

Peter's Counsel



PETER'S COUNSEL

In the opening verses of his second epistle, the Apostle Peter gave the following counsel:

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

“And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

“And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

“For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye

know them, and be established in the present truth.” (2 Pet. 1:5-12)

Peter was telling the Church the importance of developing character. To their faith, Christians are to give all diligence to add virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and finally charity (love). If these qualities are found in the Church in abundance, the brethren will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter stated further that anyone who lacks these qualities or who does not see the importance or necessity of developing them is spiritually blind and thus is not meet for “the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12). Conversely, those who give diligence to the application of these principles in their lives will make their calling and election sure and will be granted an abundant entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Then Peter summed up his thoughts by saying he would not be negligent to put Christians always in remembrance of these things, even though they know them and are established in the present truth.

“Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance;

“Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shown me.” (2 Pet. 1:13,14)

Here we see that Peter gave this counsel in the latter part of his life and that soon he would be put to death. In saying he would put off his “tabernacle” shortly, Peter was likening his human body to an *earthly* tabernacle, the present life being the earthly state or pilgrimage condition of the Church. In contrast, the “temple,” an enduring structure, represents the future condition of the faithful overcoming Church in honor, glory, and permanence beyond the veil of the present life. Years earlier Jesus had predicted Peter’s death would be in the form of crucifixion.

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands [in crucifixion], and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.

**“This spake he [Jesus], signifying by what death he [Peter] should [die and thus] glorify God.”
(John 21:18,19)**

Peter continued his counsel:

“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” (2 Pet. 1:16)

To those under his ministry, who hearkened to his word, Peter said that neither he nor the two apostles with him, John and

James, were following “cunningly devised fables,” for they had actually had the personal experience of seeing Jesus in his majesty, as it were. They were *eyewitnesses!* This statement is based on the incident that took place on the Mount of Transfiguration, as recorded in Mark 9:1-10 and Matthew 17:1-9.

**“And he [Jesus] said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.”
(Mark 9:1)**

In hearing these words, the early Church might have gotten the wrong thought. Jesus was saying that Peter, James, and John would be given a preview or a visual demonstration of the Kingdom.

“And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them.

“And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white[n] them.

“And there appeared unto them Elias [that is, Elijah] with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus.

“And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three

tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

“For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.” (Mark 9:2-6)

Peter’s remark about making three tabernacles was inappropriate for the occasion, but sometimes in our nervousness, we also make remarks without giving due consideration to our words and the circumstance.

“And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

“And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.

“And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.” (Mark 9:7-9)

Matthew’s account adds the following detail: “And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the *vision* to no man” (Matt. 17:9). Therefore, when Moses and Elijah were seen on the Mount of Transfiguration, they were not literally resurrected and speaking to Jesus, but *in the vision*, they were *representatively* pictured as talking with Christ. Moses represented those prior to the Christian or Gospel Age who *looked*

forward to Christ, who was *in the center*, and Elijah portrayed those subsequent to the First Advent who *look backward* to the Cross. As Redeemer and ultimate King, Jesus will be the center of the Kingdom soon to come (Matt. 6:10). In his second epistle, Peter was referring to this very powerful vision, in which Jesus' clothing became whitened with resplendent glory, indicative of his majesty. Through the vision, Peter was an eyewitness of "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The narrative continues:

"For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

"And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

**"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."
(2 Pet. 1:17-19)**

While the prefiguration or representation of the Kingdom and the King was a *vision*, the three apostles had a literal experience upon this holy mountain that caused them to be "sore afraid" (Matt. 17:6). They heard God's audible voice coming out of a cloud and pronouncing that they should listen to Jesus.

Because this experience was so realistic and so tangible, Peter was saying it was not a fable. Nevertheless, even though the three eyewitnesses treasured this unusual experience, Peter drew the lesson that it is more important to understand and to have knowledge from the Word of God than to hear an audible voice from heaven. In other words, even though they had heard God's voice, it was of secondary importance compared with the Word of God. "We have also a *more sure word of prophecy.*"

Some Christians might have a vision in which they think they see the Lord and talk with him and receive instructions and information, but based on Peter's reasoning, such experiences are not reliable. The Word of God is "more sure" than any trance or dream experience, and our understanding must be based on that Word. Thus, while Peter personally saw Jesus literally, it is more blessed, more commendable, and more important for those who have not literally seen or heard him to believe *by faith and to obey the instructions in the Bible.* We should diligently hearken to the words of prophecy, taking heed "as unto a light that shineth in a dark place." The "dark place" is the Gospel Age dark night of sin. God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Psa. 119:105). We need the Scriptures so that we can carefully inspect the path before us—whether that path has to do with personal character development and growth or doctrine or

prophecy and God's dispensational dealings with His people in the development and outgrowth of His plan.

The lamp of Holy Writ must be heeded until it is supplanted by the glorious light of the sun in the next age. In the meantime, the Bible is all we have, and the Holy Spirit helps us to understand that Word. God's light of truth is in the Bible, and we see it in the face of Jesus Christ. As our Redeemer, Jesus is the center of the divine plan and arrangement. The Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of truth"; that is, God's power or influence not only helps the Christian understand but also calls to remembrance things previously spoken by the Master (John 14:16,17). Daily we must prayerfully and diligently search the Scriptures in order to receive the help of the Holy Spirit and to be specially commended by the Lord. For the class who thus study, the Holy Spirit calls to remembrance statements of Scripture so that they can be compared with other Scriptures and then collated harmoniously for an understanding of particular Bible topics and subject matter.

We are to take heed to the Scriptures "until the day dawn, and the day star arise" in our hearts. Many Christians think the "day star" is literally the morning or the evening star in the heavens, but this illustration has a higher meaning. While we look to the lamp for instruction in the present age, while we look to the Word of God and the teachings of Christ and the apostles

for direction, the time is coming when the sun will replace the lamp, and that time is the near-at-hand Kingdom of God. In that day, the Sun of righteousness will arise with healing in his beams, and the presence of the Lord will be manifested in the earth as the sun traverses the heavens, shining from east to west (Mal. 4:2; Matt. 24:27). At that time, the bright shining will make apparent to all that Jesus is earth's King to the praise, honor, and glory of His Father in heaven.

The "day star" is the sun. Usually we think of our sun as being different from the stars, but the sun is actually a star. Of course the planets in our solar system, that is, in our small universe, revolve around our sun. The point is that the sun is the "star of the day" or "*day star*," and it is the center of our solar system. Peter was saying that we should study God's Word, even though when we look into that Word, we see only darkly, as through a veil, things of the future. Now we see only in part, but the time will come when all things will be made known and be seen in their fullest clarity (1 Cor. 13:12).

**"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation."
(2 Pet. 1:20)**

Unfortunately, this Scripture has often been falsely applied. Certain extremes confront us when we follow on to know the Lord and the teachings of the Bible. One extreme asserts that we

have no right to read, study, or try to understand the Bible and its teachings on our own. The thought usually fostered is that only those who have been educated in a seminary and instructed in Hebrew and Greek have the ability to interpret the Scriptures. This viewpoint would make us dependent on those who have degrees from theological schools, that is, ordained ministers and priests, and would prevent us from obeying Paul's counsel to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). Some have testified that in these colleges, instead of studying God's Word itself, they have studied and followed the teachings of men from all different religions. Strictly speaking, very little time and attention are given to the Word of God. Therefore, when members of a congregation propound hard questions in their quest for enlightenment, ministers and priests are often unable to give Scriptural answers because of their lack of familiarity with the contents of the Bible. It takes many, many years of prayerful study to know the Bible.

Most of the apostles were plain, humble fishermen, who are described as "unlearned and ignorant" in the Book of Acts. "Now when they [the rulers and elders of Israel] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled" (Acts 4:13). Although not schooled in the wisdom of this world, the apostles were very wise in the Scriptures. Because they were fully devoted to God and to Christ,

and because they diligently studied the Bible and applied its teachings to their lives, the Holy Spirit enlightened them, enriching their lives according to the Spirit.

Those of a strongly independent spirit sometimes go to the opposite extreme in the interpretation of 2 Peter 1:20. They feel that they do not need help, guidance, or counsel from anyone and that the Holy Spirit guides them as individuals. They say they can study privately and be blessed. To justify their position, they quote the Apostle John and take certain words out of context. “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him” (1 John 2:27). The words they like are, “Ye need not that any man teach you.” However, their interpretation nullifies, vitiates, and contradicts the purpose of the New Testament, as stated in Ephesians 4:11-13, as follows: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” In other words, the Lord gave gifts to the Church—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—so that Christians would come

to the fullness of the stature of a man in Christ Jesus. Moreover, Paul tells us to esteem mature Christians and their counsel, and as we see the Lord leading them, and us through them, we should appreciate their services and give them proper respect. “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess. 5:12,13). Paul also said, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am [a follower] of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Paul was not advocating the use of titles, but he was encouraging recognition that these teachers, etc., were led by the Lord. Of course if any should deflect, the Christian proportionately no longer has to hearken to them because the basis of confidence and belief is the Word of God, not the word of men. We should be thoroughly grounded in Scriptural truth.

The point is that there is a middle position between these two extremes. We do need counsel and we do need leaders to instruct us in connection with developing Christian faith, but we are not to blindly follow leaders and believe their statements without Scriptural support. As the Prophet Isaiah said, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). What we hear must square with the Word of God if we are to accept it. We must be like the Bereans who “were more noble than those in

Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and *searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*" (Acts 17:11). Even though it was the *Apostle Paul* who was speaking to the Bereans, they searched to make sure his teaching squared with Scripture. And Paul did not take offense but, rather, commended them. Unfortunately, some leaders are so sensitive that when they are sincerely asked for Scriptural proof, they take the request as a personal insult, as if it challenges what they preached. Certainly if Paul, *an apostle*, who could speak *with authority* and was given a commission not from men but *from Jesus Christ*, was not offended, then how much more should those in a lesser capacity in the present age appreciate the Lord's little ones who want to square teachings with Scripture. Indeed we do have "a more sure word of prophecy" to which we do well when we take heed. We must make sure that our faith and character structure are in alignment with the Word of God. Our conscience and direction are to be sensitive to the leadership of Christ. We are to call no man "Master" but the One who is appointed Lord of the Church (Matt. 23:10).

Now when we analyze 2 Peter 1:20, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation," we see that the lesson is completely different from either of the two extremes. To properly understand this text, we must read the

context because the next verse tells us what the Apostle Peter had in mind.

“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost [Spirit].” (2 Pet. 1:21)

Peter was saying that the prophecy of Scripture, that is, the Bible, did not originate with the will of man but with “holy men” of old who recorded their utterances. When these writings were compiled in various books (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.), they were not really the writings of man. True, God spoke through these holy men, but the message of prophecy did not originate with them. They were merely the *channels* of blessing, for God used them, as the ministers of His Word, to deliver the message to the people.

Peter was trying to say that no prophecy of Scripture is of private *aspiration*. In other words, the origination of the breathing of this Word and the utterances of the Holy Spirit—the POWER of their inner content and meaning—were really from God. It was God who originated the Word. Therefore, we cannot equate the Bible with the writings of any man here on earth. The councils of various churches and the decrees of man and man’s philosophies and teachings cannot be put on a par with the Bible. Certainly not! And this statement is especially true now because we have no proof that any of today’s leaders are “holy men of God.” We

know that the Bible is God's sanctioned Word and that it is sure and stable, tried and true. The Word of God has lasted down through the ages, and Divine Providence has protected it. The Scriptures are not of private origin but have emanated from God through holy men, who recorded the messages of truth so that we have them today in the Bible.

In a different vein, Peter wrote in the third chapter of the same epistle:

"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:

"That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour:

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,

"And saying, Where is the promise of his coming [presence, Greek *parousia*]? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." (2 Pet. 3:1-4)

Peter was warning that in the last days (that is, in *our day*), some would have no faith or confidence in God's prophecies and predictions of the future. In fact, they would scoff at any reproof or admonition along these lines and would walk after their own

lusts, saying (paraphrased), “Where is the evidence of Jesus’ presence? Things continue as they have ever since the beginning of creation.” Such individuals would misinterpret the long patience of God in waiting for the development and the harvesting of the Church class during the Gospel Age as inability on His part to intervene in earth’s affairs. The Apostle James wrote, “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman [God] waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth [the completed Church class], and hath long patience for it” (James 5:7). Because the scoffers would not see any swift punishment requited upon the head of the guilty, they would feel that either God is asleep or He does not exist. Consequently, they would gain increasing confidence and boldness that the Word of God is a collection of cunningly devised fables and that it is an instrument without power which has been foisted upon the people by the religious leaders. In other words, they would not believe that the Bible really is God’s Word, and thus they would go about in their own ways, not seeking direction for their lives and not heeding the message at all.

Even some ministers have little faith and try to philosophize and moralize along lines other than the strict interpretation of Scripture. Peter was saying that the people of the end-time generation would be just as ignorant of the fact of an impending disaster or experience as the people were in the days of Noah. In

both cases, the sin is being “willingly ignorant” (2 Pet. 3:5). Noah predicted a coming flood, and for 120 years, the Ark was in preparation, in process of being built, *until the day* the Flood came and destroyed all who dwelled on the earth except Noah and his immediate family. And the prediction for our day and the people’s reaction to it are similar, for the present generation will not heed the Word of God until the “flood” Time of Trouble inundates the earth in the near future (Matt. 24:21; Dan. 12:1). Those who are willingly ignorant lose the blessings and opportunities of the particular salvation that is available during the present age in the calling and the development of a spiritual priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). How blessed are those whose eyes of understanding are enlightened to know the hope of the calling and the riches in glory that await Christians who are faithful unto death! God’s exceeding great and mighty power is for those who *truly believe* (Eph. 1:18,19; Rev. 2:10).

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