

WHY SHOULD WE DO THE RIGHT THING?

II PETER 1:16-21

M.I. WHAT WE SAY, DO, AND THINK REALLY DO MATTER; BECAUSE SOMEDAY JESUS WILL JUDGE EVERY WORD, THOUGHT AND DEED.

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WHY SHOULD WE DO THE RIGHT THING?

II PETER 1:16-21

In order to get the full impact of this book, we must keep in mind that Peter has a feeling that he is going to be executed soon. I think that this affects Peter in two ways.

First of all, Peter wants to review in his mind all the promises of Jesus. Peter had failed in many ways. It would be important for him to know that all was right between him and God.

Secondly, Peter and the other Apostles sacrificed a great deal to bring the message of God to as many people as possible. They were very successful. The church was growing rapidly. However, false teaching was finding its way into the churches.

What's interesting to me as we study through this book is that some of the same issues that are confusing Christians today are the same issues that were threatening the church in Peter's day. For example, The Da Vinci Code, a popular book states that Jesus really isn't God incarnate and that He didn't rise from the dead. In fact, Jesus married Mary and had a baby with her. He goes back to quote some books from the late first century and early second century to get this idea. These ideas were some of the ideas that Peter was arguing against.

Peter wants to make sure the early churches are grounded in the truth about the Person and Nature of Jesus Christ. The point Peter wants to make is this. Jesus died and rose from the dead. He will return to judge the living and the dead. A clear affirmation of this is given in the Roman Catholic liturgy. It states, "Christ had died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again."

From my perspective, the fact that Jesus is certain to come at any time to judge the living and the dead, should cause us to live every moment anticipating this event. The Bible is very clear about this fact, but as you know, we are good at putting our

own personal spin on things. We are good at twisting the truth.

You all remember the church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. (How tough was it?) It was so tough that the board members were actually pretty good at spinning things to fit their lifestyles.

One day, we had a doctor come and speak to us about caring for our health. Here is the list the doctor gave us:

1. Eat right. Make sure you get your daily dose of fruits and veggies.
2. Take your vitamins and bump up your vitamin C.
3. Get plenty of exercise because exercise helps build your immune system.
4. Walk for at least an hour a day. Go for a swim.
5. Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
6. Wash your hands often. Use antibacterial wipes.
7. Try to eliminate as much stress from your life as you can.
8. Get plenty of rest.

The next day, I happened to see one of my deacons walking. I said, “Deacon, I see that you are putting into practice what we learned yesterday.”

He said, “Yes sir pastor, I’m taking the doctor’s approach. Think about it:

1. When you go to the doctor’s office for a shot, the first thing they do is clean your arm with alcohol. Why? Because alcohol kills germs.
2. So, ... I get my exercise by walking to the liquor store.
3. I get my daily intake of fruit by putting a lime in my Corona beer.
4. I get my vegetables by putting celery in my Bloody Mary.
5. I get plenty of fresh air by drinking outdoors on my deck.
6. I tell plenty of jokes to eliminate stress.
7. By the afternoon, I pass out and get plenty of rest.

8. The way I see it, if I keep the alcohol levels up, the germs can't take hold of me.
9. Like my grandmother used to say, "A shot in the glass is better than one in the ..."

Hold on deacon. That's not what the doctor said at all. But like the deacon, I think that all of us are really good at twisting truth to fit our situations. Peter wants to warn his congregations to stick to the plain truths of Scripture.

For at least 25 years now, business and philosophy departments in universities have been talking about ethics. And for the most part, that's all it has been, ... talk. I think that what it has all boiled down to is whatever can be done legally, is ethical. I'm sorry to say that for the most part, Christians have bought into this philosophy. In all areas of life, most Christians assume as long as they are obeying the law, they are acting ethically.

But for the Apostle Peter, there is only one reason to think and act ethically. That is because Jesus will come back to take His rightful place as King and Judge. Here is the main idea of this morning's text. **WHAT WE SAY, DO, AND THINK REALLY DO MATTER, BECAUSE SOMEDAY JESUS WILL JUDGE EVERY WORD, THOUGHT, AND DEED.** I think that we have failed to preach this enough. We often preach in order to help people feel better about life. But there are times that I should be more deliberate in preaching the fact that there is going to come a time when we will all have to stand before God alone and give an account of every word we have spoken, every thought we held on to, and every thing we ever did. And we must always add to that, Jesus could return at any moment, or we could die any moment and find ourselves before His Judgment Seat. We will have to give an account. And the basis of the judgment will be how we submitted to and obeyed the clear commands of the Bible.

Verses 16-18 describe the value of religious experience. In other words, **IF USED PROPERLY, EXPERIENCE CAN REINFORCE THE TRUTHS OF SCRIPTURE. IF USED IMPROPERLY, EXPERIENCE CAN HELP US TO JUSTIFY ALL SORTS OF WRONG BEHAVIOR AND WRONG THINKING.**

Let me give you an example of wrong thinking based on experience. I have

actually had a Christian man and a Christian woman who were both married to other people, come in and tell me that God brought them together. And so they were both going to divorce their spouses and get married. And then they went into this elaborate story of how they met. I said with great confidence, “I am confident this is not God’s work.” Shocked, they asked, “How can you say that?” My response was, “Because this is against the clear commands of Scripture.” Obviously they refused to listen to me.

You might think this is really uncommon. But I have seen all sorts of things like this. Here is the fundamental mistake we all make. We let our experience and feelings determine what’s right and wrong. If we operate by feelings and emotions, we will make all sorts of mistakes. Passion doesn’t define truth.

Passion, experience, and emotion, should motivate us to search out and follow truth as defined clearly in the Bible. Let’s start with Peter’s experience. The promise was defined in the first half of verse 16. Peter and the other Apostles spent their lives spreading the Good News of God throughout the world. He says, “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about ... our Lord Jesus Christ.” The first thing I want you to notice about verse 16 is that Peter now switches from the first person singular to the first person plural. He had been talking from the “I” perspective. Now he talks from the “we” perspective. All the truths they preached about Jesus Christ were historical and the facts could be checked out. In fact, Luke and Paul invited people to go and check out their message. Christianity is an historical religion.

From very early on in the church’s history, false teachers tried to introduce false doctrines into the church by appealing to Greek philosophical writings that tried to imitate authentic Christian writings. These false teachings came by way of Gnostic writings. The Gnostics believed that they had secret knowledge about God and Jesus. One of their beliefs was that the body was evil. This doctrine had two important ramifications. First, and most important of all, was that Jesus could not bodily rise from the dead because the body is evil. So they denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Secondly, our bodies are evil as well. Since the body is evil, it doesn’t matter what we do in the flesh. The upshot of all of this is that they were saved and enlightened simply by gaining secret knowledge. It didn’t matter what they did in the flesh. Jesus was not raised from the dead so He could not return to judge us.

The Da Vinci Code is based on these Gnostic writings. The interesting thing about Peter's society and ours is that there are all sorts of spiritualities floating around justifying about every kind of perversion you can imagine. There are people out there practicing polygamy, marrying under aged girls, practicing homosexuality, practicing heterosexual immorality and all sorts of things, and justifying it religiously. For the most part, people who live sexually and morally immoral lives paint a very human picture of Jesus. The fact is that Jesus was fully human. ... But He was fully God as well.

Look what Peter says they preached about Jesus. They preached about His power and His coming. Here is what is interesting about that statement. There were two comings of Jesus that the Apostles preached about and there were different types of power that would accompany each coming.

In the first coming of Jesus, He came as the Lamb of God Who would take away the sins of the world. Jesus came to pay the price for our sins. As the Lamb of God, as the Son of man, Jesus came as a humble servant. He lived a perfect, humble sinless life, and took our place on the cross. The power displayed was the breaking of the eternal bondage of evil on our lives. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus freed us from the curse of sin. As we place our faith and trust in Him, we are forgiven of all our sins. Our eternal destinies are changed from death to life.

But Jesus is also the King of kings and Lord of lords. He will return in power to judge the living and the dead. He will destroy and punish all evil once and for all.

The point of denying the divinity of Jesus and His second coming is that people can avoid the consequences of their behavior. In other words, they can act immorally in every sort of perversion and not worry about it because there is no judge. It was a lie in Peter's day. It is the same lie being told today. Many people don't believe in an eternal hell and they don't believe in a God Who sends people to hell.

Peter says the promise is this. Jesus came to save us from our sins. Jesus will come to judge the entire human and supernatural races. Angels and believers will live eternally in heaven with Jesus. The Devil, demons, and unbelievers will live eternally in hell. That is the clear promise of the Bible.

The light is described in the second half of verse 16 through 17. In these two verses, Peter describes an event in Jesus' life where Jesus demonstrated that He indeed would fulfill both roles as the Lamb of God and as the King of kings. The event described here is known as the Transfiguration.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this event. All three Gospels place this event shortly after Peter confessed Jesus as the Promised Messiah of Israel. Here is what is interesting. Right after Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus said that He would have suffer and die. Peter and the other disciples were confused because in their mind, the Messiah would be a conquering military hero who would free Israel from the grip of Roman and Israel would be set up as the dominating force in the world. They had this King of kings, Lord of lords image. When Jesus talked about being the Suffering Servant Messiah, they were confused and Peter even rebuked Jesus for even talking about that.

Next, Jesus promised the disciples that some of them would actually see Him coming in power. Shortly after this, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a mountain at night. All of a sudden, Jesus started to glow a white-hot brilliant color and levitated in the air. Moses and Elijah suddenly appeared on each side of Him. A voice boomed out of heaven, "This is my Son, Whom I love; with Him I am will pleased." When the disciples looked up, only Jesus remained. Clearly this was the type of Messiah Peter, the disciples, and all Israel envisioned. But they still did not understand that Jesus had to fill two roles.

Why does this event stick out in Peter's mind? I think several reasons, some connected to his impending death and the witness he wanted to leave the church with. If you remember Peter failed several times in his ministry. Think about his seeing Moses and Elijah with the Transfigured Jesus. Moses failed so badly, that God prevented him from ever entering the Promised Land. But there he was with Jesus, transfigured and standing on the Promised Land together with Jesus. Elijah became severely depressed at one point in his life, but here he was, standing together with Jesus in a glorified body. That would be a real sign of hope and comfort. He would soon be joining Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Just as God brought Moses and Elijah safely home, Jesus would also bring Peter safely home.

Further, the Jews believe that a prophet like Moses and Elijah himself would return before the coming of Messiah. Peter wanted to make sure the early church knew that Jesus the Messiah had to fulfill two roles. He successfully completed His mission as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world through His death and resurrection.

Not only that, Jesus will come a second time to fulfill His Messianic role as King of kings and Lord of lords. Peter witnessed a foretaste on the mountain that night of the transfiguration.

This is not some story concocted by some Greek philosopher or storyteller. Peter saw this with his very own eyes. In fact, Peter didn't really understand any of it at the moment he witnessed it. He only understood it after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and only after he himself received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Peter saw a foretaste of all the honor, power, and glory of Jesus that night.

Not only did Peter see Jesus transfigured before his eyes, since it was night time, it would be important to hear the message as described in verse 18. Sure, Peter may have been seeing a mirage. But the message was confirmed by his sense of hearing as well. He heard God confirm the fact that Jesus would fulfill both roles as Messiah. Look back at the end of verse 17. The phrase, "This is My Son," comes from Psalm 2:7. It is a Psalm that describes the Messianic King. Now look at the phrase, "I am well pleased." This phrase comes from Isaiah 42:1 where the Suffering Servant is described. Peter heard God declare that Jesus was the Promised Messiah and would fulfill two roles; redeemer and king. Peter saw and heard the message of God. Both of these roles were spelled out in the Bible. Peter used his experience to understand what God had prophesied in the Scripture. Peter used this experience to correct his incomplete understanding of what Messiah was supposed to be.

We are not to operate on the basis of our personal experience, passion, or emotions. We are not to operate on the basis of anything except the truth and promises of God as spelled out in the Bible. Passion, and emotion led Moses, Elijah, and Peter astray. But the truth of God together with the experience of God's grace and care in their lives put them all on the right path. **IF USED PROPERLY, EXPERIENCE CAN REINFORCE THE TRUTHS OF SCRIPTURE. IF**

USED IMPROPERLY, EXPERIENCE CAN HELP US TO JUSTIFY ALL SORTS OF WRONG BEHAVIOR AND WRONG THINKING.

Experience can help us to gain a deeper understanding of the Bible and shared experiences can help us gain an even richer understanding of the Bible. But the primary source of religious truth comes from the Bible as described in verses 19-21. The point of this section is that **WE MUST EVALUATE OUR LIVES AND EXPERIENCES BASED ON THE TRUTHS OF THE BIBLE.** Since I am going to talk about the topic of revelation, let me make an aside comment here. I think that God has revealed Himself and His will for us through nature, through the Person of Jesus Christ, and the Bible. Throughout the centuries, the church has come to depend on the Bible as the primary source of God's revelation for us.

The Bible was for Peter a light shining in a dark world as described in the first half of verse 19. Peter is saying this. The prophets, the writers of the Old Testament, spoke about the two roles of the Messiah. It is pretty hard for us to understand some of the truths of Scripture. But our experience of Jesus at the transfiguration helps us to understand this. For the most part, the Bible is pretty easy to understand. But there are some things that are hard for us to get a handle on. For example, even today, the fact that Jesus came as the Suffering Servant is hard to swallow for Jews. In fact they are still looking for the King of kings and Lord of lords to come. The Bible makes some allusions of Israel and the church again being joined. It's interesting to me that we are both waiting for the King of kings and Lord of lords to make His appearance.

On the other hand, there are people who claim to be motivated by science, logic, reason, or common sense who deny some of the basic mysteries of the faith. Specifically they deny the fact that Jesus is fully God as well as fully human. They tend to view Jesus as human, not divine. Following their line of thinking, they not only deny the divinity of Jesus, they deny events pertaining to Him such as, He was not born of a virgin, He certainly did not rise from the dead, and He did not really die on the cross. In fact, there is a whole group of "scholars" who have taken the Gospels apart trying to figure out what Jesus actually said or correctly portrays what is factual about Jesus. They deny almost all of the truths of the Gospels.

Peter told his congregations that the Bible is completely accurate, and if they

would submit their experiences and wills to the Bible, God would demonstrate the truth of Scripture to them.

I am reminding us that if we submit our experiences, our passions, and emotions to the truth of the Bible, God will give us certainty of the truth as well. But the trick to living a healthy, happy Christian life is to submit to the truths of Scripture without trying to put our own personal spin on them. I'll get to that in a bit.

The second half of verse 19 talks about the day. The Day of the Lord was a huge theme in the Old Testament prophets, and is emphasized by the New Testament writers in talking about the Second Coming of Christ. Technically, the Second Coming is referred to as The Parousia. Look, the Day of the Lord is a very simple concept. Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead. When the Hebrews were suffering or thought life was unfair, they would always cry out for the Day of the Lord. The prophets would answer them by saying things like, "You better not cry out for the Day of the Lord, because in it, God will judge you for your unfair treatment of the poor, for your immorality, and for your forgetting about God."

Here is the thought we must keep foremost in our minds. It brings balance to our Christian lives. Jesus could return at any time. We tend to view Jesus as this kind, loving, gentle, and friendly person. And He is. However, He is also a dangerous warrior Who is coming to destroy all that stand against Him. He is going to judge all of humanity and all beings in spiritual realms. We must never forget that He is dangerous as well as loving.

That's why the New Testament writers encourage us to live in the light. We are to be living holy lives focused on God because any moment could be our last. The very fact that we know Jesus is going to judge our every thought, our every word, and every deed should motivate us to live holy and upright lives. We need to care about the things Jesus cares about. We find out what God wants from us in the Bible. Again, let me say this once again. I have many friends who like to debate theological points and like to talk about obscure philosophical points. I am not interested in those things in the least. I need to practice obeying the clear commands of Scripture. I need to practice being humble, loving, gentle, and kind. I need to be doing more to help the poor. I need to be practicing submission and service at home with my wife and

children. I need to be controlling my thoughts, my words, and my behaviors. I don't need to be arguing about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. So if you come to me with arguments about the timetable of the end times, television miracle workers, or convoluted philosophy or theology, and find me not very interested in discussing it, please don't take it personal. I'm just not interested.

In verses 20-21 the promise is reinforced. The promise is this. The Bible is the Word of God. It is reliable and true. If we live our lives according to the commands and promises of the Bible, we will make it safely home to heaven. False teachers will try to cleverly twist the Bible to support their own evil desires.

Let's start with the origin of Scripture. Look at the end of verse 21. The authors of the Bible spoke God's Word as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. I like this metaphor because it is a sailing metaphor. The words, "carried along," describe a wind filling a sail. God did not dictate the Bible. Some words of the Bible are indeed direct quotes from God. However, the majority of the Bible is a combination of God's thoughts and human words. I know this is an oversimplification, but let me describe how I think the process went. God took particular people who lived in particular places in particular times with particular experiences. Then God spoke to them in language, pictures, and thoughts they understood. They then wrote down the experience in their own words as they understood God's words. That means that the words that come down to us are indeed the words of God, but they come to us in a particular time and culture that are not ours.

The trick of good interpretation is for us to get the universal truth out of the text and then apply it to our situation. That's why the Scripture is not a matter of personal interpretation. The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the text and the Holy Spirit guides the interpretation of the text. The Holy Spirit does work in individuals, but the Holy Spirit guides and inspires the church. Ultimately the interpretation of Scripture belongs to the church. In the New Testament, prophets had to submit their message to other prophets in the church for correct interpretation and confirmation. Because we live in a culture that emphasizes individual rights, we have a hard time understanding the nature of the church.

Here is the point. The inspiration of the Bible did not have its origin in human

beings. The correct interpretation of the Bible does not lie with individuals. The authority of correct interpretation lies with the church as a whole.

When I talk about church, I'm not talking about Devon Church or any individual church. I'm talking about the historic church, meaning all believers throughout all ages who have given their lives to Christ in faith. If we were to look at the whole history of the church, there is a margin of interpretation that we consider orthodoxy. As long as we stay within those boundaries of traditional orthodoxy, we are pretty safe in interpreting Scripture. But when we go outside those bounds, we start to face the dangers of Peter's day.

Based on this, Peter reminded his church that the Bible said that believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus and dedicating our lives to Him is the only way to be forgiven of our sins. Further, it matters the way we live our lives because Jesus is coming again to judge the living and the dead.

For us, it means that many of us are living defeated, unhappy, and unproductive lives because we have submitted to cultural norms or our own misguided personal beliefs instead of submitting to the truths of Scripture. If you find yourself unhappy, unproductive, not experiencing the joy of the Lord, the chances are that you may be worshipping a false god. Peter was convinced there was only one way to eternal life and an abundant physical life; and that was to place our faith in Jesus and Jesus alone, and to submit ourselves to the plain truths of the Bible. There is no other way. **WE MUST EVALUATE OUR LIVES AND EXPERIENCES BASED ON THE TRUTHS OF THE BIBLE.**

I have been a pastor for about 30 years. In those years I have seen people who seem to weather all the storms of life with joy, peace, and contentment. I have also seen people who seem to suffer and never get their heads above water.

I have been on both sides of the coin. As I look back at my life, I can see that when I held on to wrong thinking, pride, cultural and personal expectations, I often found myself unhappy and depressed. On the other hand, when I submitted to the plain truths of Scripture, humbled myself, and agreed to obey God, no matter what the circumstances, I found myself filled with joy, peace, and contentment. I think the problem is that we have been taught to live as individuals and to make up our own

rules. As a culture, we have rejected the plain truths of Scripture. We can find the peace, joy, and contentment in life if we keep this simple truth in mind. **WHAT WE SAY, DO, AND THINK REALLY DO MATTER, BECAUSE SOMEDAY JESUS WILL JUDGE EVERY WORD, THOUGHT AND DEED.**

If we are basing our lives on popular culture, then we are bound to fail. Our country, our culture, in fact most of the civilized world have lost their way. A minister named Rev. Joe Wright was asked to open the new session of the Kansas Senate. Everyone was expecting the usual generalities, but this is what they heard,

“Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance. We know Your Word says, ‘Woe to those who call evil good,’ but that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values.

We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery.

We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare.

We have killed our unborn and called it choice.

We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable.

We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem.

We have abused power and called it politics.

We have coveted our neighbor’s possessions and called it ambition.

We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression.

We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us, Oh God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free.

Amen.”

The response was immediate. A number of legislators were offended and walked out during the prayer in protest.

Jesus made it clear that we cannot serve two masters. If we want to find peace, joy, and contentment, we must reject all parts of culture and conventional wisdom that contradicts the plain truths of the Bible.