

Men Moved by the Holy Spirit Spoke From God

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of heeding the prophetic word and understanding that the meaning of Scripture is objective and fixed, given by the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 34:49

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:19

Topics: "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on 2 Peter 1 and highlights the main point of the chapter, which is to be a people empowered by hope to lead lives of love. The preacher explains that believers have been given divine power to live godly lives, and this power is activated through the precious promises of God. The sermon emphasizes the importance of holding onto these promises and allowing them to guard against sinful allurements. Additionally, the preacher discusses the role of the prophetic word in guiding believers through the dark world until the day of Christ's return. The sermon concludes with three implications for believers: discipline, humility, and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org. Second Peter 1, 16. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his glory.

For when we received honor, for when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was born to him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. We heard this voice born from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word made more sure.

You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all, you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation. Because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

We can sum up what we've seen now so far in 2 Peter 1 with the three pictures that you might possibly remember from the last three messages. The hot fudge Sunday, the man swimming against the ocean current, and the lamp shining in the dark place. Verses 1-4, the main point there was that divine power has

been given to believers to lead lives devoted to godliness, or we could say to brotherly kindness and to love.

And that that divine power becomes effective in daily life through precious and very great promises. So, if we hold those promises out in front of us, like the hot fudge Sunday, and let them captivate us and allure us, they exert on us, as it were, a divine power that guards us from sinful allurements and keeps us on the narrow path of love and righteousness right on into eternal life. That was the point of verses 1-4.

Then, in verses 5-11, we learn that this divine power has been given to us not to make us lazy or limp in the water, but rather to make us zealous and diligent to press on and advance in Christian virtue. The evil remaining in our heart and all those temptations that surround us from without are like an ocean current which are pulling us ever backward towards unbelief and towards destruction, and therefore anybody who treads water in the Christian life does not stay still, but goes back. And therefore the point is, be zealous to press on and add to faith, virtue, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly affection, and love.

And in doing that, we confirm, according to verse 10, our call and our election. That is, the genuineness of our confidence in the promises of God by which we are saved is confirmed by the diligence with which we stake our lives on the promises of God in efforts to be Christ-like. That's the point of verses 5-11.

And then last week we saw in verses 12-19 that Peter zeroes in on one particular shining promise, namely, this Jesus Christ whom Peter had known and walked Galilee's streets with is coming again in majestic glory. And he says that he has this prophetic word, which he learned from the Old Testament about the Messiah, confirmed and made more sure by an eyewitness experience, namely, when Peter and James and John went up on the Mount of Transfiguration and Jesus was transfigured before them and appeared in majestic glory. And Peter saw that as a preview of what Christ was going to be like when he came again.

And therefore he feels very confident to say that his coming will be in power and in great glory. And that hope then, that prophetic word about the coming of Christ, is like a lamp. That's the third image.

Shining in the night, in a dark place, and we are being guided through the dark world of this night by keeping in front of us the prophetic word about the hope we have in the second coming of Jesus Christ. Till the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. So, in a word, what I think this chapter is all about is simply this.

Be a people empowered by hope to lead lives of love. That's all Peter wants to say in a nutshell. Or, to put it another way, let your confidence in the coming day of joy make you compassionate in the present night of woe.

Okay? If you could take that away, I think you've got 2 Peter 1. But, we're not done with it. There are two more verses, and those we want to look at this morning. And see how they fit in to this purpose, because I think they are subsidiary supports, you might say, to the main point which we've already seen.

So, first of all, what we want to do is ask about the connection between verse 20 and what has gone before, especially verse 19. Now, all the English versions, all the modern English versions, make it harder rather than easier to see what that original connection is, because they all start a new sentence at verse 20. The NASB even goes so far as to stick in a totally unwarranted but at the beginning of it, which doesn't belong there at all.

It's not a new sentence, and the good old King James comes through correctly by translating it, knowing, it just continues on, knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. Now, remember that in verse 19, the main point is an admonition, namely, give heed to the prophetic word, keep your eye on the revelation of the Son of God coming as it has been revealed in the prophetic word, as to a lamp shining in a dark place. Now, let's boil verse 19 and 20 down into their essentials and see how they're connected.

It would go like this, pay attention to the prophetic word, knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. So, you can see there's a really close connection between what we know about prophecy in verse 20 and our giving heed to it in verse 19. But now, what is that connection more specifically? I see two possibilities, and we've got to weigh these two, because it'll make a big difference in the way we read and understand the text.

One possibility is that verse 20 is giving to us the reason for why we should give such close heed to the prophetic word in verse 19. And then it would read like this, give heed to the prophetic word because you know, first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. The other possibility is that verse 20 might be giving us not the reason for why we should give heed to the prophetic word, but rather is telling us how to do it, or giving us some principle to guide us in the way we give heed.

And then the translation would go something like this, give heed to the prophetic word by remembering this principle first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. Those are the two possibilities, it seems to me. Either verse 20 is giving us the reason why we should pay such close attention to the prophetic word, or it's telling us how to go about it, giving us some interpretational guidelines for how to do it.

But now, which of those two is in Peter's mind? That's the question we always ask. What did the author intend here for us to understand? And I think the only way we can answer that question now is to ask what does verse 20 mean more specifically. So let's do that and then come back and we'll put the two verses together after we've decided what this verse 20 by itself means.

It says, no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. Or as the RSV says, no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation. Now, there are good, sound Bible teachers who disagree in three different ways about what this text means.

And I want to tell you what the three interpretations are and then give you the reasons why I accept only one of them. And I think we can learn a lot by just heeding what the different interpretations have been. Here's the first way that people have tried to understand verse 20.

The first interpretation says, what the verse has to do with is not our interpretation of prophecy, but the prophet's interpretation of his surroundings. And what the verse is saying is, no prophecy is the result of a prophet's private interpretation of what he's looking at. Rather, his prophecy is given by God, as verse 21 says.

That's the first way. And then, if that's true, the connection between verses 19 and 20 would go something like this. Give heed to the prophetic word, because no prophecy is a mere private human interpretation of events, but rather, is the very word of God about events.

Okay? That's interpretation number one. It doesn't have to do with our interpretation of prophecy, but a prophet's interpretation of the events surrounding him and the future into which he's looking. The second very widespread interpretation is the Roman Catholic interpretation of these verses.

There is a fairly standard and typical Roman Catholic view of what's going on here. And basically what it says is this. No, verse 20 really does have to do with our interpretation of prophecy, not a prophet's interpretation of events.

And what verse 20 is saying is that no individual can interpret prophecy on his own, but rather, the meaning of Scripture has been entrusted to the Church, and therefore, in order to interpret Scripture correctly, individuals must look to the official teaching office of the Church for its interpretation. Basically, the official pronouncements of the Roman See, or the papal pronouncements. Now, until recently, with Vatican II, 20 years ago, that had kept the Scriptures in the Catholic Church pretty much locked up in Latin, and had kept many Latin or Roman Catholic laymen in much ignorance about the Scriptures.

And a lot of that is in flux now, and in change since the second Vatican Council. But, just recently, I read a letter from a priest in California, sent to a young man in our Church, urging him not to abandon the Church, the Catholic Church into which he had been baptized, and not to forsake the sacraments. And in three single-spaced pages, arguing for him please not to forsake the Church, there was not one reference to Scripture.

And as I reflected on that, it occurred to me that I think this priest would have been compromising his principles had he argued from Scripture that he should return to the Catholic Church. Because, in principle, it is the Church that gives credence to the Scripture, not the Scriptures that give credence to the Church in the Roman Catholic way of thinking. It's the old Reformation problem all over again.

Even with all the changes that are going on for great good in the Catholic Church, by and large, in practice, it is still ecclesiastical tradition, not Scripture, which is supreme. And that's borne out in many, many practical ways of acting and speaking. And I want us to be very much aware that one of the hallmarks of our Protestant faith is that the Church and its ministers stand under the judgment of Scripture, and not vice versa.

Now, the third interpretation of verse 20, we'll come back to assess these in just a minute. The third interpretation of verse 20 says, No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation really means no individual should feel free to interpret prophecy according to his private whim. That is, you can't just give Scripture any old meaning you please.

There is a true meaning, and it is from God, as verse 21 says. Now, which of those three understandings of verse 20 are or is correct? Is the one that Peter had in view? Let's take them one at a time. The Catholic interpretation.

I can't get to first base with that interpretation primarily because it has to be read into the text. It can't be gotten out. To be sure, there's a warning against individualism and idiosyncratic interpretation.

But there's not a word here about who should take the place of the individual, namely the Church or the official papal teachers. So I can't follow that since there's no evidence that that in fact is what is being said here. So for me the choice is between the first and the third.

Is verse 20 saying that no prophecy is the result of a prophet's private interpretation of events? Or is verse 20 saying that after the prophecy is given in Scripture, it is not subject to being handled willy-nilly by anybody that comes along to make it mean anything they want it to mean? I think the second interpretation is correct, and I'll try to give a couple reasons. I think what verse 20 is doing is warning us not to play fast and loose with the meaning of Scripture. And here's the reason.

Peter, it seems to me, has in mind false teachers here whose problem is not that they reject the authority and inspiration of the prophets, but that they twist the prophets' meaning to suit their own private desires. Look at the very next sentence, chapter 2, verse 1. Here we can see that he has these false teachers very heavily on his mind. He says, false prophets also arose among the people just as there will be false teachers among you.

Now, what was these false teachers' attitude towards the Scriptures? Turn over to chapter 3, verse 16. Chapter 3, verse 16 tells us how these false teachers were handling the Word of God. Well, in verse 15, Peter pays his tribute to the Apostle Paul and says that Paul, just like him, has written about many of these same things.

Some of them are hard to understand. And in verse 16, he says, there are some things in them, that is, in Paul's letters, hard to understand which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, and then look at these next words, as they do the other Scriptures. Now, that was my clue what Peter is against.

The problem is that these false teachers, it's not that they are rejecting the authority, evidently, of the Scriptures, or that they're saying, oh, prophets just spoke from themselves, they weren't speaking from God. That's not what they said. They took the prophets for themselves, used them, and then twisted them to support their false teaching.

And we're going to study in the next two weeks what that false teaching was. But this morning, I simply want to use that to show that I think the point now of verse 20 is, when it says, no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, it means no individual is entitled to interpret prophecy or Scripture generally according to his personal whim. Now, if that's the case, what's the connection between 19 and 20? When Peter says, give heed to the prophetic word as to a lamp shining in the dark place, knowing this verse, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, I think he means something like this.

Pay very close attention to the prophetic word, that is, read Scripture carefully, daily, deeply, remembering this principle, first of all, that the meaning of Scripture does not come from the mind of the reader. Or, to put it another way, the principle that should guide us in our attention to Scripture is that its meaning is objective, not subjective. That is, it is fixed.

It doesn't change from reader to reader and reading to reading. It is what it is, unchanging, unending. And the first principle to guide us in our giving heed to Scripture is that there's a true meaning and there are false meanings.

And our task should be to trace out the meaning that is really there, rather than pouring all of our whimsical ideas into the words on the page. Now, if that's the connection between 19 and 20, what's the point of verse 21, the last verse that we'll look at? It begins with that famous word, 4, and that shows, I think, what its function is. It's giving us a reason why we can't play fast and loose with the Scriptures, why we can't just pour into them any meaning we jolly well please.

Interpretation of Scripture dare not be a matter of personal whim, Peter says, because no prophecy ever came by the mere impulse of man, but men, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke from God. In a word, the reason we can't fill the words of Scripture with our ideas is because God intends them to carry His ideas. And those are the ideas that we should strive to find.

The meaning of Scripture is not like putty, that you can squeeze and push into any shape you want it, if you're clever enough. Rather, the meaning of Scripture is a work of the Holy Spirit, and therefore carries solid, firm, divine intentions. And to those intentions we aim in reading the Scriptures.

God has spoken, and it is God's meaning, not our own, that we are to strive for. Now, I think that's the point of verses 19 to 20. Let's step back and try to fit this into the totality of chapter 1. What's the whole chapter saying, and how do these verses fit? Peter's main point, main concern in chapter 1 is that we confirm our call and election.

Verse 10 is the main point of the chapter. He wants us to enjoy the assurance of our salvation. That's the main point.

Then as a means to that end, he reminds us that the genuineness of faith is proved by whether it produces virtue and knowledge and self-control and godliness and brotherly affection and love. And he also goes on to remind us that divine power has already been given to us to enable us to live like that. Then he goes on to remind us that the way this divine power becomes effective in that life-changing way is through the promises of God.

So, as we keep our hearts content, resting, peaceful, assured, happy in the promises of God, we have power to be guarded from the allurements of sin and to keep right on walking in the footsteps of Jesus to glory. Now, the question rises, where do we learn about those promises? Where shall we go to assure our hearts when we become discouraged and downcast and hope becomes dim rather than bright? And Peter answers in verse 19, Go to the prophetic word and give heed to it. Look at it.

Do you need encouragement that the day is really going to dawn? That the life of self-control and patience and brotherly affection and love are really going to issue in glory? If you need encouragement and assurance, go to the scriptures. Go daily. Go long.

Go deep. For men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke here from God and when you go seeking His meaning, you find promises that give hope. Paul put it like this in Romans 15, 4, Everything written in former days was written for our instruction that by the steadfastness and encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

And out of that hope flows all the Christ-likeness that Peter's been talking about. Now let me conclude with three very brief implications that this teaching, especially here at the end of the chapter, has for us. You can hang them on three words.

Discipline, humility, and the Spirit. Discipline, humility, and the Spirit. Suppose that you are a platoon leader, say in the Vietnam War, and you have been trapped with your platoon behind enemy lines and you receive a coded message on a piece of paper from your commanding officer which evidently tells you how he's going to get you out and how you can link up with the rescue team.

What do you do with that message in code? Do you pass it around the platoon and get everybody's impression and then flip a coin and see which impression is the true interpretation of this coded message?

No. You sit down and you labor to break the code. You apply yourself with all diligence to remember what you'd studied about the code and to analyze and to construct until you have a great assurance that you have attained the commander's meaning.

Right? Not your own, nor anybody else's in the platoon. The only meaning that makes any difference in that situation is what did the commander will to communicate. And so it is with God's Word.

God's intention comes to us in human language. Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke Hebrew and Greek from God. So how are we going to hear the meaning within the code? Answer? God has ordained that in His family and even outside His family some very choice ministers devote themselves to mastering Greek and Hebrew to break the code and to bring it over and unfold it in English for all of those who can't read the first code.

But you know, don't you, that English is another code? Little children can't read it. Little children have to submit themselves to the severe discipline of learning how to read. Which is why we always build schools in our missions.

But think further. Isn't it true that our learning ability to read never stops? And that just as a little child must submit himself to the discipline of learning his ABCs, adults must also submit themselves if they would become better readers. Wouldn't it be right to say that the more discipline we exert in construing meaning out of the text rather than pouring our ideas in a lazy way into the text, the better we will understand the promises of God and the fuller with power we will be to lead lives of godliness.

That's the first implication. Discipline in attending to the Word. The second implication, more briefly, is humility.

If you believe that the Bible is the Word of God, which is what this text is teaching, and that therefore it is an authority over you and me, it takes a tremendous amount of humility to interpret it correctly. And you know why? Because so many of its truths are uncomfortable. And the only person who is going to bow before the authority of those uncomfortable teachings is the humble person.

The proud person who still wants to give lip service to the authority of the Bible will take those uncomfortable truths and in the most unbelievably creative and clever ways twist them so they do not say what he doesn't want them to say. And therefore I think in the long run the only sound interpretation is going to flow from people who are broken and contrite in spirit. And the third and final implication is that humility is a fruit of the spirit.

And therefore we have a great need for assistance from the Holy Spirit in our interpretation of the Bible. If He does not overcome our proud hearts and our rebellious natures, we will always twist the Bible so that it doesn't say anything uncomplimentary about us or unsavory about the way we should act or think or feel. The Holy Spirit doesn't add new information to the Bible.

His job is to make us sensitive and submissive to what is already there in the text. And therefore, just as the Holy Spirit of old moved men to speak from God, so it will be those today who are yielded to this same Holy Spirit who will hear most clearly God's Word in the Scriptures. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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