

2 Peter 1:20-2:3. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

Make every effort to remain standing on the word of truth.

Members of a small congregation gathered together for a voters' meeting. The treasurer's report has been handed out and more than a few of the men scratched their heads wondering how they can get things turned around. After twenty minutes or so the discussion then turned from the budget to replacing their retiring pastor by calling a new pastor. Before the voters engaged in any more discussion they were asked to write down a few of their thoughts about what kind of pastor their church needed and what kind of things they saw as important as they looked ahead into the future of their congregation.

After the comment cards were filled out it was the pastor's turn to scratch his head out of concern. Many of the letters spoke of the importance of holding on to God's Word and reaching out into the community with the good news of Jesus. However, some of the comment cards insisted that in order to get more people into the church they should stop practicing closed communion. Another note insisted that the church should soften its position on marriage and homosexuality so that we don't scare so many people away. Another comment card insisted that the pastor should stop preaching about sin and hell and just focus on a more positive message - that way the church can attract and keep more visitors. One card simply read, "We need more people so that we can balance the budget. Change something."

Dear friends, this kind of thing happens more often than what you would think, even in our own church body. The evidence for false teachers is not just found in the big print of newspapers. False teachings and false ideas are not just a problem out in "those churches", or simply out in a place that we label "the world today", but false teachings are all around us and they can very easily be smuggled and secretly introduced into our lives and into our church as well. We need to watch out for false prophets and instead we are to do everything we can to remain standing on God's Word of truth.

The apostle Peter, way back in that first generation of the church, could see this problem already in his day. He knew that false prophets had always plagued the church and

he knew that false teachers would just keep on coming. He knew that the church, throughout the centuries, would have to face this nagging problem because mankind has a tendency to manipulate God's Word when it troubles them. Flawed reasoning, hard and sinful hearts, the sway of popular opinion, sinful pride and greed, are all just a few of the many contributing factors which lead to this continuing epidemic of false teachers and false teachings.

When the Bible presents difficult truths, when it talks about sin and judgment and hell, when it goes against popular opinion, the sinful flesh is appalled. And so the devil seeing the opportunity sneaks in and using that trusty old lie that he has been using from the beginning he whispers in our ear, "*Did God really say?*" Then that serpent manipulates God's Word to lead us away from the truth. It may sound something like this: '*If God is a God of love than certainly he would not send anyone to hell. Did God really say, did he really mean, that hell is a real place?*' '*Jesus showed love to all sorts of people from all sorts of lifestyles certainly he wouldn't condemn a person for how they live or who they love.*' *Did God really say anything about this in his Word that should still apply today?* Or it may sound something like this, '*If God is a just God who demands obedience I just have to do something to earn my salvation.*' In each of these examples of false doctrine, a portion of God's Word is twisted and contorted and brought to the forefront and another section of Scripture is hidden and bent so that the truth is obstructed from sight. And suddenly a destructive heresy or false teaching is smuggled into the church disguised as a rational compromise, a progressive update, or a loving change.

In Matthew chapter 7 our Lord Jesus pleads with his dear flock to watch out for false prophets, especially those who are dressed up in sheep's clothing. Here Peter passionately pleads his case to the same end. Watch out for false teachers and instead firmly hold onto God's Word of truth. In the words leading up to the verses he writes these words of encouragement. ¹² *So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.* ¹³ *I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body,* ¹⁴ *because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.* ¹⁵ *And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.* Apparently, Peter did not have much time left on earth, but one of his final wishes was that God's people would faithfully hang onto and properly handle God's Word of truth. And so in these words we see that His chief concern was to address these faithful Christians to hang onto God's Word of truth long after he was gone.

By God's grace Peter's wish came true. God's Word has been preserved and passed down in its truth and purity. Thankful for this tremendous blessing we are to continue to handle God's Word of truth properly. God's Word is not like sand that moves and shifts whenever the winds of change blow. God's Word is not a ball of clay that we can mold and shape and form to better fit our liking. And the Bible does not simply contain God's Word so that we can pick and choose what we think God actually meant. All Scripture is God-breathed. These are the very words of God given to us in his love. And so Peter encourages the believers with these stirring words. ***Above all,***

*you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.*²¹ *For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

After he encourages the Christian to make every effort to hold on to the truth he then quickly turns his attention onto the false teacher. Compassionate words of encouragement swiftly turn into words of fierce warning. Just like there were false prophets in the Old Testament Church, who spoke against and tried to change God's Word of truth, there will also be false teachers in the New Testament church. They continue to go about their deceptive work, but that does not mean that they are unnoticed by the Almighty God. Peter writes, *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.*² *Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.*³ *In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.* Peter makes it clear that changing or manipulating God's Word is not some harmless activity that goes unnoticed and unpunished by God. This is not just how things will be in a changing world. These false teachers have themselves been deceived and judgment is, therefore, coming for them. And, unfortunately, they will lead more people away from God and into that same judgment through their false beliefs. And then because there are so many false teachers, coming with their own opinions on what God's Word says, many people will simply become so frustrated with the various opinions that they won't even bother trying to understand what God's Word has to say - perhaps you even know someone like that. That is what Peter means when he says that *they will bring the way of truth into disrepute*. The reputation of God's Word is tarnished by those who teach falsely. People will doubt and reject God's Word because of all of the different man made interpretations.

Dear friends, we have been blessed with the very words of our God. Men spoke the very words of God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit and these words have been preserved for us. This is God's rock solid truth upon which we are to stand and upon which we are to build our lives and our church. And so we let Scripture interpret Scripture. We let God's Word, and not man-made opinions, show us what the truth is. And then standing on that truth we proclaim God's Word as he has given it to us. As those prophets and apostles served as the mouthpiece of God in years gone by, let stand on his truth and share God's Word today and tomorrow and into the future. Let us do whatever we can to make sure that the pure word is proclaimed long after we are gone.

The message we have been given, is not always going to be a comfortable message, it's not always going to be popular with this sinful world, but this is God's Word of truth. And God tells us in his Word of Truth that there is a place called hell and sinners stand condemned to suffer for all eternity in that place because of our sin. But

God in his love saved us. He sent his Son to redeem us, to rescue us from this sure destruction and give us certain salvation. He sent his Son into this world so that we might not perish for all eternity. God himself came and endured the agony of the cross as one of us that we might be spared the wrath of God and the endless agony of his punishment. This is what God tells us in his word. We proclaim the horrible and terrible reality of hell in order to warn people about the destruction that is eternal judgment that hangs over those who are not in Christ Jesus. We warn those who have never believed as well as those who are in danger of rejecting the gift of eternal life by their neglect of God's Word. We proclaim the reality of hell in order to reveal the wrath of God as well as the amazing love, the undeserved kindness, the marvelous mercy that God has shown to us sinners. We deserved hell as our final destination but he gives us heaven through faith in Christ Jesus. This is his Word of truth.

The fact that God saved me, that he came to this earth to live as one of us, to die as my substitute, to rise from the dead to give me heaven, these are wonderful truths given to us along with the rest of God's blessed and holy word. These are marvelous truths that go beyond my comprehension, but I don't change them. If I was to change any part of God's Word wouldn't I put these saving truths into doubt? If the church today wants to change what God's Word tells about marriage, or what God's Word tells us about hell, or God's Word instructs us to carefully administer his sacraments, would that not put into doubt how true, how factual, the rest of the Bible is? Wouldn't that put into doubt how solid our salvation is? Why would we ever want to put any of God's Word into disrepute? Why would we ever want anyone to doubt God's Word of truth?

And so we don't change his Word, but instead we proclaim God's Word as he gives it to us. After all, this is HIS HOLY WORD. This is not my opinion. This is not something that the church made up and can, therefore, adjust as we see fit. NO! These are the very words of God. They tell us what we are to believe and what we are to do. They tell us how we are saved in Jesus Christ and how we are to live out of thanks to God. These words of God serve as a mirror bright to show us our dreadful sinfulness and these words of God also shine upon our darkened hearts with the good news of forgiveness in Jesus. We do not, and cannot, change these words. We do not adjust them so that we might simply gain acceptance in the community or keep up with changing times. We do not mold the teachings or manipulate them to fit our liking nor do we adjust them so that we may be better set up for some sort of financial advantage. We cannot and we will not bend to reason, or greed, or comfort, or whatever pulls at us to change God's eternal word. Instead, we do what our Savior told us is the wise thing to do: we build our house, our lives, and our church on this Rock. We are to listen to our God's Word and we are to put it in practice.

Dear people of God, make every effort to hold on to this word of truth so that is proclaimed now and long after we are gone. ²¹ *For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* Amen.