

~ Experience Vs Absolute Truth ~

Text: 2 Peter 1:16-19

Theme: God intends His people to receive truth from His Word, to interpret every experience by that truth, and then, through faith and obedience, to come into a living experience of the realities His Word has already revealed. The facts of God's Word must inform our faith and feelings.

Intro:

1. In 2 Peter 1:16-19 the Apostle Peter gives us a reminder of the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus, an event that Peter was an eyewitness to. Despite the fact that he had experienced this firsthand, Peter tells us that the Word of God is more sure, or more certain, than Peter's own experience.
2. There is a certain knowledge that only comes with experience, but our experiences need to be informed by the truth of God's Word. Consider the hypothetical example given of Mary.
 - a. Mary is locked in a black and white room which has been the extent of her experiential existence. In this room she has access to all the research material that has ever been produced regarding the colour spectrum, and specifically the colour blue. Mary has read all the books and research papers and understands that the colour blue must exist, but she is still limited to a black and white room. One day she steps outside the room and sees something blue; has she gained any knowledge?
 - b. The answer would seem to be yes, because now she has an experiential reference point for the knowledge she had accumulated. In the example above, Mary had all the facts and was able to interpret what she experienced, seeing the colour blue, by the facts. Without the facts, Mary would have seen the colour blue, but she wouldn't have the necessary facts in order to properly interpret what she was seeing.
3. As human beings, we have a very strong tendency to interpret the world through the lens of our experiences.
 - a. We may have learned about something, but until we experience that thing it remains conceptual rather than experiential. As soon as we experience it, it becomes real to us in a way that it never had been before.
 - b. In truth, man was created to experience the world through the lens of what God told us was reality, not the lens of what our experience tells us is reality.
 - c. **A return to elevating the Word of God above our own experiences is a return to how God intended things to be.**

Main:

- I. **The Experiential Tendency Explained**
 - A. The example of the fall (Genesis 3:1-6)

1. In the garden of Eden, God commanded Adam and Eve that they were not to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.
 - a. Adam and Eve obviously could conceptualize evil, otherwise the command would have made no sense.
 - i. Before the fall, Adam knew what evil was because God had defined it, but it wasn't until after the fall that Adam knew evil from the inside because he had become a sinner himself.
 - ii. Adam and Eve understood there was a right path and a wrong path, but they hadn't yet experienced what it was to choose the wrong path.
 - iii. So, what would it mean for them to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?
 - b. God never intended for man to experience evil, and man was carefully placed in a perfect world which was free of evil.
 - i. Man was made in the image of God, in the image of the nature and character of God that is.
 - ii. God possesses perfect knowledge of evil without ever committing evil or being morally corrupted by it. It is the personal participation in evil that is what destroyed the picture of man as God's image bearer.
2. At the root of the fall was rebellion against God's Word in exchanged for a personal experience.
 - a. The serpent who tempted Eve began by questioning the Word of God.
 - i. **Genesis 3:1b** *"Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"*
Genesis 3:4 *"And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:"*
 - ii. At the very beginning of the fall of man there was a question mark placed over the Word of God followed by an outright rejection of God's Word. God had told Adam and Eve what they could and couldn't eat, and God's Word had been enough for them up until this point in time.
 - **Hebrews 4:12** *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*
 - **2 Timothy 3:16-17** *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for*

correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

- iii. God gave man his Word and that was all that man needed in order to live a perfect and fulfilling life that was pleasing to God and beneficial to man.
- b. The second thing the serpent did was appeal to the human senses and emphasised personal experience over God’s Word.
 - **Genesis 3:5-6a** *“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof...”*
 - i. The serpents promise of forbidden knowledge appealed to the very same lusts that James warns Christians about.
 - **1 John 2:16** *“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh (it was good for food), and the lust of the eyes (pleasant to the eyes), and the pride of life (to be desired to make one wise), is not of the Father, but is of the world.”*
 - ii. Although Eve was deceived by the serpent, Adam made the choice to elevate his personal experience above the Word of God. Every man and woman since Adam has had to choose between trusting in our own wisdom, which is formed by our experiences, or trusting the Word of God.
- B. The problem since the fall (I Corinthians 3:19)
 - 1. Inherent within us is the tendency to trust what we experience with our senses, in particular our sight, far more than we trust what we are told by someone else.
 - a. we are heavily dependent on our experiences for formulating our world view. This is a major reason why people find it so difficult to accept the existence of a God they cannot see.
 - i. God wants us to take Him at his Word, but we want him to reveal Himself to us in a more experiential way, so that we can begin to rationalise our belief in His existence.
 - The Pentecostal movement with its false “tongues” is an attempt to give people an experiential element to their faith.
 - The Roman Catholics with their huge religious system which offers people a physical experience that makes

- them feel closer to God while discouraging individuals from reading the Bible and actually getting to know God personally through his Word.
- ii. It is actually a departure from what God intended when He gave us His written Word.
 - **2 Peter 1:19** *“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. Let’s look at another application of the concept: **Idols**.
- a. An idol is the result of man’s imaginations enacted upon.
 - i. The “images” Rachel stole when Jacob fled from uncle Laban were small figurines which were intended to represent his gods. These images began in the imagination of man and were translated into physical images.
 - ii. When man begins to formulate his conception of God based on his experiences rather than on who God has revealed Himself to be, that is when an idol is formed.
 - **Romans 1:21-23** *“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”*
 - b. The idol is formed first in the mind and imagination of the man as he begins to project his experiences onto his concept of God.
 - i. Once the imagined concept is complete, he may retain that image (idol) only in his mind or attempt to reproduce it in a physical form by creating an “image” as many pagan religions still do today.
 - ii. These idols are not just harmless images but they are the attempts of men to limit God to the realm of their own wisdom and experience.

So the question arises, “are all experiences wrong, and if not, should we still totally distrust our experiences, especially in relation to God?”

II. The Experiential Tendency Informed

- A. Our experiences are supposed to be interpreted through a biblical lens.

1. Our experiences are supposed to instruct us but they, in turn, are meant to be informed by our understanding of God and the world he created as revealed in His Word.
 - a. If God's Word is to be the objective standard by which we interpret every experience, then we must have confidence that we possess that Word. If the standard itself is viewed as uncertain or constantly changing, people will naturally begin looking elsewhere, often to their own experiences, for certainty.
 - i. This is another grave danger in the countless modern "bible translations" which undermine the absolute truth of God's Word. If there is no absolute reference point, then we are left to conjure up our own "images" of God based on our subjective experiences.
 - Rom 1:19-22 *"Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,"*
 - ii. When we reject God's revelation of himself through the Bible, we are left to our own vain imaginations regarding who God is and our place in the world God created.
 - iii. This in turn leads to atheistic humanism which is spoke of at the end of the passage, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."
 - b. If we don't ground our personal experiences in the Word of God, then we run a great risk of letting our personal perspective on our experiences drive us into mysticism and humanism.
 - i. Mystics believe that the ultimate truth of existence cannot simply be taught; it must be experienced firsthand.
 - Mysticism seeks a higher knowledge that is outside the natural world but cannot be known except by having mystical or religious experiences.
 - Mysticism makes the individuals experience the definition of what is real or true. Rather than having a grounding truth that governs our experiences, mysticism make the experience itself the truth that governs the way we interpret everything else.

- ii. Humanism is at the opposite end of the spectrum. Humanism denies the supernatural and teaches that man himself determines what is real or true.
 - Human reason is the god of the humanist, and he assumes that everything he experiences has a naturalistic explanation.
2. So, do our experiences hinder us or benefit us spiritually, and where do you draw the line between experiential and knowledge and absolute truth. After all, just because something appears to be true in our experience does not mean that it is absolutely true.
- a. Provided our experiences are interpreted through the lens of God's Word they can be extremely beneficial.
 - i. Even our understanding of who God is can be furthered by experiencing him in a personal way through a relationship with him.
 - ii. Think of this, someone may have read the Bible from cover to cover, and spent years studying Theology in an attempt to get to know God, but all of that knowledge is empty unless the individual steps through the door of faith and enters experientially into a relationship with God through salvation.
 - b. This is true on the human level as well.
 - i. You may have heard of someone named Rob Magill, you may have someone spend hours explaining Mr Magill to you in precise detail, outlining his character and his physical appearance and so forth, but until you meet Mr Magill and actually experience a connection with Him that goes beyond the intellectual assent to his existence you really don't know him on a personal level.
 - c. We can hear of the love of God, but until we experience it through salvation we can never really understand the breadth and depth of God's love.
 - i. While the experiential aspects of God's love and our relationship with Him are subjective, when they are aligned with God's Word they become reassuring and take on a deeper meaning.
 - ii. For example, when we go through a difficult trial and we begin to experience a deeper sense of God's love and presence with us, these things reassure us of God's Word which says;
 - **Ephesians 3:17-19** "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what

is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

- d. In summary, God intended for us to experience life, His creation, and a personal relationship with Him. Yet He never intended our experiences to determine what is true. Rather, His Word is the unchanging anchor that grounds our experiences in reality and enables us to rightly understand what we experience.

Conclusion:

1. We need to remember that:
 - a. God reveals truth.
 - b. Faith accepts that truth before experience confirms it.
 - c. Experience then strengthens faith in that truth.
2. In the garden of Eden, the serpent convinced man to elevate his experiences above the Word of God. As Christians, we need to put things back in order and take God at his Word and let his Word govern the way we view ourselves and the world we live in.