

**Text: 2 Peter 1:12-21**

Introduction

I want to begin by sharing the opening paragraphs of our teacher guide for today, as it very pointedly addresses one of the biggest problems facing the church today.

Evidence of biblical illiteracy surrounds us. School children do not understand literary allusions to biblical stories. Consequently the meaning of much English literature escapes them.

Adults do not know what the Bible contains. I cannot count the times I've heard adults insist the Bible says, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." That quote actually comes from Samuel Butler in the 1600s. Others state with absolute certainty the Bible says, "God helps those who help themselves." [This comes from the deist Benjamin Franklin.]

More serious than the lack of specific knowledge of the Bible, many are unwilling to engage in serious Bible study. They love entertaining preaching filled with funny stories. They flock to the success motivation preachers on TV. They enjoy hearing the stories of the Bible. They quickly grow bored, however, with any preaching or teaching that asks them to think deeply about God's revelation in Scripture.

Most serious of all, many believers fail to apply the Bible to their lives, to live out its teachings. They have no idea how to apply biblical teachings to their finances, marriages, parenting, relationships with those of other races, or recreation. They are good, decent human beings; but their behavior never rises above respectable worldliness. They think of themselves as knowledgeable Christians, but they are almost totally illiterate as far as the Bible is concerned.

Some members of your Sunday School class have never made serious study of and meditation on God's Word a part of their daily discipline. Other have engaged in deep study of and thinking about Scripture in the past but have neglected this discipline recently. Others love to study the Bible but do so purely theoretically. They love to study the stories or the doctrines, but they fail to take the critical step of applying what they learn to their lives. Consequently, biblical revelation does not change the way they live.

Chances are, one of these groups of people describes you. Maybe you've never devoted time and effort to serious, in-depth study of the Word. Perhaps you've done this at times in your life, but not consistently, or you've recently fallen out of this habit. Or, perhaps you suffer the temptation that I sometimes endure, of soaking up the Word on a cognitive level but not allowing it to penetrate to the heart. Maybe you experience all three at times. God's Word is a serious matter. As His servants, we are to study it, meditate on it, memorize it, and seek to know it as thoroughly as He will allow. The purpose of such study, however, is not our intellectual aggrandizement, but rather our obedience. We are to study and know the Bible because it contains the commands of the God that we have proclaimed to be our Lord and Master. We read, we study, and we learn so that we can obey. In today's passage, Peter reminds us of some of the reasons God's Word is trustworthy, and why we must seek to know and submit to it completely.

Section 1

*12Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. 13I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, 14knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind. (2 Peter 1:12-15)*

Peter acknowledges that many of his readers are indeed mature believers, yet he does not apologize for reminding them repeatedly regarding the various elements of the faith. We never become so mature that we do not need constant study, repetition, and reinforcement of the principles of God's Word to "stir us up." Paul likewise told Timothy to give diligent study to the Word, so that he would know and teach it accurately.

**15Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)**

Although he is old and near death, Peter provides an example of diligent, lifelong service to the Lord Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews likewise tells us to "**run...the race that is set before us**" with Christ Himself as our model. Paul uses the same metaphor when he acknowledges that his life and ministry are at an end.

**1**Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2**fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **3**For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

**6**For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. **7**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; **8**in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

Peter acknowledges to his readers that he is indeed near death. Whether Christ made the exact timing of Peter's death known to him is not entirely clear. Perhaps he was simply aged and knew from God's Word that death was both inevitable, and near at hand.

**10**As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years,  
Or if due to strength, eighty years,  
Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow;  
For soon it is gone and we fly away. (Psalm 90:10)

**27**And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, (Hebrews 9:27)

Whether he knew the exact timing of his death or not, Peter did know that his death would not be a natural one. Jesus had revealed to him years before the manner of his death. Unlike the Peter that cravenly denied Christ and hid during His trial and crucifixion, the older, mature, faithful Peter calmly anticipates glorifying God by martyrdom. His concern is not for his own life and well-being, but only that he leave sufficient instruction behind for the believers in his charge.

**18**"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." **19**Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!" (John 21:18-19)

## Section 2

*16*For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. *17*For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"-- *18*and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. (2 Peter 1:16-18)

This is such an important truth. Unlike most world religions that are based upon myths or tales with perhaps a moral truth to convey but no basis in fact, and also unlike Islam and Mormonism, for example, that rely largely upon the testimony of one man as the basis of their beliefs, Christianity is centered around a series of events—most significantly the Resurrection—that actually and demonstrably *happened*. How can we say that with such confidence? Because multiple individuals, sometimes even hundreds, were witnesses to these events, including appearances of the risen Christ. One, or two, or perhaps even a small number of individuals can become deluded enough to think that they saw Christ when they clearly did not. Five hundred? I doubt it. If the apostles and New Testament writers were lying, these same people would have challenged and defeated their testimony. Instead, the Word was obviously found to be unassailable (at least in matters of history and fact) by those that were eyewitnesses to the events. We as Christians can rejoice that our faith is not based upon feelings or desires or even thoughts, but upon the historically documented truth that Jesus is Who He says He is, which he demonstrated in word and action.

**1**Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, **2**by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. **3**For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, **4**and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, **5**and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. **6**After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; **7**then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; **8**and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

One of the plainest demonstrations of His deity while on earth is what we call The Transfiguration, the specific event that Peter references in this passage. Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to a mountaintop, and was there glorified and acknowledged by

God the Father in what might have been an appearance of the same *Shekinah* glory by which God was manifested before Moses, and later before Solomon.

**1Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" 6When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." 8And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. 9As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." (Matthew 17:1-9)**

**9The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD. (Exodus 19:9)**

**15Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. 16The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. 17And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. 18Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights. (Exodus 24:15-18)**

**11When the priests came forth from the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to divisions), 12and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps and lyres, standing east of the altar, and with them one hundred and twenty priests blowing trumpets 13in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the LORD saying, "He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting," then the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, 14so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God. (2 Chronicles 5:11-14)**

Peter, James, and John had indeed experienced a foretaste of Christ's glory in His Kingdom, even as He had promised them just days before. This could only have led them to have even greater anticipation and hope of the coming reign of Christ in His glory, not to mention the glory that had been promised to them.

**28"Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." (Matthew 16:28)**

**15Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)**

**50Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)**

### Section 3

*19So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. 20But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:19-21)*

The “*prophetic word*” is none other than that of the Old Testament, the prophecies of which regarding Him Jesus consummately fulfilled. Refer back to 1 Corinthians 15 for a moment. Paul cites the testimony of the Old Testament as evidence that Jesus is Who He claimed to be.

**3For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)**

Peter cautions us against “private interpretations” of Scripture or prophecy. Indeed, how many misrepresentations and outright perversions of Scripture have come about because men have sought a mystical or otherwise “secret” meaning to a given passage, when the actual message of the Word is quite plain? Remember that man, especially when still utterly lost in sin, cannot understand the things of God. The plain truth of God’s Revelation will seem foolish to him, and he will reject it in favor of a system of belief—perhaps even based upon a perversion of Scripture—that is more palatable to his fleshly desires.

**14But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Corinthians 2:14)**

**3For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)**

For this reason, we are to “**test the spirits**” to determine the truth or falsehood of a given teaching. The Bible tells us that a plain indicator is whether or not confession is made “**that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.**” Much of the false teaching that was current in New Testament times, and in ours, seeks to “over-spiritualize” Jesus and the Gospel, and denies the basic historical facts of His life as presented in the Bible. We must reject any teaching that does not plainly preach Christ as He is presented in Scripture. (And, we must know Him *as He is presented in Scripture* in order to identify and reject falsehood.)

**1Beloved, 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. 2By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. (1 John 4:1-3)**

Remember, God is God, and He does not change. Anyone claiming that the Bible is outdated or needs a “new interpretation” denies the immutability of God and, consequently, of His inspired Word.

**16Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (James 1:16-17)**

At the same time, we can look forward to the time when we will know and understand His Word and will perfectly. In spite of our best efforts and even with the aid of the Holy Spirit our understanding of Scripture while in this life is marred by our sinfulness. Sin dooms us to a terrible existence indeed, punished forever through eternal death in Hell. We can rest in the promise, however, that Jesus Himself will return for all that believe in and follow Him, bringing us to a perfect understanding of His will, and more importantly, into eternal life in His presence. I pray that each one of us here today will experience that life.

**10but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. (1 Corinthians 12:10-12)**

**16For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)**

**23For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)**