

2Peter 11-09-23b

Let's pick up our study in the book of 2 Peter, and we're at the beginning of chapter 2, looking at the concept of what is and is not inspired scripture. And one of the things we see from the Apostle Peter's words here is that scripture is not of human origin. It comes from the Holy Spirit's influence on men who write it.

And so our job in identifying scripture is to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit. And this is a bit of a puzzle at first, because you could legitimately say, well, isn't that kind of subjective? What if I think it's from the Holy Spirit and the person next to me doesn't think it's from the Holy Spirit? Should we vote? Should it be a democratic process? Should we get a quorum? Here's the thing. Think about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in general.

As soon as you say scripture carries authority because it originates with God's Holy Spirit, Peter doesn't say, this is how you will know. There will be a secret Bible code. If you count every seventh letter, it's going to spell Jehovah or some weird thing.

He says, no, this first of all, the first and first of all, is not an accident. If we want the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives, we want the day star to arise in our hearts. We want to be ready for the dawning of the day of the Lord's return.

We want the word of God to shine like Psalm 119, 105 on our path. Peter says the first thing you need to know is that scripture is from God. Scripture comes to us written down by humans who were enabled and empowered, carried along by the Holy Spirit.

He does not say how you can tell. Why doesn't he give us a technique or a litmus test or some procedure to determine whether or not it came from the Holy Spirit? Why is that? Well, I ask myself this question and I say, well, what are the other ministries of the Holy Spirit? Jesus said, I'm going away, but I will not leave you orphans. I will send you another comforter.

He will lead you into all truth. Paul says the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Well, how do I know it's the Spirit bearing with my spirit? How do I know the Spirit is the one that's comforting me? How do I know that the Spirit is the one illuminating me or leading me into truth? Do we have any sort of scientific tests or procedures or votes that are taken in a group to determine these things? How do we know that the Spirit is witnessing to our spirit? Well, we just know, don't we? We know the way we know when a meal is good and satisfying.

We know because of the taste and the texture and the effect over time. When I eat these spinach salads night after night after night, I am healthy and I have good digestion and I have energy and I can work out and weeks go by where I'm eating largely spinach and I'm doing great. My mind is clear.

My reflexes are sharp. I see the effect. My taste buds tell me it's good.

My body tells me it's good. The results tell me it's good. It proves out over time where if I was trying to eat unboiled poke salad, I would know immediately that something was wrong because unprepared poke salad tastes terrible.

It's poisonous. You will throw up and have the runs and everything else. If you try to eat poke that has not been boiled at least three times, you know right away it's just not spinach.

It's not healthy. I don't know why people would. How did the first people figure out that if you boil it three times, you can eat it boiled at once? Oh, no, I'm sicker than a dog.

Boil it twice. No, I would have given up, you know, after the first try. But well, look, we boil it three times and we can actually eat the stuff.

Well, it's just beyond me. And there's people who will try to make pseudo scripture work in the same way. They just keep boiling it and boiling it until they can get it down.

And I think, did you not get a clue? You know, there's people who keep smoking after that first one. They inhale it and they cough and sputter and turn green and get nauseated. And they think, well, but if I keep trying, I can I can do this.

And they eventually do. And then they can't quit. So Peter says it's the work of the Holy Spirit.

Well, what what are the signs and signature characteristics of the work of the Holy Spirit? For each of us, it is subjective. There is no objective test for the presence or the witness or the ministry of the Holy Spirit. You know, because, you know, you know, because you are convinced of it individually and personally over time.

Right. Isn't that the way it works? Somebody else can say the Holy Spirit told them that I'm their future spouse. You know, you've been your teenage years, early 20s.

Somebody comes along, you know, God told me that we're supposed to get married. Well, maybe he told you, but he didn't tell me. And I can't vouch.

I can't say what is and isn't this ministry, the spirit for anybody else. But I have very little difficulty discerning the work of the Holy Spirit in my own heart. I know when I'm being convicted.

I know when I am recognizing truth. I know when I am looking at Scripture and I'm puzzling over it and praying over it and meditating on it and comparing Scripture with Scripture. And suddenly the light dawns and it comes together.

And I think this, the Holy Spirit is teaching me here. He's helping me to learn something that I didn't know before, to discern and to appreciate. And his ministry has consistent results in that my appreciation for the Lord Jesus Christ grows and grows.

My appreciation for God the Father grows and grows. My recognition of my smallness and yet the grace of God that raises me up with Christ to sit in heavenly places just grows and grows. My insufficiency and God's sufficiency.

There are themes and there are aspects of the work and the plan and the truth of God, the character of God, the grace of God, the love of God that are impressed upon me. And I know that this is the work of the Holy Spirit. I could not have gotten it on my own.

And so it is inherently subjective. So what's interesting to me about what Peter says here is you don't need the Council of Nicaea. You don't need the opinion of the Catholic Church.

You don't need the opinion of the Protestant Church or any particular denomination, any particular Bible editor or any particular pastor. For each of us, now it is certainly worth gaining by the experience of other believers who have been down the road. It's a nice place to start is where untold hundreds of millions of believers have recognized that these books contain the speaking voice of Almighty God.

That's a pretty good clue. But we don't take their word unthinkingly and uncritically. This Bible should speak to me.

And if other books are uninspired and not the work of the Holy Spirit, moving men and carrying them along, then those books won't speak in the same way. They won't have the same life changing power, the same motivation, the same illumination as these. They will be far distant.

It's the difference between good food and spoiled food or non-food like beets. Beets are not food. I'm just telling you.

Green peppers, not food. People try to make them food. They're not food.

Not for me. If you like them, God bless you. Your chemistry is way different than mine.

Gourds and other sawgrass and seaweed and things that people claim are food, I don't find them to be food. I find them to be deleterious and unhealthy and unhelpful and to just not fall in that category. Now, at the same time, we're not saying that truth is relative, that truth is subjective.

Well, your truth is different than my truth. This is not a matter of determining what is truth. Like Pilate asked Jesus, what is truth? It is a matter of how effectively we recognize absolute truth.

There absolutely are inspired books and there absolutely are uninspired books. We are not determining their truth. Our task is to recognize what God has left us by way of inspired scripture.

So we're not going down the road of relativity or subjectivity, but it is a personal experience recognizing the truth. And some people have difficulty recognizing truth even when it stands right in front of them. Look at the Pharisees.

Look at the Sadducees. Look at the scribes. Look at the Jews of Jesus' day who had the incarnate truth in front of them, and so many of them failed to recognize him.

It doesn't mean that Jesus was any less true or any less the Son of God. The problem is in the eye of the beholder. And in the same way, there are people who have difficulty with some of the books of the Bible.

And there are people who think other books, the Gospel of Judas, and the further machinations of Moses, and all these other strange things, are somehow scripture-valuable. You've got your Guide to Science and Health, and the Book of Mormon, and the New World Translation of the New Testament, where they garble and intentionally alter many verses of scripture, dealing with the deity of Christ and so on. And people, they're on their own recognizance.

If they want to treat such things as scripture and try to live in their light, that's their business. I respect your right to do what you think is best for yourself. I respect your right to be wrong.

And you need to respect my right to make my own decisions about what I think is and isn't scripture. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ as believers. Those who aren't will stand before the great white throne and give an account.

It is not my job to convince anybody of the canonicity, or the inspiration, or the truth of any given book of the Bible. If somebody doesn't want to accept James, adios kemosabe. If you don't want to believe the first chapter of Romans, and you don't want to think that the Bible preaches against homosexuality, go, be warmed, be fed, good luck with that.

Not my problem. I am ultimately accountable for myself, and as a father, my family, as a husband, my wife, for what we understand. And that's just about the extent of my authority.

As a pastor, I can present my understanding, my observation. It is not authoritative for you. What I say is not authoritative for you.

I offer it to you. It's my best understanding. You are free to disregard it.

You are on your own. You are accountable before God for what you believe. Don't blame me.

I am a cook in God's mess decks. I take the potatoes. I take the ground beef.

I make flour gravy. I mix it together. I put it out there as best I can.

And it is up to you to figure out if this is helpful or not. You don't have to believe it because I say it. You don't have to believe anything any other pastor says or has ever said.

This is why we all have our own copy of the scripture. And there are assigned functions and assigned gifts like pastor and like teacher. But it is not authority for you.

You cannot blame me. You cannot credit me. Can't go either way.

I just assemble and present as faithfully and as accurately as I can with my limitations what's in the word of God. But this is why Peter is telling you just like he tells me no scripture is of human origin. And the truth of scripture is not of human origin.

I didn't invent the truth. I didn't come up with it. I take no credit for it.

If I can recognize it, if I can assemble it and put it together and make it available, then I have done a useful service. I have been a faithful servant before God to take things, kind of bring them together and put them before you. But each of us is accountable.

We are all children of God. And the truth of God is your heritage as much as it is anybody's. And so we take it and we recognize it as a work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit bears witness with our spirit to every truth that's in scripture. So Peter says, be careful. Look at chapter two.

There were also false prophets among the people. This is the people of the Old Testament, people who had a false message. You remember there was Janice and Jambres.

There was Korah, Dathan and Abiram. There was Aaron himself who made a false proclamation. This is the God that brought you forth from the land of Egypt.

This not even cooled off metal-covered calf. There were false prophets who ministered in the days of the kings, who told them everything will be great. Go into battle.

You're going to win. God is with you. This is all good.

And it wasn't. There were false prophets. Whole groups of prophets.

Probably graduates of the school of the prophets from all I know. So Peter says, there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you. Now look at the, this is what's interesting to me, look at the progress of ideas.

He says, first of all, you need to recognize that genuine scripture is the product of the Holy Spirit. And just as in the past there were false prophets, now there are going to be false teachers. But if you first of all know that genuine truth comes from the Holy Spirit, this is what is going to deliver you, to preserve you, to keep you from being led astray.

You have to understand that it's a product of the Holy Spirit. Well, how does that help me? How do I know if a teaching is false? I hear a guy on the radio and he says, Jesus took up with Mary Magdalene and had a bunch of kids. Or he says, Jesus wasn't really divine.

He was just a good teacher. Various other things that somebody might come up with and say,

how do I know if this is a false teaching or not? Peter says, you'll know because truth is authored by the Holy Spirit. I said, well, how does that help me? Well, we, especially as modern, post-modern, western, scientific, we want a test.

We want a procedure. We want some sort of objective label on it that, you know, this has got the USDA choice stamp. This has got the inspector's number in the pocket.

This has got some kind of proof. It's not the way it works. Our ability to discern truth depends directly on our relationship with the Holy Spirit.

If the Holy Spirit is your guide and your comforter and your constant companion, it's kind of like your spouse or your brother or your sister or your close, close friend. You almost know what they're going to say before they say it. Anybody who's been married any length of time, you can start, and people that just meet each other know that they're soulmates.

You complete each other's sentences. Somebody can say one word. It's fun to be driving down the road, and somebody will say, look at that.

We already know three or four paragraphs about what they're thinking about that thing because, oh, yeah, we saw something like that on another trip, and we had a whole conversation about it, and we just fill it in. It's like when the New Testament authors give you a little snippet from the Old Testament, and everybody fills it in. Everybody knows.

It's common ground. It's familiarity. It is close, warm, personal, intimate, knowledgeable relationship.

Well, Peter says, look, you'll know the truth because it's authored by the Holy Spirit. Say no more. I know the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

I'm familiar with it. I live with it. It's second nature to me, and that ought to be enough.

Why would you need some sort of external proof when you've got the witness of the Holy Spirit? And so the real test becomes, am I on any kind of close terms with the Holy Spirit? If I am, I've got no problems with canonicity, right? Easy. It's like sometimes I find notes laying around where all of us work and make notes to each other about sermons we're working on down at the Crystal Foundation, and somebody says, oh, you know, this transcript doesn't match this media and this and the other. Well, little scraps of paper, and we lay them on each other's desks, and sooner or later they all end up in big piles in my desk drawer, and I pull them out, and I say, and I look at them.

Well, I immediately, I can say this one's from Ken. It's in pencil, and it's got the same handwriting I've been seeing for 35 years. Here's one from Patty, same handwriting I've been seeing for 25 years.

I can sort those things instantly. Sometimes even the text of a note that's typed into a field, I know who typed it because I know the way they type, and I know Ken doesn't put any spaces in his notes. His notes are, there's no spaces.

His space bar, his thumbs just never hit it. So when there's an unspaced note, well, Ken put that one in there, and Patty has a certain way. And I know them.

I've known them forever, and so I can easily identify their work, even without a name on it or a label or anything else. This is how it ought to be. Peter is saying a lot here.

If you want to know the truth, you'd better first want to know the Holy Spirit and be on good terms with the Holy Spirit. Cultivate the fruit of the Spirit. Recognize the Spirit's influence and His still, small voice and His ability to bring Scripture to mind and to confirm and to comfort and to encourage and to strengthen and to direct and to empower and enable us through the Word of God.

We should be so familiar with the work of the Holy Spirit. When Peter says, you want to know how to know Scripture? It's the work of the Spirit. Say no more.

It's like saying, you want to know this handwriting? It's going to be from Patty. If you want to know the notes that pertain to a thing, just look for Patty's handwriting. Well, I know Patty's handwriting, inside out, upside down.

I know the way she spells. I know the way she thinks. I know everything about it.

I can spot it. You could scramble it with 500 people's other handwriting. I would pull it out immediately without question.

It ought to be that way with us. You say, well, that's so subjective. That's so individual.

That's so hard to tell if the other person's. You don't have to worry about the other person. We've got our hands full worrying about ourselves.

And if we know the Spirit, and if the Spirit knows us, then we're going to have no difficulty recognizing Scripture. Ye shall know the truth, Jesus said. How? The Holy Spirit is going to lead you into all truth.

He doesn't say the church is going to lead you into all truth. The various councils are going to lead you into all truth. The canon of Eusebius is going to lead you into all truth.

The table of contents of your Bible is going to lead you into all truth. It's the Spirit. It is inherently invisible and subjective and personal and individual.

And that's where we get it. There were false prophets among the people, even as there will be

false teachers among you all, who secretly... This is not... I mean, if it was a secret, nobody would know about it. Did you know there was a false teaching in our church? Never heard it.

Nobody else ever heard it. That would be a secret. This isn't secret in the sense of nobody knows it.

It is surreptitious. It is unnoticed that it is false. It isn't that the teaching is secret.

It's that people are unaware that it is false. It is surreptitious. It's sneaky.

It's deceptive. They will deceptively... They will look harmless. It will look valid.

It will be accepted without question. And the secret is that it's false. They will surreptitiously bring in destructive heresies.

Now, this is a great clue. Heresy, to be concerned about, is a destructive heresy. So, for example, you think about the nature of the gospel.

What is the gospel? Is it exclusive or inclusive? There's neither Jew nor Greek. There's neither male nor female. There's neither slave nor free.

We are one in Christ. It is inclusive. The only exclusions for the truth of God and the fellowship of God and the blessings of God are based on bad moral decisions.

God is no respecter of persons, but God is a respecter, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, right? It isn't whether you're rich or poor. It isn't whether you're of one race or another. It isn't whether you're one gender or another, one social status or another, one job or another.

It is one mind or another. What is your thinking? What does God say to exclude from a church? Those who are unrepentantly immoral. Unrepentantly immoral.

Separate yourself from. You go to them once, twice, three times. They are unrepentant.

Separate. Treat them as you would a heathen or a tax collector, which means pray for them, pity them, hope for them that they will come around. But you cannot have close fellowship with someone who is actively practicing immorality in an unrepentant fashion.

Separate yourself. Touch not the unclean thing. Don't be a sponsor.

Don't be a tolerator. You have to separate. If someone is unrepentantly immoral, separation is the policy.

And that's just about the only basis for separation. That's what does God say? He doesn't say your poverty has separated you from your God and your lack of money has hid your face from him so that he will not hear. Your race has separated you from your God.

Your gender has separated you from your God. Your status as a slave has separated you. What is it that separates us from God? Your sins, plural.

Your iniquities. Your policy of practicing evil in an unrepentant fashion has separated you from God. Your sins have hid his face from you so that he will not hear.

His policy is I do not hear. I do not fellowship. I do not embrace.

I do not bless. I keep no company with those who practice evil. Look at the eternal future.

Who's not in the heavenly Jerusalem? Outside are the practitioners of immorality. The dogs, the fornicators, the liars. Practicers.

These are policies. And we have to do the same. So, there will be false teachers among you who will bring in destructive heresies.

Heresies are destructive. And one of the things you'll notice is that they do make some other form of discrimination. They do divide the body of Christ based on race or based on gender or based on some other thing that God does not make a basis for separation.

Something other than unrepentant immorality. And so there will be distinction. There will be the us's and the them's.

We are the incult. The mothership is going to come collect us and take us away. The rest of you hopeless people.

You people are not really the true church. You have to be with us. You have to be baptized.

Or you have to have no instruments when you sing. There's some basis. We are the true church and you're not.

We're the good guys and you're not. Because you're not in our denomination. You don't believe our particular understanding of scripture.

Exclusion. This is cults. You've got to be following this personality.

You have to acknowledge this latter-day prophet. You have to perform this particular function. You have to engage in this particular ritual.

There will be these prescriptions and they are destructive because they divide the body of Christ. They make issues out of things that are at best non-essentials and at worst completely irrelevant. They distract from the glory of Jesus Christ.

They distract from the centrality of the gospel. They distract from the mission we have to lay hold of righteousness by faith. To love one another.

Those 65 one-anothers in the New Testament. We've got a different set of priorities here. You need to pay attention to our do's and don'ts.

To our legalism. To our standards of righteousness. Or our standards of inclusiveness and exclusiveness.

You've got to dress a certain way. You can't use cosmetics. All of these other things.

Well, this is a destructive heresy. And Peter says, they're going to be all around you. They will even deny the Lord who bought them.

And this is critical. Because it tells you that false teachers are in fact saved people. They are believers.

There is no unsaved person that is bought with the blood of Christ. They have the propitiation for their sins. He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only.

Also for the sins of the whole world. Their sins are propitiated. But it is only believers who are purchased.

Who are redeemed. The Lord who bought them, that is synonymous with redemption. The Lord who redeemed them.

The purchased price is the blood of Christ. You have been bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body.

You are bought with a price. No question. These false, heretical, destructive, heresy purveyors are believers.

And they're just as wrong as they can be. They're clouds without rain. They're spots in your love feasts.

And for whom the blackness of darkness is reserved. They are going to be out in the darkness which is outside. In the eternal future as saved people.

Outside Jerusalem. Outside the kingdom. Outside blessing.

Outside are the dogs, fornicators, those who love and practice a lie, and so on. Saved, but outside. Bushel baskets of healing leaves from the tree of life are flowing out from the city to try to bring these people up to speed.

The healing of the nations. So, don't think that anybody that teaches a heresy is never saved. They didn't even deny the Lord that bought them.

Now, how do you deny the Lord? By the way, this is one of my sort of sideways justifications for

the notion, and it's just a harmless theory, that Judas is saved. Jesus washed Judas' feet. Jesus shared with Judas the bread and the cup.

And it is possible to deny the Lord that bought you. Peter denied him in the courtyard. Judas told somebody where he was for money.

Is there some hugely different moral equivalence there? I'll let you know where the Lord's going to be tonight if you give me some pieces of silver. He's going to be in the garden. How big of a moral crime is that? You give me money, I tell you where he is.

I'm not responsible for what happens after that. Jesus has walked through crowds that were trying to throw him off cliffs and stuff before. You know, can't hurt.

He didn't tell you where he's going to be. I'll tell you where he's going to be. That's what Judas did.

It is possible to be very, very wayward and still be saved. That's the point. And they bring on themselves swift destruction.

You say, well, I see people going on for years doing this kind of thing. It doesn't look like their destruction is very swift to me. This word swift is better translated sudden.

Sudden. And the suddenness may occur at the resurrection. They may have a huge following.

They may have a wonderfully moneyed ministry. They may be copiously endowed with all kinds of luxuries. But at the rapture, it will suddenly all go away.

And they will suddenly be very, very far from the throne and far from the light, in the darkness which is outside, weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth. And their destruction, i.e. loss of all the things they thought they had, is swift in that sense. Many will follow their destructive ways.

Notice, second use of the word destructive. Peter is giving us clues here. Scripture, genuine scripture, the product of the Holy Spirit, is constructive.

This is what edification means. You build an edifice. It is constructive.

It builds up. Love builds up. Love suffers long.

Love covers a multitude of sins. Love is patient. Love is kind.

Love prays for those who spitefully use you. Love does good to those who hate you. And that love is fueled, Romans 5.5, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

How does he do it? Through the inspired word. And we will find ourselves built up. We will find ourselves in fellowship with others.

We will be built together as a body of Christ. It will unite. It will cohere.

It will bring together believers. Heresies are divisive and they are destructive. We find ourselves less motivated, less encouraged, less empowered, less enabled, less free of the pull of our fallen nature, more inclined to sin, more inclined to fail, more inclined to be petty and vindictive and bitter and backbiting and squabbling and carping and engaging in useless activities, destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

Most of the disparaging comments and the criticisms launched at Christianity in the world today are because of failed Christianity, wrong-headed Christianity, abusive, misguided Christianity. The simple truth of Scripture, where we work quietly with our own hands and don't meddle in other people's affairs, go about our business, we don't try to influence, get together and have a moral majority, we don't picket and cause, we are individual lights shining in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. You remember the fruit of the spirit thing? The fruit of the spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, against such there is no law.

Nobody objects to people who are bearing the fruit. How can you object to somebody who is patient and kind, long-suffering, gentle, good, faithful, meek, temperate, self-controlled? Where is the objection? Most of the objections to Scripture are because of these heresies. Well, this brings us to the subject of covetousness.

By covetousness, how many ministries are basically grubbing for money? We'll sell you a resource. Send us a contribution. This is our last gasp.

If you don't send a check, we could be off the air next week. We hate to bring it up, but if we don't get some money soon... Covetous. Materialistic.

If you're supposed to be on the air, if you're supposed to be doing anything, God will provide. You don't have to browbeat. You don't have to beg.

You don't have to embarrass the cause of Christ by using shameless marketing tactics and indulging in the same sort of fundraising efforts that the world uses. If you are doing God's work, God will provide. Jesus told the disciples, don't even take extra stuff with you.

The people of God will provide. If you're doing the right thing, people of God are going to be motivated. God, the Holy Spirit, is going to speak to their spirit, and they will send what you need.

They will provide what you need. They will take care of you. God will take care of you.

Take no thought. Your Heavenly Father knows what you need. Look at the lilies of the field.

They toil not, neither do they spend. So, covetousness. This is where we'll pick up next time.

But here's the bottom line. If we want to know the truth, we have to know God. If we want to know

God, we have to know the truth.

It boils down to how hungry and thirsty are we for righteousness. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. They will be filled.

God will come to those who are seeking Him. You shall seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. Yes, it is subjective.

And yes, it is personal. But that's our experience. That is our search, finding the absolute and unchanging truth.

And it is incumbent on us to respond to God's call and seek it and find it and receive the ministry of God's Spirit that will effortlessly help us identify what is true and what is false. And there is no other way. You can't rely on human ingenuity or human affirmations, human accreditations.

Oh, take my word for it. This is Scripture. You'll know Scripture because God the Holy Spirit confirms it.

So, our task is know the Spirit. Cultivate fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit. All these things are added to us.

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for the promise of Your presence, the seal of Your Holy Spirit, which is the open door into all things eternal, all things divine, all things that partake of Christ and of His glory and of His victory on the cross. We thank You that we have not been left as orphans.

Your Spirit is with us and is fully capable of ministering to us every good thing. We pray that we will be sensitive and amenable to His ministry, that we will find our path illuminated by Your Word in such a way that we can walk through that straight gate to life. And in so doing, we will fulfill Your purpose and Your calling for us in this life and prepare us for the next.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.