

Alignment – Ordering Your Life With God
The Credibility of Aligning With Him
2 Peter 1:16-21

Introduction: Apologetics is the science of defending something, and because of this, some in our tent of conservative evangelical theology are critical of its efforts. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say, "The Bible doesn't defend the existence of God; therefore, we shouldn't presume to need to do it either."

Now, let me first say that I totally agree that God has no need to defend Himself. God needs no recognition or approval to exist. However, I totally disagree with the suggestion that the Bible records no intentional effort by God to defend His existence, power, and authority.

For instance, I recently watched a documentary on a murder investigation that came to a screeching halt because the person they believed to be murdered showed up very much alive. She had been kidnapped. Likewise, centuries after God spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, those stories were handed down one generation after another. Still, the God of those stories had not clearly shown Himself since. As such, it's not hard to imagine that some, if not many, began to question the existence of God, possibly including a young man named Moses. However, one day, God proved Himself to Moses by doing what the woman did in that documentary; He showed up! In Exodus 3 we read,

1 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. 3 And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3:1-6)

Now, here's what was interesting: in the documentary I watched, when the woman presented herself to the police, she had to prove she was who she said she was. I won't go into the details, but the police weren't going to believe it because she said it, but rather because her parents affirmed it was her, she matched photos that they knew were of her, she had knowledge of things only she would know, and I believe they even did a DNA test. Because the evidence proved she was who she said she was, the police had no doubt it was her and thus had no reason to accuse her boyfriend of murder. In the end, it was unequivocally proven that a serial rapist and murder had kidnaped her.

In the same way, how do we know the one who spoke to Moses is God? If you keep reading the Book of Exodus, God makes it way more straightforward than talking out of a burning bush that wasn't consumed by the flames. One might argue that what Moses saw that day

was nothing more than a hallucination. But, as you read the story, you see God unleashing miraculous judgments on Egypt that ended with the firstborn in all the land being killed on the same night, that is, with the exclusive exception of those who obeyed God's command and were in a house with the blood of a Passover lamb smeared on the door posts. God then led the Hebrew people out of Egypt with a cloud by day and fire by night.

God performed miracle after miracle that proved to the Hebrew people that He, Yahweh, existed and that He alone is Elohim, the all-powerful creator and sustainer of the Universe! However, the pinnacle of these miracles, which is so often cited in the Bible as such, was when God parted the Red Sea, led the people across on dry land, and then folded it back on top of the Egyptian army that was pursuing them. There are countless references in the Bible to this event, and almost all of them are used to prove the power and trustworthiness of God, and, in doing so, they also confirm the existence of God, who is all-powerful and trustworthy!

The Book of Job is another prominent place in the Bible where we see God defending Himself. At the end of the Book, God confronts Job's lack of faith with a torrent of questions that all begin with, "Where were you when I ...". Each question brings Job face to face with the reality that God is not only more powerful than the universe itself, but that His mind and ways are not subject or explainable by mankind or anything else. He alone is God, and we clearly are not! In the face of Job questioning the justice of God, God not only defends His existence but also the extremity of His power and sovereignty and thus eliminates any concept that Job, or anybody else, has the right or even ability to judge God and His ways. God was literally defending Himself in the face of Job's accusations.

The examples of God defending His existence, power, and trustworthiness didn't stop in the Old Testament. The New Testament is also filled with apologetic passages, and today, we arrive at one of them in our study of 2nd Peter. It's an apologetic of the Gospel itself; that is, it's a defense of the credibility, and thus authority and trustworthiness, of the Gospel Peter preached.

So, let me begin by reading 2 Peter 1:16-21 to you, then I'll walk you back through it and dig deeper.

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths 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, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:16-21)

Proposition: The credibility of the Gospel Peter preached was based on two significant apologetics.

The first significant apologetic that gave credibility to the Gospel Peter preached was his personal experience.

(1) The testimony of Peter's personal experience - Peter, along with James and John, were witnesses to Christ's supernatural existence and the confirmation by God that Jesus is His eternal Son. If Jesus is God, then the Gospel He preached to Peter and the other disciples is authoritative and trustworthy. (1:16-18)

A. 16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths 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, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

B. Peter refers to a story known as "The Transfiguration" recorded in the Book of Mark and Matthew. Both Gospel writers give us the exact same story. But for argument's sake, I will use Mark's account of this story because the Gospel of Mark is widely accepted as Peter's. Mark recorded what Peter told him about the Gospel, and Peter himself officially endorsed it. Scholars love debating when the Gospel of Mark was written, and for the last 100 years or so, liberal scholars have done everything possible to date it as far away from the life of Christ as they can to try and discredit its accuracy. However, liberals were highly disappointed when a fragment of a scroll was found that quoted the Gospel of Mark in 50 A.D.¹, less than 20 years after Christ's death, burial, and resurrection and well before the death of Peter. It made all the attempts to remove the authorship of the Gospel beyond the lives of those who knew Christ impossible. It is, therefore, reasonable and most accurate to believe that Mark is the official telling of Peter's story of Jesus and that Peter himself attested to it. So, with that, what did Peter tell Mark about what happened? If you have your Bible, flip over to Mark 9. The Apostle Matthew records the same story in Matthew 17.

C. 2 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. 5 And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses

¹ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [*Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*](#) (Vol. 10, pp. 15–16). Baker Book House.

and one for Elijah." 6 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "**This is my beloved Son; listen to him.**" 8 And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. 9 And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10 So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean. 11 And they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" 12 And he said to them, "Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? 13 But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him." (Mark 9:2-13)

- D. So, Peter's point in verses 16-18 is straightforward. Peter essentially says, "The Gospel I've been preaching to you is the very Gospel Jesus Himself taught; the Jesus whom God Himself testified to as His eternal Son and commanded us to listen to which in that context meant to fully submit to, and trust. Peter is saying, "You need to submit to and trust the Gospel I'm preaching because it came from the one the Father told us to listen to! This is not our Gospel; this is His Gospel!"
- E. Furthermore, this wasn't just witnessed by Peter. James and his brother John were also there, and they all saw the same thing. If just Peter had seen it, then it wouldn't have been as trustworthy, but the fact that Peter, James, and John all saw and heard the same thing simultaneously makes it hard to suggest it was a hallucination. Ironically, however, if three people did happen to have the same hallucination at the same time, that would likely be just as much a testimony of a supernatural act of God as it not being a hallucination.
- F. But, for argument's sake, what if this was something they imagined incorrectly? What if it was coincidentally a simultaneous hallucination caused by eating a bad burrito or something? After all, the perception of our experience is not always the most reliable thing. In a 2014 article on changes in how eyewitness testimony was gathered and used in criminal cases, the author noted, "... just because someone says something confidently doesn't mean it's true."² So, there is no doubt that Peter, James, and John believed they heard God the Father say Jesus is His son, and they need to trust and submit to what He says. There is no doubt these same three men, as well as many others, believed they saw, spoke with, ate with, and walked with Christ after His resurrection and saw Him ascend into Heaven. These are VERY compelling testimonies because so many had the same exact experience and were willing to die rather than recant anything about their story or what they claimed Jesus Himself taught them.

² <https://www.science.org/content/article/how-reliable-eyewitness-testimony-scientists-weigh>

- G. What if the more than 500 people that Paul referenced in 1 Corinthians 15, a letter with absolute certainty was written by Paul, and thus with absolute certainty was referencing people who were still alive that had witnessed the resurrected Christ ascend into heaven, were actually mistaken? That is, for argument's sake, what if not only did Peter, James, and John suffer a mutually simultaneous hallucination but did it again with over 497 others when Christ ascended? What if the followers of Jesus of Nazareth had a virus that caused mutually simultaneous hallucinations? Nothing like that has ever been heard of in human history, but for argument's sake, what if the cynics are right? What if their experience, as solid as it was, was still not entirely trustworthy?
- H. More possibly, what if their recollection of what Jesus said was wrong? How would we know? How would we know if what Peter and the other Apostles and witnesses proclaimed was right? Is there something more reliable than their experience? Well, YES! That takes us to the second key apologetic of the Gospel Peter preached.

The second significant apologetic that gave credibility to the Gospel Peter preached was Old Testament prophecy.

(2) The testimony of the Old Testament - In preaching what Jesus taught Peter, Peter is preaching exactly what the Holy Spirit told the Old Testament Prophets the Messiah would be, do, and say. (1:19-21)

A. 19 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word,

1. The Greek word translated “prophetic” means “the words belonging to a prophet.” Peter is speaking of the words of the Old Testament prophets, not random prophecy.

Note: “*prophētikós* means “belonging to a prophet,” “prophetic.”³

2. So, those who get upset with me constantly preaching that the Scriptures are better than our experience need to see that I’m saying it on good authority! Peter just said the prophetic Word is better than his experience of literally seeing the physical humanness of Jesus pulled back so that the divinity of Jesus could physically shine forth, then hearing God audibly speak and affirm that Jesus is the eternal Son of God and therefore they should submit to Him and trust Him!
3. However, let me also clarify Peter is not arguing that the Old Testament Scriptures are superior to the New Testament Scriptures. K.S. Wuest noted, **“To appreciate this we must put ourselves somewhat in the place of**

³ Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1985). In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* (p. 953). W.B. Eerdmans.

those for whom St. Peter wrote. The New Testament, as we have it, was to them non-existent. Therefore we can readily understand how the long line of prophetic scriptures, fulfilled in so many ways in the life of Jesus, would be a mightier form of evidence than the narrative of one single event in Peter's life" (Lumby)."⁴

4. Peter is saying what we have from the Old Testament prophets is even more reliable than his extremely reliable experience. But he is also saying that, as incredibly awesome and authentic as his experience was, if it didn't match what God had previously said, then his experience wasn't what he thought it was! Why? Because God doesn't change His mind about things, if He has said this is what He's going to do, then that's what He's going to do. God is completely trustworthy and, therefore, worthy of our submission. The Bible says,
5. **"19 God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" (Numbers 23:19)**
6. Therefore, no matter how convincing something you experience may be, don't do eisegeses and start defining Scripture through your experience, but rather, through exegesis, where you see and interpret your experience through the Scriptures. Scripture is the standard by which we measure our experiences, not vice versa. As such, Peter then says,

B. to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

1. Have you ever walked into a really dark room and noticed you were unable to see anything until you found the spot in the room that had light? But oddly, once your eyes found that light, you could then turn your eyes back to other areas and follow that light into areas of the room you couldn't previously see. Maybe I'm weird, but I've had this happen numerous times. Until I tune my eyes into the angle of the light entering the room originating from within the room, I can't really make out anything in it. I have to first find the lamp shining in the dark place.
2. Our experiences, as exceptional and personal as they may be, are in the darkness of a world that is under the curse of sin and Satan! In addition, our minds are not naturally equipped to understand God at all, and therefore, apart from His saving work in our lives, we can't know Him, nor do we even want to know Him. Consequently, it is God's Word alone coming to us that shines into our experience and properly defines it. As such, we must stay

⁴ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 12, pp. 33-34). Eerdmans.

constantly aware of that light until Jesus comes back and permanently removes the curse of darkness over this world! It's why Peter then writes,

C. until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,

1. **"Venus, usually known as the morning star, reflects the rays of the sun when daybreak has as yet not appeared. But the terms *day* and *morning star* are both poetic descriptions of the coming of Christ and do not necessarily imply a sequence."**⁵
2. **"Indeed, even our *hearts* shall not *fully* realize Christ in all His unspeakable glory and felt presence, until He shall come."**⁶
3. In other words, until Christ returns, know that you will need the words from the prophets, which now includes the New Testament as a more sure Word, on which to base your understanding of God and life. But when Christ comes, all things will be known, and we will no longer see in part but in full; we will no longer know or look through a foggy window, but we will be with Him!
4. **12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)**
5. **3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation 21:3-5)**
6. Until that Day, keep the Word of God as your standard! Fixate on it as the light it is in our dark world and sinful hearts! Peter then explains why at a deeper level. He writes,

D. 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by

⁵ Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953–2001). [*Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*](#) (Vol. 16, pp. 269–271). Baker Book House.

⁶ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 519). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

1. What makes Scripture “Scripture” is that it wasn’t an opinion fleshed out by a man or men, but rather its writers were literally “carried along by the Holy Spirit.” It was not based on human rationality or illumination, but it was literally that the Holy Spirit delivered it to the writers.
2. Paul explained this same truth in a letter to the Church in Corinth. In it, he was not defending the inspiration and infallibility of the Old Testament, but rather what we would come to know as the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 2:11-13 we read,

- a. **11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also, no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.**

Note: Paul is saying that we cannot speak the truth about God unless God gives it to us.

- b. **12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.**

Note: The context is clear that Paul is speaking of himself and the other Apostles. Therefore, Paul is saying that God placed the Holy Spirit in him and the other writers of Scripture and, as such, brought to them truth they themselves had no ability to discover.

- c. **13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Corinthians 2:11-13)**

Note: Likewise, the Holy Spirit taught them what to say. Because it is from God, it can’t be expressed through human wisdom but must be expressed by God’s words. Otherwise, it wouldn’t properly communicate what is from God. What Paul argued for here is what we call the doctrine of infallibility of Scripture, that is, the original manuscripts are precisely what God told the writers to write (infallible) and because they are God’s Words, they therefore are also inherent (authoritatively correct in what they are about.)

3. So, putting this in context to what Peter is arguing, his interpretation of what happened the day he, James, and John witnessed the transfiguration of Christ isn’t authoritative, but rather, what the Scriptures say about it is because the Scriptures are not what he thought about it, but what God

thought about it! Therefore, if how he interpreted the situation matched what the Scriptures said about it, he could confidently trust how he saw it. However, if it didn't, then he would have needed to see it the way God said it was, and thus, he would have needed to change his interpretation! Therefore, if the Old Testament Scriptures had not clearly taught that the Messiah would be the eternal son of God, then Peter could not have interpreted the voice from heaven to mean that. However, because the Scriptures clearly stated that he would be the eternal son of God, Peter was free to understand the voice to mean exactly what the voice said.

4. Furthermore, and more importantly, because the voice said what they knew God had already said, they were free to believe the voice was God's! The Old Testament pointed straight to what they saw and heard on that mountain, and as such, they didn't need to argue with Jesus; they needed to listen to HIM ... something I'm sure all of them wished they would have started doing sooner than they did! So with that,

CHALLENGE: Are you aligning your life with God's Word or yours? Are you interpreting life through your knowledge or God's?

Sadly, these days, the world confidently tells us never to let truth get in the way of an honest opinion!

When we first moved to North Carolina, I had the most challenging time figuring out how to grow grass. For those who know me, you might find that surprising because I take great pride in keeping my yard looking good. However, during the first few years we were here, I kept losing my yard by the end of June. It turns out, even though I concluded that my grass was turning yellow and getting black spots all over it because it wasn't getting enough water, it was actually caused by fungus. However, because I kept putting water on it I was actually increasing the environmental opportunity for the fungus to spread and kill my grass. Furthermore, because I was cutting it too short, the root system got cooked when it started getting into the upper 80s and low 90s, and whatever had survived the May fungus ended up baked by the June sun.

I was confident I was doing the right thing until I took the time to read the back of the seed bag and found out I was cutting the grass too low. In addition, when I did a little research on the yellow and black spots and found out that it was fungus I then knew it needed fungicide instead of more water! The point is, when I stopped interpreting my circumstances through my knowledge and started interpreting my circumstances through the knowledge of the people who made the grass seed, I ended up with a beautiful green lawn!

The Psalms are full of examples of where David begins with his interpretation of what's going on but then recalls God's Word, and as such, his tone and outlook totally change. One of my favorite examples is Psalm 13, a Psalm my wife actually wrote a song to. I'm not going to try and sing it but here's how the Psalm goes,

1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2 How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? 3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, 4 lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. 5 But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. 6 I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me. (Psalm 13)

Did you see what happened at the end of that Psalm when David's head and heart turned away from defining his circumstances through his perspective but instead defined them through the truth about the power and trustworthiness of God? The same is true for us.

Whether it's the morality we're aligning our lives with or the hope we are aligning our lives with, whenever we interpret our circumstances by our knowledge instead of the Word of God, we align ourselves with knowledge that is, at best, insufficient and possibly massively destructive for our life and circumstance. However, when we define our circumstances by His Word and, as such, align our lives with His Word, we are aligning ourselves with His power and trustworthiness no matter what becomes of our circumstances!