testament, and this is true until the morning star rises in our hearts, until Jesus comes. Now we're in verse 20. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.

Now when he says knowing this first, one of the things I was taught when I first went to Bible college was that when you announce that you're going to say my first point, then you better be sure that you have a second and a third point. Now Peter doesn't have a second or a third point, because he is not saying this is my first point and now there will be a second point. He's saying this is the primary thing.

This is the uppermost thing. This is the most important thing. So it's not saying first, second, and third.

This is the important thing. That no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. So when he speaks then about the Scriptures in the Old Testament, whether they have to do with predictive stuff, whether they have to do with Jesus' first coming or second coming, or whether they are just the Scriptures, he is saying they are not of private interpretation.

Now I'm going to spend a bit of time on this because this is a very, very important statement that he is making. Remember that he is going to address false teachers, and most of chapter 2 and some of chapter 3 is going to deal with this issue of false teachers. So what he has established now, and you've got to follow the flow of the argument.

The problem is that we take a verse and we want to build a whole idea on that one verse, and we don't understand where the verse fits into the context in the rest of the letter. And in fact I had some dealings with someone in South Africa on the internet who wanted to discuss a particular subject, said he was looking for advice, I don't know that he was looking for advice, but just taking a verse. And I said, but you have to look at the context in order to understand what the verse means.

You have to look at the verses before, the verses after. You have to look at the chapter before and the chapter after that. If you're going to understand what the verse means.

And so when he speaks then, when he's speaking here about the fact that it is not a private interpretation, the context is that he's dealing with false doctrine. And so how then does false doctrine come? One of the ways it comes is when it is a private interpretation. I'm going to explain that hopefully in a moment.

And so he is saying then what we have, remember the context, we have a more sure word of prophecy. The word of God is sure and steadfast. Every word is true, every word is inspired, and these are things that are attacked, and we'll speak about the inspiration in a few minutes.

But the word is true. It is unchanging. It is reliable.

It is applicable in every situation. And the attacks come against the word of God because if you can take away absolute truth, we spoke about that. If you can take away the absolutes, well then everything becomes relevant, or relative, and you can develop your own system of theology or your own system of truth.

And so he's established that we have a more sure word of prophecy, that the word is confirmed by the Lord Jesus, by the Father, by the Holy Spirit, by the prophets in the Old Testament, and by the fulfillment of prophecy. Now the next thing is if we agree that the scriptures are true, that the scriptures are indeed the word of God, and as I said I'm going to speak about that in a moment. Many people disagree.

Very few Christians and pastors and seminaries today teach the inerrancy of scripture, teach that the scriptures are without error, that they are fully inspired by God. Now if we agree on that, well then our next problem is how we interpret it. And so we can both agree on the veracity of scripture, we can both agree that it is without error, we can both agree that every word is inspired.

But if you interpret it one way and I interpret it in another way, we're going to have a problem. And so that's probably where a lot of the difficulty comes today, because I look at it and I see something, and then you look at it and you see something different. And you say, well, you know, that's my interpretation, that's the way I see it, that's the way I understand it.

And in fact every error can be traced back to this problem. Very few heresies and cults today are based on something other than the word of God. Obviously we understand there are those who have their own translation, and there are those who have books in addition to the scriptures.

But most of those heresies come out of the word of God, it comes with how we interpret the scriptures. And so interpreting is absolutely crucial, it's absolutely vital. And you really have nothing unless you have what the learned people call a solid hermeneutic.

Hermeneutics is how we interpret the scriptures. And in the colleges that I teach in, we lay a tremendous emphasis on training pastors, on training people how to interpret the scriptures. Because if you misinterpret the scriptures, you're going to come to a wrong conclusion.

You can have a road map, anyone know what a road map is? Some of the old people do. You can have a, well, let me get more up to date. You can have Google Maps on your phone.

But if you hold the phone wrong, now for those who, hopefully we all understand that if you open Google Maps on your phone, the top of the phone is north. But north is that-a-way. But if you open your phone and you're looking this way, and you say, OK, now I want to go to, I want to go to, I want to go to Glen Oaks.

So what I need to do then is, it's three streets back that way. The map is right. But the way you interpret the map is wrong, because in fact, Glen Oaks is that way.

You held the phone upside down. And that's the problem with the Word of God. Well, it's not a problem, but that's the problem with how we interpret the Word of God.

The Word of God is right. It is true. But if you're going to apply it incorrectly, if you're going to interpret it incorrectly, if you're going to read it upside down, you're going to come out with a wrong conclusion, and you're going to end up in the wrong place, and not where you ought to be.

So now, having said that then, Peter deals here with one aspect of interpretation. Only one. There are many, many aspects.

There are all sorts of rules as to how we interpret Scriptures. But one of the most important principles in how we interpret Scripture is that no Scripture, no prophecy is of any private interpretation. The word private there literally means of your own.

If you look at the way the word is used, the Greek word is used elsewhere in the New Testament, it literally means of your own. When we say something is private, we say it is my own. It is my private business.

It's got nothing to do with anyone else. When we say something is private and confidential, it means it is personal. It has nothing to do with anyone else.

So what he is saying then is that no Scripture can be interpreted on your own. Wow. You see, that's exactly where the problem is.

Because so many Christians say, well, I don't need to be taught. I can understand the Scriptures for myself. And I know there are Scriptures that speak about that you will have need of no one to teach you.

But again, those are being misinterpreted because clearly the plan and the pattern that God institutes through Paul and through others is that we are taught by teachers. Why does He, when He ascended on high, He gave gifts to men, and He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers? What's the purpose of those ministries if everyone can just figure it out for themselves? Paul says very clearly to Timothy that you need to teach other men the same way as I've taught you so that they can teach others again. And so that's the principle that God established, is that we don't figure out the doctrine for ourselves from scratch every time, but that the interpretation and the meaning and the understanding is passed on from one generation to the next.

Now obviously, if there is someone in this chain who has a wrong understanding, he's going to pass his wrong understanding, his wrong interpretation on to the next. There is that danger. But we have the Holy Spirit, and I'm going to speak about the Holy Spirit in a minute.

But we have the Holy Spirit who's able to bring those corrections. And once we understand the basics, we need to search the Scriptures that we make sure, like the Bereans, that what we have been taught is in fact correct and is the truth. Now I don't want to get too much down that particular road, but here's the

problem today.

And I know that there was a problem 2,000 years ago when Peter writes this, but I don't believe that that problem has ever been as big as it is today. I remember 30 years ago, 40 years ago, we didn't have this problem to this extent that we have today. Because today, every Tom, Dick, and Harry is his own guru as far as the interpretation of Scripture is concerned.

And you find that people come up with the most crazy ideas, and you say, well, where do you get that idea? Well, I was reading the Bible, and God revealed this to me. Now here's the problem, and here's exactly what Peter is saying, is if that is the truth, how come God revealed it to you, and He didn't reveal it to anyone else? You see, we become so arrogant in the human race that there are thousands of Christians running around, thousands of pastors running around, all claiming that they have understood, they know stuff, that they have revelation, they have interpretation that God hasn't revealed for 2,000 years. So what makes you so special? That you know what Wesley and Spurgeon, and the list goes on and on and on, great men of past centuries, and others today, that you know something nobody else got, nobody else understood.

You see, it's your own private interpretation. I was listening to a preacher today, and I won't mention his name, but he was boasting and saying, I was never trained by anyone. Well, it's pretty obvious.

I'm serious, it's pretty obvious. Now, please understand me. Bible schools and seminaries cannot make preachers.

God gifts men to be preachers, teachers, prophets, whatever you want to call them. But without being taught the fundamentals of the faith, the chances are excellent that you will end up in some error and in some heresy. Oh, but what about someone who gets saved out there in darkest Africa, and they just have a New Testament, and nobody... Yes, there are exceptions.

God is able to work with them. I think I've shared with you the testimony of my grandfather who got saved in a prison cell as a prisoner of war. And Jesus appeared to him and preached the gospel to him.

Now, is that the way that God has chosen for the gospel to be preached? No, that is an exception. The way He has chosen is that you go into the world and preach the gospel. The church preaches the gospel.

But it doesn't mean that He can't operate outside of that in an exceptional situation. But the exception doesn't prove the rule. So the rule is that we are taught, and one generation teaches the other.

But when we come up with our own fancy ideas, we must question. And folk, I cannot stress this enough, the importance of checking that we are right. At the beginning of this year, if I remember right, when we came back from Australia, the beginning of the lockdown, when I was still preaching inside with nobody in here, I spoke about getting on a train in England and having a ticket and finding... And the train was going in the right place, but I needed to get off halfway, and the train didn't stop at that particular station.

We need to check. We need to make sure. And the way that we check is to find other points of reference.

I think I may have shared with you, I think I did, but for those who are new, maybe you've forgotten, others have forgotten, but in South Africa, one of the port cities is a city called Durban, which is an hour away from where we come from. And in order to get into the harbour, the ships have to come into a very narrow channel. It's dredged so that the big ships can come in, and in fact, the captain of the ship cannot bring the

ship in.

A pilot has to go out, and he gets on board the ship, he goes out on a tugboat, he gets on the ship, and the pilot will bring the ship into the harbour. And we, Inna and I, and our kids, one day we're down just watching the ships, and we were able to get a ride on the pilot tugboat. And we went out with a pilot and watched him get on board and bring the big ship in.

But when he brings the ship in, it's like a bay. And on the other side of the canal, or the channel in which he comes, there are three lights. But it's a built-up area.

There are many houses and streetlights and all sorts of lights. But there are three specific lights that he has to line up. And when he lines up those three lights, he is on the right way, on the right, in the channel.

If he's 10 feet to the left or the right, he's going to get into a sandbar. Now, he can't choose any lights on the bank, because there are many lights. He can't just choose one light.

There are three lights that must line up. And folks, the same is true of the Word of God, is that what happens is that we get our own interpretation, and then we say, well, it's got to be right, because I got it. Some go a little further, and they say, well, let me check and see whether, in fact, I'm right.

And so I start shopping for someone who will agree with my point of view. So you knock on the first door, you watch the first video, read the first book, whatever you do. Oh, no, no, he doesn't agree with me.

So, okay, he's wrong, I'm right. Now, the problem is that if you shop long enough, eventually you'll find somebody to agree with you. Well, you may find somebody like myself, who eventually gets tired of disagreeing, and say, well, just have it your way.

Okay, now I've got confirmation. Remember the principle, two or three witnesses. But we don't need two or three witnesses in order to confirm our doctrine.

We have thousands of witnesses. We have 2,000 years of teaching. We have thousands and thousands of good, solid doctrine, and theologians, and preachers, and teachers that we're able to refer to.

And if your doctrine does not line up with what we call orthodoxy... Now, when I use that word orthodoxy, I'm not meaning Greek Orthodox or Armenian Orthodox. The word orthodox means commonly accepted, commonly believed. When we say that the way that we're running our service tonight is unorthodox, what do we mean by that? It's not the normal way to do things.

What would be the... And I'm stretching the word of the meaning of the word a little bit. But what would be the orthodox way for a church to meet? Here, inside of the chapel. For us to be outside here is not the norm.

It is extraordinary. It is strange. It is unorthodox.

And so there is orthodox doctrine. And again, it's got nothing to do with Greek or Armenian or Cypriot orthodoxy. But it simply means there are common doctrines that we hold in evangelical Christianity, in Christianity for 2,000 years.

And when you come up with the idea that there is no three in the Trinity, but there's only two, well, you better check. Because it's very easy to check those kinds of things. Is it possible that we can disagree on

some of the points with that which is orthodox? Yes, it is possible.

And there are one or two points in my own theology which differs from what is commonly held. But you need to be very, very sure of your facts when you choose to go outside of what is orthodox. And those points do not change anything of our main doctrine.

They are minor non-essential issues. And so, folks, no scripture can be interpreted the way you choose to interpret it. It has to be checked.

It has to be agreed by the broader body of Christ. Now, immediately you're going to tell me, but, you know, everybody disagrees on all sorts of things. There are no two churches in LA probably that agree 100%.

Yes, there are no two churches that agree 100%. But you can go to any, and I use the word evangelical not in the modern sense of the political thing it has become. But you can go to any evangelical church in LA and ask them about the essentials of the faith.

And they will all agree on the essentials of the faith. What do we mean by the essentials of the faith? The Trinity, the eternity of Jesus, that Jesus is without beginning, without end, that He is God, that the scriptures are inspired, that the scriptures are sufficient, that the scriptures are without error. These are things that we all agree on.

The things that we generally disagree on are non-essential things, like whether you sing hymns or choruses, or whether you have contemporary music or traditional music. Those are non-essentials. Whether you have little cups in communion, or whether you have one big cup in communion.

Whether you have communion once a week, or once a month, or once a day. Those are not the critical things. But when you speak about communion, is it literally the body, the blood of Christ? Is it literally His flesh? Or are they symbols? Now we're getting into major issues.

All right, so no prophecy, no scripture can be interpreted privately. If you think you have a doctrine that you have dreamt up, that you have figured out, and you can't get agreement with respected teachers. I mean, you can get anyone to agree with you.

And we spoke about their witnesses last week. You remember there were those witnesses that testified that Jesus was a criminal, basically. Well, the first problem they had is they couldn't get three witnesses or two witnesses to agree.

And then eventually when they did get them to agree, they agreed on a lie. Oh, Jesus said He was going to break down this temple. But Jesus never spoke about the temple.

He was speaking about the temple of His body. So you can, if you dig long enough and hard enough, you'll find someone to agree with your view, whatever, however crazy it may be. But that's not the point.

When I'm checking my doctrine, and I check my doctrine every day, every time I write something, every time I prepare to preach, I check whether what I'm teaching is correct. And I don't check it by the cults. I check it by orthodox and recognized teachers, theologians.

What does this one say? What does that one say? And it's not so that I can establish my doctrine. I established my doctrine a few years ago. But to make sure that when I stand here, I'm not teaching something which is not right.

Here's an example. When it says that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, some people say that that refers to the prophets, how they interpret their prophecies. And others say what I'm just telling you tonight.

And that is that this applies to anyone who is interpreting Scripture, that you can't put your private interpretation. How do we know which one is right? Well, I can say, well, you know, I just like this idea. No, that's not how you establish doctrine.

I now have to look at the commentaries, and sometimes I will check 20 or 30 commentaries. And when I disagree with them, I need to understand the background of who I'm disagreeing with. Why do I disagree? Do I have a totally different philosophy than I have? So I don't want to get into the whole process.

But folks, the important thing is to check, and check, and check. In woodwork, we say that you need to measure twice and cut once. Because once you've cut, it's too late.

Well, when it comes to doctrine, you better check more than twice. Because once you establish an idea in your mind, and especially once you start speaking to others about that idea, and they run with that idea, and it's not the truth, it's impossible to bring that back again, to undo the damage that you've done in your own thinking and in the minds of others. So no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.

Now, I was hoping to deal with the next verse, but I think I'm going to just finish this verse, and then we'll break for tonight. So let's go to 2 Peter 3 and verse 16. So in the same letter, the end of the letter.

Now, this is a complicated verse, and we're going to unpack the verse when we get there one day. But he says, as also in all his epistles, speaking about Paul, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand. So some of what Paul writes is difficult to understand.

We know that. Now, but here's the point. Which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of Scripture.

So Peter is now giving us two attributes of those who twist Scripture. Those who put the wrong interpretation on Scripture. He gave us the first one, that they are making up their own ideas, private interpretation.

But here he's giving us two other things. The first is that they are untaught. Now, that's exactly what I've been trying to say.

They are untaught. In fact, the guy I was listening to today, boasts of the fact that people ask him, but where did you get these ideas? Who taught you? And he says, nobody taught me. Exactly.

You're untaught. You're untrained. In the word of righteousness.

And it doesn't matter how many books you read. If you've not, if your thinking has not been disciplined by solid preaching and solid teaching, if you've not been disciplined as an individual, you will remain untaught. Some time ago, I was approached by a preacher in another, in another town, another country actually.

He said, will you disciple me? He's already the pastor of a church. Now, I'm not saying that I'm anything, but my conclusion, and I'm still figuring this one out on this particular, but my inclination is to say, no, I can't teach you. Why can't I teach him? Because he has a wrong foundation.

And in order to teach him the truth, I have to undo his whole foundation, because where he went to seminary and what he was taught and what he learned is nonsense. So it doesn't matter whether you have degrees. The question is, were you disciplined? Because it's not head knowledge.

It's how we deal with the word of God, how we apply the word of God. And so they are untaught and they are unstable. In fact, the whole of chapter two is going to deal with many attributes of these false preachers.

But here are just these two. They are untaught and they are unstable. The word unstable here, I don't believe that he is speaking so much about being emotionally unstable.

But I believe what he is talking about here, because the way the Greek word that he uses here is really the word unestablished. In other words, they have no foundation. Why would a house be unstable? Because it doesn't have a foundation.

And so because they are untaught, they don't have a foundation and they twist the scriptures. Now, folk, why am I emphasizing this? Why am I taking a whole evening about on one verse? Because this is exactly what is going on around us all the time. Any yahoo can start for himself a YouTube channel.

In fact, my granddaughter just turned 13. And one of the things she couldn't wait once she was 13 was to have her own YouTube channel. So a 13-year-old kid can have a YouTube channel.

And you get a camera or you get a phone and you can go on there and you can talk the biggest lot of nonsense in the world. And there are thousands and thousands and thousands of YouTube videos talking the biggest lot of nonsense about whatever, about Christianity, about politics, about motor cars, about all sorts of stuff. Everybody thinks they know something.

But do they know? And folk, there are preachers who have built a whole following just on the Internet. They have no church. They have nobody that they're accountable to.

They have no fellowship. They just get on the thing and they take the Bible and they twist it and they turn it apart and they mess it up because it makes good money. Peter's going to deal with us in chapter 2. Any Tom, Dick and Harry can get a few friends together in their house and because they have a charismatic personality, establish a church and have hundreds and thousands of people in their church.

But they are untaught and they are unfounded. Without a foundation, they're unstable. And one of the attributes of being unstable, Paul deals with this in Ephesians chapter 4, which I've quoted already that when he ascended, he gave gifts to men.

And he says that if we are not brought to maturity, we are tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. That's the character of being unstable. If we don't have a doctrinal foundation, every wind of doctrine will blow us this way and that way.

And you look at people and you say, how can this pastor, how can this preacher buy into this heresy? And there's lots of heresies going around because they don't have a foundation. And so they're blown by this latest fad, this latest book, this latest preacher, whatever, just blown by the wind. And they'll ride that thing until that crashes.

And then they'll pick up the next thing and they'll blow in the other direction. They're unstable because they have no foundation. So let's get back.

Where are we? No prophecy. This is the prime thing, Peter says. No prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you, Lord, for its riches and for its depth and its beauty and its glory. And yet, Lord, the responsibility that comes with interpreting prophecy and scripture.

And Lord, I pray that you would help us to be those who are like the Bereans, who search the scriptures, who check the references, and make sure that what we do and what we believe is indeed the truth. And Lord, I pray that for those who may be watching on the video and have some aspirations to being a preacher or being a blogger or any of these things. Lord, that they would not begin to open their mouths until they've been taught, until the foundation has been laid in their lives of truth.

Not just of truth, but of integrity. Integrity in dealing with the word of God. And so, Lord, I pray that you'd help us.

We live in desperate times. We live in times, Lord, when they're just like at Berea, that everyone seems to have the desire to think up some new thing and to tell some new idea. And people are surfing the internet and surfing YouTube all the time, looking for the latest, greatest preachers with some great new fancy ideas.

Help us, Lord, to search the old paths. Help us, Lord, to get back to the foundations of your word. Because, Lord, there is so much there that we haven't obeyed yet, and yet we're chasing after some newfangled ideas.

And so, Lord, I pray that you'd help us to be responsible, to be accountable, to be wise as we interpret the word of God. I ask this in Jesus' name. I pray, Lord, that you would continue with us in the rest of our service.

And, Lord, for those who watched on the video, I pray that you would bless them in Jesus' name.

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