

2Peter 1:20 -- 2:1a "The Warning About False Teachers"

2 Peter 1:20 - 2:1 ²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

A very influential man once asked the question, 'what is truth?' This is a very important question because as it relates to our eternal destiny there's only one true answer. You might remember the context in which that question was framed.

JOH 18:36-38 "Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." ³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." ³⁸ "What is truth?" Pilate asked. ..."

Pilate wasn't really interested in truth, he simply was looking for a way to get around having to deal with Jesus, knowing He was guilty of nothing. If he was interested in truth Pilate would never have crucified our Lord.

But that's not the kind of truth Jesus addressed. Our Lord was making a very profound statement concerning His kingdom and how one might come into that kingdom. On another occasion Jesus said this, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (JOH 14:6)

This doesn't leave any room for any other opinions, or any other way to heaven. And yet, how many times have we heard people claim that they have the inside track to truth and that everyone must follow them if they are to come into the presence of God. We see this in every major cult in the world.

There is only one truth as it relates to salvation and we do not have the luxury to make it up as we go. This is what Peter has been addressing up to this point, because even in his day there were many who were claiming to know things about God that simply were not true.

2PE 1:16 "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

The truth is based upon the truth-Giver, the Creator of the universe, Jesus Christ. God's prophets and apostles were personally entrusted with the truth, which we find in the word of God, which leads to life.

And so, as to give evidence to this, Peter assures his readers that this same Jesus who rose from the dead is the same Jesus who proved His Godhood as the only Savior of the world. Peter, along with scores of others were eyewitnesses of these things.

And this is why not just any writings from any person will do when it comes to the truth that there is One God who has given one truth of the one Savior for men. This is why Peter emphatically states that those who were given this truth to be recorded for all time were not making it up as were the false prophets and teachers.

2PE 1:20 "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."

Now, the word prophecy used here in our text is not limited to future events although it would certainly include that. Strongs concordance defines it this way. "A discourse emanating from divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of God, whether by reproving and admonishing the wicked, or comforting the afflicted, or revealing things hidden; especially by foretelling future events."

Prophecy of Scripture is any writing which originates from the mind and will of God as He gives it to His prophets or apostles.

We see this all throughout both old and new testaments. If God, for example, was warning Israel of their rebellion and the consequences for such rebellion, that would be considered prophecy of Scripture. If He were to declare some future event which would certainly come to pass, that too, would be considered prophecy of Scripture.

In fact, everything recorded in the N.T. Scriptures is also considered prophecy of Scripture as Peter points out in this very letter, as he compares the O.T. Scriptures to the very words Paul

gives and puts them both on the same footing as far as originating from the living God.

2PE 3:15-16 "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."

But the point Peter is making back in our text concerning this prophecy of Scripture, which was given to God's prophets, is that they didn't dream these things up. It was never a matter of their own interpretation.

If this is the case, then everything they have received from God and have recorded for us must be taken seriously and embraced by faith. After all, isn't this what Peter just got through saying in verse 19?

2PE 1:19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, ..."

Why? Because the word of the prophets are the very words of God who communicates with mankind words of life and hope as well as words of sure judgment for those who would reject God's way of salvation.

The prophet Jeremiah, Isaiah or Micah didn't decide one day that it would be a good idea to give Israel a word and say it came from God. This word of prophecy was not invented in the minds of men. It was not their own interpretation.

The word interpretation here actually means authentication. Again, notice the parallel. Peter has just previously said that he was actually there at the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. He, along with James and John, actually saw both Moses and Elijah and they all heard the Father literally speak to them. They had not made that up.

In like manner, the prophets of old literally had an encounter with the living God, and just as sure as what Peter had encountered was authentic, these prophets of old had an authentic word from God which was not their own.

If I come to you this morning and say, Cellular One is located on the S.W. corner of U.S. 41 and Midway Blvd. in the city of Port Charlotte, Fl., you cannot take that to mean anything other than what I've said.

It's clear and precise and coherent. You know with certainty that Cellular One will be there if you leave here this morning. There is no room for interpretation because it can be authenticated. In like manner, that's what Peter is saying about the prophets. God clearly communicated with them and we can know with certainty that the prophets recorded only what God communicated.

This is why he continues, "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." (2PE 1:21)

In this verse Peter doesn't deny that the prophets were the ones who actually recorded these words, but he goes on to explain that the words they recorded came from someone outside themselves. They were men who spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

In other words, it is the Holy Spirit who has given them this word. It's not like the prophets were continually able to read the mind of God when they felt like it, and then record it. No, they were not able to record anything unless God spoke to them.

And yet, we know that many a false prophet did in fact just make things up or felt they had some sort of revelation when it was only their imagination. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel both address this.

JER 23:16 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD."

EZE 13:3 "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!"

The word we have before us is reliable. It is divinely trustworthy. Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit gave us this word and it is the very word of God, not from the imagination of these men, "for prophecy *never* had its origin in the will of man, ..."

But, what does it mean to be carried along by the Holy Spirit? The phrase "carried along" in the Greek can actually be used in a nautical sense. Just like the wind which catches the sails of a boat and carries the boat along, the Holy Spirit moves His prophet along in a way where the prophet moves where the Spirit leads.

In this we see both the prophet and the Spirit working together. It is the Spirit who is moving the prophet as He reveals His will, but it is the prophet who has his spiritual sails set by God to receive the wind. The prophet was always seeking to be used of God and in obedience he received and recorded those things the Spirit gave him.

But the clear implication is that without the wind picking up the sails the boat would not move. In like manner, if the Spirit does not give a word the prophet has nothing to record. But when the Spirit speaks the prophet is ready and willing to speak and testify to what God has said.

We must not think however, that the prophets or apostles were just some sort of containers through whom the Spirit spoke. They were not robots who acted like parrots. God worked through people and the personalities each person had.

This is why when Peter writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit it is not expressed exactly like Paul when he is inspired by the Holy Spirit. And so, there is, in a sense, a cooperation between two persons and yet the person of the Holy Spirit never allows His message to be confused or mingled with the message any mere man might want to interject.

So, in conclusion the Holy Spirit is the primary author, while the prophet or apostle is the secondary author. Paul brings this out in the book of Acts.

ACT 28:25-26 "... "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: 26 "'Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."

The writer of Hebrews essentially says the same thing when he quotes the O.T. Scriptures.

HEB 3:7-9 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion,

during the time of testing in the desert, 9 where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did."

It is clearly the Holy Spirit who delivered this message to Israel, and yet it was David who recorded what the Holy Spirit said. David didn't get up one morning and decide to write to Israel. The Holy Spirit blew into the sails of David and David moved and recorded the will of God.

This is how the true prophets of God are used by God. In contrast, the false prophets devise their own words and will. And then they pass that off as though God has spoken when He has not.

2PE 2:1 "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."

Here Peter is saying that just as in the days of the prophets of old there were those who were false. In our day there are also those who are pretending to be carried along by the Holy Spirit and yet are not.

This is why we must be discerning. In Peter's day this was a bit more of a problem because the N.T. Scriptures were just coming into their own and there were unscrupulous people who were claiming to be apostles and would bring words of their own to cause people to follow them instead of Christ.

But it wasn't limited to those who were claiming to be apostles. Notice that Peter does not make a one to one correspondence when referring to the false prophets of old. He says, "there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you."

Peter does not mean to imply that false teachers may not claim to be prophets, but he expands the idea here by including anyone who brings in falsehood to the church. It could be someone claiming to be a prophet, but if a teacher in the church is teaching anything outside of God's revealed word then he must be confronted.

Now, there is a difference between a legitimate teacher in the church teaching something which turns out to be false and a false teacher. One is a human being who is prone to error. The other is one who either has no regard for the truth and uses the church for

his own advantages or one who will not study to show himself approved.

This latter one is more often than not a misguided believer who is moved more by his own emotions or experiences than by the Holy Spirit who has clearly revealed the way in which we are to study the word of God.

Though we must be discerning to know the difference we must always be on the alert when it comes to dealing with the revealed word so that we do not place upon it our own interpretation, but rather the interpretation the Spirit of God intended.

But for our purposes here in our text Peter is making it plain that the type of teacher to unequivocally avoid and expose is the one who claims to be speaking for God and yet is not, because he has his own agenda, not God's.

Peter compares this teacher to the false prophets of old. In fact, there were times when some of these false prophets were actually given information directly or indirectly by God and yet these same false prophets proved themselves false because they directed Israel away from God.

DEU 13:1-5 "If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, 2 and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," 3 you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. 5 That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery;..."

And so, even if a teacher is commanded to bring the truth of God's word and yet uses it to actually take us away from God he must be viewed as a false teacher and therefore avoided. We see how this took place in the Garden of Eden. The serpent brought some truth to Eve and yet that truth was shrouded in deception to lead them away from God.

We'll look at some of the characteristics of false teachers and prophets, but one thing which is consistent among such people is their desire to draw many unto themselves. And in most cases they will teach those things that tickle the ears of people instead of teaching the whole counsel of God's truth.

We see this time and time again in Israel. Jeremiah had their number. He says of them in JER 6:14 "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace."

Ezekiel gave a similar message in EZE 13:15-16 "So I will spend my wrath against the wall and against those who covered it with whitewash. I will say to you, "The wall is gone and so are those who whitewashed it, 16 those prophets of Israel who prophesied to Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for her when there was no peace, declares the Sovereign LORD."

Again, the idea here is that they are not really concerned about feeding the sheep. They want only to be liked and placed in positions of importance. It is a selfish approach, not an approach of being a servant.

We'll also see how false prophets and teachers are more interested in their pocketbooks than in the feeding of the sheep.

MIC 3:11-12 "Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us." 12 Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets."

Paul touches on this same thing when addressing the N.T. church.

TIT 1:10-11 "For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. 11 They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach - and that for the sake of dishonest gain."

It amazes me that false teachers lead people astray and yet people pay them to do it, and more times than not they do it willingly and cheerfully.

False prophets and teachers are also the types who speak of holiness and yet their personal lives reflect something quite different.

ISA 28:7-8 "... Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions, they stumble when rendering decisions. 8 All the tables are covered with vomit and there is not a spot without filth."

JER 23:14,32 "And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. 32 Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," declares the LORD. "They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least," declares the LORD."

God continually warned Israel of these false prophets and yet it seemed that more often than not they wanted the false prophet who told them what they wanted to hear instead of the true prophet who brought them the truth.

Much hasn't changed even in the church-at-large today. This is why there are so many warnings from Jesus and the apostles.

MAT 24:4-5 "Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."

Paul brings it up in a variety of places.

EPH 5:6 "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient."

COL 2:8,18 "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. 18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions."

The apostle John also warns of such false prophets in the world today.

1JO 4:1 "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

So, what we see is that there is a direct correlation between false prophets and teachers of today and the responsibility of the church not to be taken in by these false teachers. As we go through this section of 2Peter we'll take a closer look at the attitudes and desires of these false teachers and how to recognize them.

As we see in verse one "they will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them - bringing swift destruction on themselves."

False teachers are not going to come into a church and announce that they are here to teach destructive heresies. This is why Peter says, they will do this secretly. And the idea here is that it's done craftily. It is calculated and well thought out. They know what they're doing.

I've had people come through our doors who had teachings which were heretical. And yet, they stayed and tried to gain the confidence of me and others with the express purpose of ultimately bringing in these false teachings.

Slowly, over time they wormed their way in only to try and influence the sheep with destructive heresies to lead them away from the truth and to their own way of thinking so that people would follow them.

This is diabolical. And this is the reason we'll see why God deals with these people the way He does. We'll pick up here next week. But know this. As long as there are shepherds in Christ's church who are not only willing to teach the truth, but are also willing to protect the flock, God's people will be in good hands as those shepherds follow Christ. This is what Paul told the shepherds at Ephesus.

ACT 20:28-30 "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.
31 So be on your guard!..."

May we all be on our guard; not paranoid, but living with our eyes open and willing to follow Christ and His truth and walk in His ways to His glory.

EPH 6:14 "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist,..."

EPH 4:15 "... speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."