

spoke from God..." Peter's reasoning may be clearly seen by identifying the parts of his argument: *Reason* -- because men spoke from God as they were borne up (in their writing) by the Holy Spirit; *Conclusion* -- therefore no prophecy comes into being by one's own interpretation. Peter is telling us of the godly men who wrote the prophecy of Scripture; and he says that because the Spirit bore up and carried along these men as they wrote, no portion of Scripture has been conditioned or modified or distorted by the fallible human interpretation of its authors. The infallible Word of God is not conditioned by the fallible opinions of men!

Thus this verse does not deny or even relate to the right of private interpretation. It speaks of the original writer's interpretation, not of the reader's. The Christian who reads the Bible, seeking to understand what the Spirit has revealed, may depend upon the understanding of some other human beings, or he may investigate and interpret the Bible for himself. The latter expresses the principle of the right of private interpretation.

It should be emphasized that Christians, employing the right of private judgment, do not place themselves *over* Scripture, as though they were judges of the Word of God: rather, they place themselves *under* the judgment of Scripture. recognizing that the Supreme Judge is the Holy Spirit himself speaking in Scripture, and that they are merely discerners of what the Spirit has said in His Word. This emphasis suggests the thought that perhaps Christians do not have an *absolute* liberty to interpret the Bible, but they have liberty only within the limits of certain laws or guiding principles. And that brings us back to the question, "Are there limits to the right of private judgment?" To this question we must answer that there are at least four principles which limit this right.

1. The principle of the Bible's self-interpretation

Many times the Bible provides us with interpretive principles by the manner in which speakers or writers clarify the meaning of a word or statement, quote from another place in Scripture, identify the fulfillment of a prediction, or allude to another scriptural doctrine. In such cases we are not free to place our own construction upon the particular Scripture at hand, but must accept the construction which the Holy Spirit has placed upon the verse or passage.

For example, in Rom 13:8 Paul writes. "... he who loves his neighbor has