

Fellowship Bible Church 6/3/2018 Pastor Howie Wideman

God's Revelation

II Peter 1:20

Open your Bibles and join me this morning in II Peter 1:20. For context let's read verses 19-21. In our message two weeks ago we began looking at this passage to understand what it has to say about the illumination, revelation and inspiration of the Word of God.

From verse 19 we considered the ministry of the Holy Spirit who takes the Word of God and *illuminates* us in a way that helps us understand it and then how to apply it. Now, we'll never understand all of it, because the Bible, like its source, God, is infinite and we are finite. But the Holy Spirit helps the believer to know what it means and what it means to me. He doesn't seek just to give us knowledge about the Bible, but to understand what we are to do with what we learn.

My college Bible professor used to say that there is one interpretation but many applications. You can take that to mean each person will get something unique for him or her to apply to their lives or it can mean that I can read a passage today and understand one thing I am to apply from it and read the same passage tomorrow and get something else from it that I am to apply.

Take for example Mark 10:30 quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 which says we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Today the Spirit takes that passage and enlightens me about areas where I don't love the Lord with all my mind and points out certain things that I think about that needs to change. Coupling it with Philippians 4:8 the Spirit might then use that passage to remind me that I am to think about things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable. He might also remind me from II Corinthians 10:5 that I am to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

If I read the same passage in Mark tomorrow God's Spirit may reveal to me that I don't love God with

all my heart. I may have some idols that I love more than God. Not wooden or carved images mind you, but things like a hobby or career, something that has priority over God. Now the overall message of the verse is to love God with everything I have in every way. The Spirit then points out or illuminates from the passage areas where I am falling short and need to change.

Peter points out in verse 19 that we would do well to pay attention to the prophets. We learned this isn't just a reference to the Old Testament prophets with books after their names, but the term meant all the Old Testament writings. God's Word is a light that shines in dark places, but that is our message in two weeks.

Today we are going to discuss the topic of the *revelation* of God's Word. Bear in mind that Peter was concerned about the false teachers who were immersing in the church spreading heresy about Christ and in an effort to turn these believers away from the truth. Peter wanted them to stand firmly planted in their faith built on the Word of God, and not be easily swayed by false teaching.

It wasn't just a concern in Peter's day and to his audience, it is a concern today. Pastors who say they have a new word from God, churches who alter the Word to fit their own ideology are springing up and pulling unsuspecting believers from the truth and authority of God's Word. Churches are being swept away by a slow erosion of God's Word because culture is demanding and dictating that they change with the times. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that it is to change with cultural mores, instead culture is to keep in step with Scripture. It becomes a question of authority and when we begin to question its authority, we are in danger of sliding down the slippery slope of liberalism. It's important and imperative for us to understand and hold to the revelation of God's Word as authoritative.

With that, I would like us to consider this morning three points from verse 20.

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An important realization  
An immutable revelation  
An impelling revitalization

I. AN IMPORTANT REALIZATION – v. 20a

We have all been in meetings or in a conversation where the speaker wanted to get his or her point across. It might be really obvious by what they say.

“This is really important, so listen up.”

“If there is only one thing you get out of my talk today, this is it.”

“Pay close attention to what I’m about to say.”

Dr. Charles Stanley will be preaching and he will stop and just say “Listen”.

Dr. David Jeremiah will just stop and ask the “class” a question. It’s a way of making sure they are paying attention because he’s about to drive home an important point.

Peter is direct with us. There is no ambiguity in what he is about to say. We can take this verse and claim it as the bedrock or foundational verse for the authority of God’s Word – its revelation and inspiration. Herein is the source and authority of the Bible.

This passage along with II Timothy 3:16 makes it obvious where God’s Word came from and why.

What Peter is about to say is an important revelation.

KJV – “Knowing this first”

Amplified – “Yet first you must understand this”

NASV – “But know this first of all”

NIV – “Above all, you must understand”

Next year in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, David will be taking Algebra I. Before that he had to learn some pre-Algebra and before that the fundamentals of mathematics and so on. There are foundational aspects of math that are required for him to understand Algebra.

Peter is saying there is something foundational that you need to understand. This is the first thing you need to know.

Verse 20 is not a new sentence but connects verse 19. Verse 19 reminds us to pay close attention to the prophets about the coming lamp who would shine in dark places, referring to Christ. As Pastor John Piper points out, the connection is this: “pay attention to the prophetic word...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.” He goes on to say that “there is a very close connection between what we know about prophecy in verse 20 and our giving heed to it in verse 19.”

There is then two possible connections between these 2 verses. The first is that verse 20 may give the *reason* we should pay close attention to the words of the prophets or it may be telling us the *way* to pay attention to their words by remembering that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.

“Above all, understand this first” is an important realization about the foundational aspect of their words. They are an immutable revelation.

II. AN IMMUTABLE REVELATION – v. 20b

So which of the two possible connections or views is correct? Is Peter speaking of the reason we should pay close attention or the way in which we should pay close attention?

There are three ways this verse has been interpreted. Some evangelical Bible scholars believe the passage to mean that it has nothing to do with our interpretation of prophecy but our interpretation of history. They claim the intent is that “no prophecy ever came from a prophet’s private interpretation of historical events.” Prophecies did not come from private interpretation of historical events but as we will learn when we look at verse 21 prophecies came from God through the Holy Spirit. In essence this view holds that we are to pay attention to the prophetic word because no prophecy comes from an interpretation of events but from God’s Spirit. This view has some merit but doesn’t hit the mark.

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A second interpretation of this verse is something those of you who grew up in the Catholic Church will understand. They take this verse to mean that no private individual can interpret prophecy on his own meaning that the pew sitter can't interpret Scripture, only the clergy. They claim that Scripture has been entrusted to the church and that individuals must look to the church to know the true meaning of Scripture. The Gnostics hold a similar view in that only certain people who are enlightened can understand it. When people in the church began to teach heresy in the early church, the clergy stepped in took Scripture away from lay hands allowing only for the clergy to interpret and teach it. I think the religious leaders of Jesus' day were the same.

This view was held for centuries by the Catholic Church and only in the past couple of decades has there been a movement within for personal study, although it's not highly encouraged. They still believe that the church has authority over the Scriptures not the other way around. Tradition, not Scripture, is supreme.

The third view about this verse is that no one should interpret Scripture to fit his own personal preference making it say what you want if you happen not to agree with something Scripture says. God's Word has been given to us just the way He wanted and it's not to be rewritten to suit our likes.

For example, a few years ago a group didn't like that the Bible was gender specific as it relates to God. So they set out to rewrite the Bible to make God gender neutral. Because culture is changing with the idea of gender neutrality or genderless, they wanted to rewrite the Bible to reflect that cultural change. Just because culture says it's okay doesn't mean the Bible can be arbitrarily rewritten to fit the change in society.

"Thus says the Lord" still means today what it did when it was written.

God's Word is immutable. It is unchanging. It is authoritative and God is warning us not to change it to say what we want just because it doesn't fit with a particular cultural narrative. The false teachers of Peter's day didn't deny what the Scriptures said, they just twisted them to mean what they wanted for their own personal benefit. It cannot be written or interpreted by an ever changing culture to suit ever changing personal preferences.

Personal interpretation can be wrong.

Personal interpretation can be biased.

Personal interpretation can be inadequate.

Warren Wiersbe states that "Since the Spirit gave the Word, only the Spirit can teach the Word and interpret it accurately." (I Corinthians 2:14-15)

How many of you have ever told a child to do something and an hour later when you check on them found that they didn't do what you told them to do and when you ask them why they say, "well I thought you meant this."

When I was in college I worked in a paint shop. They painted name plates and mirrors for vehicles. One of the jobs required the operator to put a part behind a plate. The operator would press a button that extended two hydraulic arms from behind the piece to be painted that would hold the part tight against the plate so that when it was painted only the part that was to be painted got painted. (That's a tongue twister.) The guy operating the booth decided that he wanted to paint more parts and since the plate had two masks, he adjusted the hydraulic arms so that he could paint two parts at a time instead of just one. The problem was that the applied pressure from the one hydraulic arm didn't give a tight seal on the piece. When he applied the paint from the spray gun, it seeped around the edges. Dozens and dozens of pieces were ruined because he interpreted how the job should be done. He didn't listen to the instruction of the boss.

Since God is the source of Scripture let His Spirit

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interpret it for you. His Word is not to be changed because He does not change. The Lord says in Malachi 3:6 “I do not change.”

In Psalm 119:89 we read that God’s Word is forever settled in heaven.

If God does not change and His Word is forever settled then who are we to think that we can arbitrarily change God’s unchanging Word?

God has revealed Himself to us in His unchanging Word. Scripture speaks of two ways that God has revealed Himself to us.

The first is what we call general revelation. General revelation refers to general truths that can be known about God through nature. General revelation is universal in scope meaning that everyone has been made aware of His existence through creation.

Psalm 19:1-4

Romans 1:20

In the first passage we see that from nature we come to learn about the existence of a Creator God and that His power is evident in creation. When we begin to observe nature more closely we understand that the Creator planned everything with order and intricateness.

In Romans 1:20 we see that God’s power and nature are clearly seen in what He has made. But then that chapter continues by saying that the evidence of God through creation was foolishly rejected by man.

One author suggests that a definition of general revelation would be “the revelation of God to all people, at all times, and in all places that proves that God exists and that He is intelligent, powerful, and transcendent.”

God has revealed Himself generally or universally to everyone through creation, without exception, and they are without excuse if they reject Him.

A more specific means of revealing Himself is called special revelation where God reveals Himself through miraculous means.

Hebrews 1:1-2a; 2:3-4

Special revelation can be by His visible or physical appearance. We call that a theophany. We see this in Genesis 3:8 where He walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden or in Genesis 18:1 where God appeared to Abraham with two angels and discussed the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Special revelation was also through visions as in Genesis 15:1 where God spoke to Abram about the covenant He would make with him and his descendants.

Then there were dreams as in Genesis 28:12 when Jacob saw angels going up and down a ladder with the Lord standing at the top speaking to him and confirming the covenant made with Abraham.

But the primary way in which God has revealed Himself through special revelation is the Bible. Next week we will look at the inspiration of the Bible, how God guided 40 authors to write 66 books recording His message to mankind, yet doing so with each person’s own unique personality and style.

The importance of God’s revelation, that it is His Word and not man’s, can’t be overstated. As one author wrote “God determined to have the truth regarding Him recorded in written form because He knew the inaccuracy and unreliability of oral tradition. He also understood that the dreams and visions of man can be misinterpreted. God decided to reveal everything that humanity needs to know about Him, what He expects, and what He has done for us in the Bible.”

Of course the ultimate way God has revealed Himself was in the incarnation when God became man in the person of Christ.

John 1:1, 14

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“God became a human being, in the Person of Jesus Christ, to identify with us, to set an example for us, to teach us, to reveal Himself to us, and, most importantly, to provide salvation for us by humbling Himself in death on the cross.”

God has made Himself known.

Some have received His revelation through which they will receive an eternal reward.

Others have rejected His revelation through which they will receive an eternal punishment.

Bruce Barton writes that “One’s belief about revelation is foundational to faith. Christians must be able to rest on the infallibility of Scripture, or their faith is of no value.”

If God’s Word can’t be reliable in one area, who’s to say it can be trusted in another?

But, since God’s Word says He cannot lie, His unchangeable Word does not lie either.

The Bible is the revelation of God. In his book *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible*, Erwin Lutzer notes that if you were to systematically search the Bible you would find some 1,500 statements that either directly or indirectly claim the Bible to be of divine origin.

Lutzer gives a compelling argument when he states “If the Bible is mistaken regarding its own origin, we have no reason to think it is reliable about anything else. We do not have the luxury to pick and choose what we consider to be from God and what is not; and if the authors were writing their own ideas, not a single line should be taken seriously. If they were so deceived regarding the source of their ideas, they would have been deceived about the content of those ideas.”

God has given us this special revelation as a means of knowing Him, His great love for us, and His plan of redeeming/saving us through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. That is the crimson thread that runs throughout Scripture from Genesis

to Revelation.

Peter’s intent is for us to take the revelation of God seriously so that it not only transforms individuals, but cultures. Since God’s revelation, His Word, is reliable, believers of Jesus Christ can stand firmly planted against false teaching that would otherwise seek to dismantle its credibility and authority.

He gives an important realization – the Word of God is foundational, it is an immutable revelation. What kind of impact is this revelation having in your life or in the life of our nation?

In closing consider that this revelation of God, the Word of God gives an impelling revitalization.

### III. AN IMPELLING REVITALIZATION

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century the words of Salmon Chase are compelling. He wrote “There came time in my life when I doubted the divinity of the Scriptures, and I resolved as a lawyer and a judge, I would try the Book as I would try anything in the courtroom, taking evidence for and against. It was a long, serious and profound study and using the same principles of evidence in this religious matter as I always do in secular matters, I have come to the decision that the Bible is a supernatural Book, that it has come from God, and that the only safety for the human race is to follow its teachings.”

Think for a moment about what he just said and the implications for what a society would look like if its people took seriously the belief that the Bible is supernatural – the very Word of God and that it is the only safety for the human race if we would but follow its teachings.

The Bible isn’t just a book that works in us, it is a Book that works through us to transform a culture that is in desperate need of reform, but not reform that comes through politics or policies or the public sector. Transformation doesn’t come through rituals or regulations. It comes when we allow God’s revelation to permeate our lives through

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practical Christian living.

Now, I wasn't sure how I wanted to end this message. I gave some thought to talking about some of the things I learned from my recent conference. I think it's important to understand the role God's Word had in its founding. The evidence can be seen in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution. But I'm going to save that for another time.

So how do I wrap up? We're going to have communion in a few moments so let me close with setting up for next week's message on the inspiration of God's Word. We'll see both the profitability and power of God's Word. While God has used different means by which He has revealed Himself, He continues to do so through His Word.

I think I want to close by asking you this: what are you doing with what you have been given? How does it revitalize?

Psalm 19:7 says that God's Word revives the soul.

Psalm 119:11 says that God's Word can keep us from sin.

II Timothy 3:16-17 says it's profitable for godly living.

John 17:17 says it sanctifies.

Colossians 3:16 says we are to let it rule our heart.

How is your life being revitalized through the book He has given to transform us?

The revelation He has given us is holy, flawless. It is without error and is unchangeable. If it could be changed, then it is not without error. It gives hope, joy, strength, comfort, peace, and encouragement.

It changes people when it is obeyed.

It matures us.

When it comes to who He is, the relationship He desires to have with us, and the kind of transformation in our character as a result of that relationship, all of that is revealed for us in His

revelation to us in what we call the Bible.

*"Within the covers of the Bible are the answers for all the problems men face."*— Ronald Reagan

*"The Bible is very easy to understand. But we Christians are a bunch of scheming swindlers. We pretend to be unable to understand it because we know very well that the minute we understand, we are obliged to act accordingly."*— Søren Kierkegaard

*"Reading the Bible will help you get to know the word, but it's when you put it down and live your life that you get to know the author."*— Steve Maraboli

*"The Bible was not given for our information but for our transformation."*— D. L. Moody

*"A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't."*— Charles Spurgeon

That's an impelling revitalization and that won't happen if we don't read and live His revelation.