

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Nicene Creed		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	45		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	2 Peter 1:16-21		
Date:	July 13, 2025 (a.m.)		

### WHO SPOKE BY THE PROPHETS (Part II)

Evangelicalism today is awash in our culture's mindless preoccupation with feelings, emotions, and an over all heightened sense of subjective, personal experiences becoming the barometer for what is valid and meaningful – who cares if it is actually *true*! Floating prominently in this massive societal flotsam is what goes by the name *Charismatic* with its emphasis on supernatural, personal communication directly from God through such things as tongues, prophecy, word of knowledge, visions, dreams *and* transportations to heaven. Some of you will remember the TV news program 20/20 that, a few years back, devoted a segment to Betty J. Eadie and her claim to have died and gone to heaven. She gave a very detailed description of her experience to Hugh Downs, informing him that she not only saw Jesus, but was actually embraced by the Son of God. Why would 20/20 devote time to such a story? As of May of that year, Eadie's book, *Embraced by the Light*, had spent over 50 weeks on top of the *New York Times* non-fiction, hardcover, best-seller list. The book has already been translated into 21 languages. It is expected to sell twice as many copies in paperback. Bantam Books has paid \$1.5 million for paperback rights; audio rights went for \$100,000. A sequel has already been published.<sup>1</sup> Eadie claims to have died for five hours following a partial hysterectomy in 1973. During this brief five hour hiatus, she claims Jesus took her to heaven and gave her a message to take back to earth, informing her that "it's not your time yet. You have to go back to earth and finish your mission." What heavenly information did *this* Jesus pass on to Betty Eadie? *We are all divine by nature; Eve didn't really fall – she "made a conscious decision to bring about conditions necessary for her progression;" we learn that religions upon earth are necessary because there are people who need what they teach; we have no right to criticize any church or religion in any way. They are all very precious and important in Jesus' sight.* Although Eadie does not say so in her book, it turns out that she is a Mormon.<sup>2</sup> Most Christians would dismiss the book and Eadie's claims as bogus. But she may well have had such an experience. I don't doubt that she is sincere. But sincerity in such matters is not enough. A sincere person can be sincerely mistaken. The question is not whether or not she had an experience, the real question is, is it true? A lot of other people claim to have had a similar experience. In fact, her experience is somewhat *typical* of the claims of other people who said they also died and went to heaven and returned to earth. What is most disturbing about many of these claims . . . they are made by professing, Bible-believing Christians, and their stories are given wide publicity in the Christian media. Here are a *few* of the people who claim to have made the ultimate trip. Dr. Percy Collett, a Charismatic medical missionary, claims that in 1982 he spent six days in heaven. He not only had extensive conversations with Jesus, but incredibly claimed to have talked *face to face* with the Holy Spirit. There are dogs in heaven, says Dr. Collett, only they do not bark. You can eat all you want in heaven and never get fat or have to make a trip to the restroom. Dr. Collett says he saw Jesus overseeing the construction of mansions and that there is a large group of angelic seamstresses in the "Garment Room" sewing robe of righteousness.<sup>3</sup> In 1976, Melvin Ford appeared on the 700 Club and relayed his visit to heaven. He went into great detail on what heaven looked like and, as it turns out, his description is very similar to that given by Betty Eadie. The aroma of heaven is so overpowering that the necktie Ford was wearing on the trip still retains the fragrance so that, whenever he wants to refresh his memory of his experience, he simply sniffs

the tie. Paul Crouch of the Trinity Broadcasting Network interviewed Dr. Richard Elby about his experience. Like Melvin Ford and Betty Eadie, Dr. Elby was overwhelmed by the aroma of heaven. We are told by Dr. Elby that the primary nerve in God's cranium is the sense of smell, and that the whole purpose behind the Old Testament sacrifices was to send a sweet aroma up to heaven to satisfy God's main cranial nerve. Then there is the case of Roberts Liardon, who made the trip when he was 8 years old. Supposedly, Jesus took little Roberts to a branch of the River of Life. The two waded out into the water and Jesus suddenly dunked Roberts in the water and they proceeded to have a water fight. Liardon goes on to describe many other incredible sights he saw in heaven. He saw huge warehouses with storage rooms of human parts: legs, arms, hands, fingers, eyes, etc. These were "unclaimed blessings." Jesus told Liardon that all people on earth had to do to get new parts was simply come in faith and get what they need.<sup>4</sup> I could go on with this ludicrous and absurd list. Kenneth Hagin, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, and Benny Hinn have all made equally outrageous claims about their personal heavenly experiences. We even have at least one person who claims to have been to hell and back! She even appeared on the 700 Club to tell us all about it.<sup>5</sup> What are we to make of all this? Betty Eadie's runaway bestseller is surely the vanguard of what is going to be a flood of similar books (it sells, does it not?). Christians of all people should not be mesmerized by this type of thing. Unfortunately, especially in many Charismatic circles (not all, there are Charismatics who are equally disgusted by this as well), this is not the case. Why? Charismatics, as a whole, have no way to judge or stop testimonies like Betty Eadie's because in their system *experience validates itself*. Instead of checking such experiences against the Bible for validity, Charismatics typically try to get the Bible to fit their experience. If that does not work, they often simply ignore the Bible (although they would never admit it). Now I know that most Charismatics would protest and cry, "Unfair – we reject Betty Eadie's claims because she is a Mormon and her experience is contrary to the Bible!" My response is simply – What Biblical support does Collett, Ford, Elby, Liardon and the others have for their outrageous claims? In the strictest sense of the word: *None*. The Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 12:2-6 that he was caught up to the third heaven and that he heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. Interesting contrast. Paul was not permitted to talk about this or to tell of the things he heard, yet these people go into great detail about their experiences, together with verbatim reports of what Jesus supposedly told them. How do we judge these claims? What makes Betty Eadie's experience any less acceptable than those of Collett, Ford, Elby or Liardon? In the final analysis, there is no difference. All of these claims are rooted in irrational mysticism. Biblical authority is replaced by personal subjective experience. "There are only two basic approaches to biblical truth," writes MacArthur. "One is the historical, objective approach which emphasizes God's action toward men and women as taught in Scripture. The other is the personal, subjective approach, which emphasizes the human experience of God. How should we build our theology? Should we go to the Bible – or to the experiences of thousands of people? If we go to the people, we will have as many views as there are individuals. And that is exactly what is happening throughout the Charismatic movement today."<sup>6</sup> After his interview with Betty Eadie, Hugh Downs exchanged comments with 20/20 co-host Barbara Walters. Both concurred in their assessments that what happened to Betty Eadie could best be explained by medical authorities' studies on the effects of trauma on the brain. But when Hugh Downs, in response to the tremendous appeal Eadie's book was having, said this: "There is no doubt about the spiritual thirst. That's a fact." It is indeed. People are seeking to quench their spiritual thirst and the whole concept of *spirituality* has become a hot topic (remember Shirley McLaine's remark: "I am not interested in religion. But I am into spirituality.") Basically, it revolves around emotional experiences – "feel goodism." But any notion or concept of spirituality that has as its reference point simply a heightened state of religious consciousness (a quest for a religious experience) is totally alien to what the Bible means by spirituality. The Apostle Paul warns us that *someone may come to you and preach another Jesus* and that *Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light* (2 Corinthians 11:4-14), These people who claim to have gone to heaven and conversed with Jesus have been deceived either by their own mental illusions – or by a seducing spirit. We really should, however, not be all that surprised."

- I. **THE NEED FOR BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL LITERACY.** One of the major indicators of biblical and theological ignorance is the widespread acceptance and popularity of "Word-Faith"

personalities like Kenneth Hagin, Fred Price, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Benny Hinn, and Jerry Savelle. There are others of this stripe (Joyce Meyers, T. D. Jakes, and Joel Osteen. They do not necessarily agree on all the Word of Faith doctrines – but they share a commitment to the same kind of emphasis on the prosperity theme), but these are the most prominent. Why am I pointing the accusing finger at these people? The doctrines they teach and promote are not compatible with historic Christianity. At best, they are *sub-Christian*; at worst, they are heretical. The word “heresy” comes from the Greek word *hairesis*, which has for its root meaning, “that which is chose by, and for oneself.” This in turn highlights the thought of schism or faction (cf. Titus 3:10). A heretic, therefore, is someone who sows error, confusion, and division (1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20). Michael Horton has aptly written, “In other words, heresy brings with it not only error, but a particular spirit or attitude: arrogance, a rejection of all authority, and self-will.”<sup>7</sup> The New Testament expresses serious concern over this subject. This is seen not only in its condemnation of false doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3), but also in the way it urges the maintenance of sound teaching (1 Cor. 11:2; Gal. 1:8; 2 Tim. 1:13). Do these people teach heresy? Yes, and this is not only my opinion, but is the position of such respected men as the late Walter Martin, John MacArthur, Jr., Hank Hanegraaff, R. C. Sproul, Dave Hunt, to mention only a few.<sup>8</sup> What kind of heresy are we talking about? How serious is it? Well, to begin with, one of the doctrines taught by the Word-Faith people is that Christ did not make atonement on the cross; rather, He had to accept into His own spirit the nature of Satan and be re-born in the pit of Hell. That is heresy. The Word-Faith teachers deny the omnipresence and eternal existence of the pre-incarnate Christ. That is heresy. Another doctrine they advocate is that the believer is actually a “little-god” and, as such, is just as much an incarnation of God as Jesus. That is hereby. Finally, the Word-Faith teachers deny the historic doctrine of the Trinity and reject the Biblical teaching on the Sovereignty of God. That is heresy. Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders to take heed to themselves and to the flock over which God had given them charge because they would be confronted by “savage wolves” who would attack and not spare the flock. Even from among their own number, false teachers would arise “speaking perverse things” and seeking to draw away disciples (Acts 20:17-35). The Apostle Peter in his last epistle wrote of “ignorant and unstable” men who “distort the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16). Pastors are expected to feed and protect the flock, and one of the ways this is done is by pointing out false teachers. Paul had no reservation about naming names (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:14-15). Neither do I. Our churches are full of people who are ignorant of historic Christianity and, as such, are easy prey for false teachers. Simply because they stand up and declare, “The Bible says . . .!” does not mean they are being true to Scripture. Remember, Paul warned the Corinthians about someone preaching “another Jesus” (2Cor. 11:4). The Jesus of the Word-Faith teachers is *not* the Jesus of historic Christianity. Ignorance is not bliss and all Christians are called to know the faith, which has once and for all been delivered to the saints. Mark the words of Luther: “We are not free from blame if we have a wrong faith and follow false teachers. The fact that we did not know will be of no help to us, for we were warned beforehand. Besides, God has told us to judge what this or that person teaches and to give an account. If we fail to do this, we are lost. Therefore the soul’s salvation of each person depends on his knowing what is God’s Word and what is false teaching.”<sup>9</sup>

- II. ***WHY SOLA SCRIPTURA IS SO IMPORTANT.*** I would like to be able to tell you that the kind of things we see in the Word of Faith crowd is not typical of the Charismatic renewal as a whole – but I can’t. Why? Because even the more restrained and theologically cautious Charismatics likewise *insist* that God continues to give revelation today – and not simply in terms of personal guidance – but theological insight as well. Back in May of 1994, a certain Charismatic “prophet” named John J. Hinkle gained nationwide attention (appearing on TBN and the 700 Club) claiming that God personally told him (“in a very loud, firm voice, as clear as a ringing bell and with such power and clarity there was no way to doubt it”) that on this historic day, God will “rip the evil out of this world.” Mr. Hinkle said he would not try to convince people of the truth

of his message since, “the Holy Spirit will do the convincing of those who were to believe him.” In other words, if you do not believe Mr. Hinkle’s message, you are resisting the Holy Spirit. Mr. Hinkle leaves no doubt about the source of his inspiration. “This is the startling message that He gave me: ON THURSDAY, JUNE THE 9<sup>TH</sup>, I WILL RIP THE EVIL OUT OF THIS WORLD. There was no doubt that this was the voice of God speaking [*Really? How does he know that?*], but my human mind [*it is typical of some Charismatics to denigrate the “human mind by which they mean the intellect*] asked a question and I asked the Lord [*the voice*]: Lord, you said in your Word that no man would know the hour of the Second Coming. Instantly the voice spoke and said to me, *I didn’t say the Second Coming*, and in that moment I knew it was going to be a great cleansing and destruction of evil forces and power in the world. It is not the Rapture, but God’s love and Glory overcoming all evil.” Mr. Hinkle goes on to claim that the voice directed him to specific passages of Scripture to support the message. This is most interesting since the voice declared that the message did not refer to the Second Coming, yet the passages cited – Isaiah 25:6-10; 40:5; Luke 17:30-34; Matthew 13:41 *do* refer to the Second Coming or to the consummation (which *follows* the Second Coming). Is God giving direct revelation today? Although this might appear to be a recent development (this trend emphasizes personal, direct communication from the Holy Spirit *apart* from the Scriptures). Along with 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 the passage in 2 Peter 1:20-21 likewise highlights the divine origin of Scripture. Like Paul, Peter is well-aware of nearing the end of his life. Down through the centuries people claimed the Holy Spirit speaks directly to them apart from Scripture.

- III. **PETER’S ASSERTION.** The Scriptures are *not* the product of human determination. Note the negative “Not by the will of man.” Young writes: “With great force and clearness Peter writes, *Being borne by the Holy Spirit, men spake from God* (translation by the author), and in this declaration gives us the heart of the matter. In language as unmistakable and direct as that of Paul, he maintains that the Scriptures have their origin in God. Men spake from God, he asserts, and then further remarks that these men were borne by the Holy Spirit. There is here no conflict with Paul. Paul stresses the Divine origin of the Scriptures, and Peter does the same thing. Whereas, however, there is no conflict, it is true that Peter does say more about the Scriptures than did Paul in his epistle to Timothy. Peter insists that the Scriptures are from God, but he goes on to say that men, being borne by the Holy Spirit, spake, and in this utterance tells us quite a bit as to how God breathed forth or produced the Scriptures. The Scriptures, according to Peter, are not a magical book dropped down from heaven but, rather, gave them to us by means of men who spake from Him.”<sup>10</sup> The word translated *interpretation* is the genitive feminine singular norm *epilysis* which is a *hapax legomen* which refer to this term appearing only once in the New Testament. Green correctly points out that: “Peter is not talking about *interpretation* but *authentication*. His theme is the origin and reliability of the Christian teaching about grace, holiness and heaven. The same God whom the apostles heard speak in the transfiguration spoke also through the prophets. Thus the argument in verses 20, 21 is a consistent and indeed necessary conclusion to the preceding paragraph, i.e., we can rely on Scripture because behind its human authors is God. The prophets did not make up what they wrote. They did not arbitrarily unravel it. *They did not blab their inventions of their own accord or according to their own judgments* (Calvin). In the Old Testament, this was the characteristic of the false prophets, who *speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord* (Je. 23:16, RSV, cf. Ezk. 13:3). But true prophecy were *moved or carried along* by the Holy Spirit. Peter, then, is talking about the divine origin of Scripture, not about its proper interpretation. If interpretation were his subject in this verse, then verse 21 would be utterly irrelevant to his argument. What is more, a very forced meaning would have to be given to *ginetai*, viz., *comes under the scope of* (Mayor). And Mayor was too good and honest a scholar not to be troubled about this.”<sup>11</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** Peter describes the world as a place of obfuscation. *Obfuscate* comes from the Latin *obfuscare*, to darken, and by derivation means to deprive of light, make dark or dim. In modern usage *obfuscate*

may mean either to make something obscure or indistinct, or to make it confused, muddled, or unclear. You can obfuscate the truth, obfuscate your meaning, or obfuscate your intentions. Think of *obscure* when you think of the verb to *obfuscate*.<sup>12</sup> The Word of God is a light shining in a dark and murky place. The Old Scottish commentator John Brown declared that the Bible, “depends on being not of self-disclosure, but the work of men who *spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*. It could not have served this purpose if it had been otherwise – and being so, it cannot but serve it in the best way. Like the Author of light, from whom it comes, revelation is clear, steady, unchanging – clouds may prevent us from seeing it, but nothing can dim its intrinsic lustre. It is a true light, making everything enlightened by it appear to be what it is – a portion of the light in which He, who can make no mistake, sees all things.”<sup>13</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics gleaned from *Christianity Today*, March 17, 1994, p. 53, and *The Christian Observer*, June 3, 1994, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Christian Research Journal*, March/April, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> “An Interview with Dr. Percy Collett” by Mary Steward Relfe in *Relfe’s Review* No. 55, Aug. 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Roberts Liardon, *I Saw Heaven* (Harrison House, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> At least two other women have made similar claims. Aline Baxley, “I Walked in Hell and There Is Life After Death,” *Charisma*, Nov. 1990, p. 145, and Mary Kathryn Baxter, *A Divine Revelation of Hell* (National Church of God, N.D.). Bob Jones of the Kansas City prophets claimed mystical journeys to heaven and hell, cf. Eric Wright *Strange Fire? Assessing the Vineyard Movement and The Toronto Blessing* (Evangelical Press, 1996), p. 161.

<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur, Jr. *Charismatic Chaos* (Zondervan, 1992), p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Scott Horton, *Modern Reformation* (Jan.-Feb., 1994), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *The Agony of Deceit: What Some TV Preachers Are Really Teaching*, ed. M. S. Horton (Moody, 1990); Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Harvest House, 1993); John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Zondervan, 1993); Dave Hunt & T. A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity* (Harvest Home, 1985); D. R. McConnel, *A Different Gospel* (Hendrickson, 1988). Some might accuse me of having a theological ax to grind against Charismatics since the Word-Faith teachers are all self-proclaimed Charismatics. It should be noted that Martin, Hunt, Hanegraaff, Fee, and McConnel are writing from within the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition.

<sup>9</sup> *What Luther Says: An Anthology* II, ed. E. M. Plass (Concordia, 1959), p. 637.

<sup>10</sup> E. J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth* (Eerdmans, 1978), p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> M. Green, *The Second Epistle of Peter and The Epistle of Jude: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Eerdmans, 1975), p. 90.

<sup>12</sup> C. H. Elster, *Verbal Advantage* (Random House, 2000), p. 202.

<sup>13</sup> John Brown, *2 Peter Chapter One: Parting Counsels* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1980), p. 219.