



BE DILIGENT, DO NOT STUMBLE 2 PETER 1

INTRODUCTION TO 2 PETER

1 Peter was written to comfort and encourage Christians who were experiencing persecution by unbelievers. A short time afterwards, 2 Peter was written to warn Christians about dangers of false teachers and apostasy within the church. Peter's first letter speaks much about suffering. The second letter speaks much about knowledge, in order to counter the false teachers. To stand firm in one's faith and live an honorable life in conformity with the will of God, one must have knowledge of correct Christian doctrine. At the time 2 Peter was written, some leaders within the church were living corrupt lives and using their position for monetary gain. They were also permitting immorality in the church. False teachers were denying the teaching of Christ's return. As a loving shepherd, concerned for the sheep Jesus had commissioned him to feed, Peter wrote this brief letter of warning. John Calvin has written, "The majesty of the Spirit of Christ expresses itself in all parts of the epistle" (John Calvin, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries).

Date

2 Peter was probably written between A.D. 65 and 67 while Peter was in Rome, shortly before he was martyred by Nero. According to tradition, Peter requested to be crucified upside down because he felt unworthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

Author

Some scholars have questioned Peter as the writer of this epistle because the style of writing is quite different from that of 1 Peter. However, this may have been because Peter used different amanuenses (writing secretaries) to write the two epistles. George Eldon Ladd feels that "the different subject matter contained in the two letters is reason enough for the differences in style" (George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament).

Following are several evidences which support Peter as the author.

1. Both 1 and 2 Peter have the same unusual salutation, Grace and peace be multiplied to you.
2. 2 Peter contains some of the same unique vocabulary which Peter used in his sermon in the book of Acts. For example, Acts 1:18 and 2 Peter 2:13 and 15 use the same term, reward of wickedness or wages of wickedness.

3. In 2 Peter 1:1, Peter's name is in the text as the author.
4. In 2 Peter 1:1, we are also told that the writer is an apostle of Christ.
5. In 2 Peter 3:1, the writer refers to an earlier epistle.
6. In 2 Peter 3:15-16, it is clear that the writer is a close friend of Paul and had read his letters.
7. There are also autobiographical references. 2 Peter 1:13-15 refers to Christ foretelling Peter's death as recorded in John 21:18-19. 2 Peter 1:16-18 refers to the Mount of Transfiguration, and Peter's presence there is recorded in Mark 9:2-9.

Recipients of the Epistle

2 Peter was written to Christians (1:1) who had received an earlier letter (3:1). The first letter may have been 1 Peter or some other epistle which has been lost. These Christians were being threatened by false teaching from within (2 Peter 2:1). False teachers were using their Christian liberty as license for sexual immorality (2:14). These false teachers were denying the Lord (2:1), despising authority, slandering celestial beings (2:10), and scoffing at Christ's coming (3:3-4).

Purpose of the Epistle

Peter's purpose was to warn the endangered flock against false teachers and apostasy and to instruct them in faithful holy living while they awaited the day of God. As in 1 Peter, the call is to stand firm in faith and persevere to the end. The epistle opens and closes with encouragement to persevere in holy conduct by the grace of God. The part in between is a stern warning against destructive heresies.

Although 2 Peter was originally written to first century Christians, the message is timeless. False teaching has always been a danger within the Christian church. It is especially dangerous where people lack knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. In order to live confident and godly lives in this world, every Christian should be armed with the truth. 2 Peter will help you to know the truth and become more confident of the truth in which you believe.

OUTLINE OF 2 PETER

- I. Diligence - 2 Peter 1
- II. Destructive Heresies - 2 Peter 2
- III. Delay in Christ's Coming - 2 Peter 3

Introduction to 2 Peter 1

Peter introduces himself as Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ. The word "servant" is literally translated "slave," and it is noteworthy that Peter mentions himself first as a slave of Christ and secondly as His apostle.

Just as in his first epistle, Peter begins with heartfelt encouragement for his readers. He reminds them that they are a chosen people who share a precious faith with him. He then goes on to exhort them to demonstrate their faith through the practice of moral excellence, listing seven Christian virtues which should be evident in their lives. Finally, he expounds upon the splendor and certainty of God's prophetic word which was revealed through holy men of God and through God's beloved Son.

Peter's purpose is to spur his readers on to fruitful growth in their faith. He shows that faith is built upon a sure foundation (2 Peter 1:16 - 21), and that God Himself provides the power needed for growth (2 Peter 1:2 - 4). Therefore, the believer has all the reason in the world to live a life overflowing with Christian virtue and confident hope of sharing eternity with the Lord.

OUTLINE OF 2 PETER 1

- I. **God's Power Provides for the Faithful - 2 Peter 1:1-4**
- II. **God's Faithful People Press Forward - 2 Peter 1:5-15**
- III. **God's Prophetic Word is Certain - 2 Peter 1:16-21**

I. God's Power Provides for the Faithful - 2 Peter 1:1-4

The apostle addresses this letter *to those who have obtained like-precious faith with us* (verse 1). He is writing to believers. His purpose in these verses is to show that a believer's faith is a gift from God, a gift equal to that which was given to him. Not only do believers all share the same precious faith, but they also share in the divine nature of God and consequently have all that is necessary to live the Christian life.

A. God provides the gift of faith - 2 Peter 1:1

Faith is obtained. The literal translation of the Greek is "obtained by lot," which implies that one receives faith by the sovereign choice of God and not by any personal merit. Faith is a *gift of God* (Ephesians 2:8). Faith is given through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, meaning that God is fair and impartial in bestowing the gift. Peter writes that his readers' faith is *like-precious* (or equally precious) with his own. This was probably to counteract the false teachings prevalent

at the time, that special knowledge was attained by a select inner circle of men. Peter refutes this by making it clear that the faith given to his readers is just as real, precious and profitable as the faith given to him and the other apostles.

Along with Matthew 16:16; John 1:1; 20:28 and Titus 2:13, the phrase Our God and Savior Jesus Christ in verse 1 is an important proof text for Jesus Christ being coequal in nature with God, the Father.

B. God blesses us - 2 Peter 1:2

Peter's opening benediction is the same as in 1 Peter 1:2. He desires the increase of grace and peace in the lives of his readers. This will come through full knowledge (Greek "epignosis," which implies intimate and personal knowledge, and not just an intellectual knowledge) of God the Father and Jesus. God blesses us as we study His Word, opening our minds and hearts to receive His truth, His grace and His peace.

C. God makes us partakers of the divine nature - 2 Peter 1:3-4

God has endowed us with everything we need to live godly lives. He has given us a share in His very nature. We are a new creation with a new self, created in the likeness of God (see Ephesians 4:24). *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Romans 8:9-11 explains how this occurs through the reception of the Holy Spirit.

1. Through His divine power - 1:3

Those who are called by God are also empowered by Him to live a godly life. All who have true knowledge of God have this divine power available to them. In one of his sermons, A. W. Tozer points out that "the experiential knowledge of God is eternal life (John 17:3), and increased knowledge results in a correspondingly larger and fuller life.....We may count all things of no value and sacrifice them freely if we may thereby gain a more perfect knowledge of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. This was Paul's testimony (Philippians 3:7-14) and it has been the testimony of all great Christian souls who have followed Christ from Paul's day to ours" (I Call It Heresy). Is this your testimony?

2. Through His exceedingly great and precious promises - 1:4

God has given us His promises, and it is through the promises that we partake of His divine nature. The Greek word translated "promises" is used only by Peter in the New Testament and means "an emphatic public announcement." This must refer to the promises of

salvation announced through the gospel, including forgiveness of sins, the power to live this present life on earth, a glorious resurrection and eternal life with God and Jesus our Lord.

The word "given" in both verses 3 and 4 means to "bestow or endow." It is not the usual Greek word for give, but it has the connotation of giving a gift of great worth. The word is used in Mark 15:45 to describe Pilate giving Jesus' body to Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:58).

II. God's Faithful People Press Forward - 2 Peter 1:5-15

In this section, Peter explains how Christians are to respond to the precious faith and power which is ours as partakers of the divine nature. We are to be fruitful, diligent and established in the truth.

A. Exhibit fruitfulness - 2 Peter 1:5-7

Faith is not meant to stand alone and stagnate. Faith is the basis of all godly behavior, but to progress in faith, believers must be diligent (full of zeal), adding all the excellent qualities which Peter lists here.

1. The virtues - 1:5-7

Virtue is goodness or moral excellency

Knowledge refers to spiritual knowledge gained through the Holy Spirit -- knowledge which is focused on the person and Word of God. Knowledge requires study and practical experience in applying what is learned.

Self-control is self-discipline, keeping your passions under control. As we shall see later in the epistle, this is something the false teachers lacked.

Perseverance refers to constancy and steadfast endurance under adversity. It means never giving up but looking beyond the present circumstances to all that you know is yours.

Godliness is piety and reverence toward God. It comes from two Greek words which mean to worship well. It means living a life which corresponds to the one who is worshiped. As Peter wrote in his first letter, we are to be holy because God is holy (1 Peter 1:16).

Brotherly kindness is the Greek word philadelphia. It alludes to a family affection among believers - caring for one another in real and practical ways.

Love is the Greek "agape" or divine love, the love described in I Corinthians 13. It is love which desires the highest good for others. God's love toward sinners

is agape love, as seen in John 3:16; Romans 5:8 and 1 John 4:9-11.

All Christian virtues begin in faith and end in love. Love is the highest of the virtues, but all the virtues are aspects of the glory of Christ in those who believe. They are simply aspects of His holy character shining through a Christian's character. Are you constantly diligent to make these virtues yours?

2. The virtuous are never unfruitful - 1:8

Christians are not only to possess the virtues listed, but are to abound in them, continually growing in them so they are increasing all the time. "In this way your knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ will never be useless or unproductive. As you practice diligence in applying the knowledge you have of Christ, you will never be barren (or idle) or unfruitful. Wherever grace abounds there will be an abounding in good works" (Matthew Henry, The Matthew Henry Commentary).

3. The one who lacks the virtues is blind and forgetful - 1:9

This verse speaks of a spiritually immature person whose sight and memory have failed, a person so short-sighted that he or she sees only earthly things and not heavenly things. Such a person is spiritually blind and has forgotten what Christ has done in cleansing him/her from his/her sins.

Never forget what Christ has done for you. *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth* (Colossians 3:2). Remember what it means to be His and remind yourself what manner of life you should be living.

B. Be even more diligent - 2 Peter 1:10-11

To "be diligent" means to "make it your business." As a believer, it is your business to be confident of your calling (see 2 Peter 1:3) and your election (see 1 Peter 1:2). Your new life in Christ authenticates your salvation. Your new manner of living is the evidence that you are saved and also keeps you from stumbling when troubles and temptations come.

It is through diligence that Christians receive the ultimate reward of a fruitful life -- a rich welcome into Christ's everlasting kingdom. When you practice your faith, you can be sure you will receive your reward. See Matthew 5:12; Hebrews 11:24-26 and 2 John 8.

C. Be established in truth - 2 Peter 1:12-15

As for Peter, he will also be diligent by reminding his readers of the importance of knowing and being established in the truth he has just presented.

1. A present reminder - 1:12

Peter was confident that his readers knew the truth of what he had written and he knew that they were established in that truth. He wanted them to abide in the truth and not forget. He also wanted them to continue to act upon the truth they knew. This letter is a reminder to them, as it is also a reminder to you. Forgetfulness is one of the failings of our human nature. We all need to be reminded often, even when we think we know the truth and are established in it.

2. A personal reminder - 1:13-14

Peter knew that he would soon die. Jesus had spoken to Peter twice about his death. The first time was at the last supper after Jesus had dismissed Judas to accomplish his treacherous task. Jesus told Peter, *Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you shall follow Me afterward* (John 13:36). The second time was after Jesus' resurrection when he appeared to the disciples by the seashore. Jesus' words to Peter were, *When you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish. This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God* (John 21:18-19). The imminence of death made Peter diligent in the business of life. As long as he resided in his earthly body (tent) he would continue to stir up his readers with reminders of the truth and their responsibilities.

3. Permanent reminder - 1:15

Peter wanted his readers to continue to have a reminder even after he had departed from this earth. He may have been referring to this letter which has survived for nearly 2000 years and is still reminding readers of the truth and will continue to do so until Christ comes again. Peter may have also been thinking of his preparation of others to carry on his ministry after he was gone. We know that he was mentor to both Silas (Silvanus in 1 Peter 5:12) and Mark (who was the author of the gospel of Mark). Are you making provisions for others to carry on in ministry after you have gone by teaching and shepherding younger believers? Whom can you mentor in ministry?

III. God's Prophetic Word is Certain - 2 Peter 1:16-21

To further impress upon his readers the surety of their faith, Peter stresses the infallible nature of what they have believed. John, in the first chapter of his gospel, refers to Christ as *the Word*. In this passage, Peter explains how the majesty of Christ, who is the Word, confirms with certainty the inspired word of the prophets which foretold His power and His coming.

A. The majesty of Christ - 2 Peter 1:16-18

When Peter writes of *cunningly devised fables*, he is probably referring to the heresies of the false teachers. In the New Testament, fable is always used in a negative sense and held in contrast to the gospel. For examples see 1 Timothy 1:4 and 2 Timothy 4:4. But Peter and the apostles did not teach their own opinion or cleverly devised reasoning. Their teachings were based on solid evidence. They were eyewitnesses of the majesty of Christ. The incident to which Peter refers is Christ's transfiguration which is recorded in Matthew 17:1-8 and paralleled in passages of the other gospels.

1. The voice of the Excellent Glory - 1:17

The *Excellent Glory* is God. The reference here is to the bright cloud which overshadowed those who were present on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). It was comparable to the Shekinah glory which rested above the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant (Leviticus 16:2). On the mount, the voice of the Excellent Glory spoke in confirmation of Christ, *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*.

2. The witnesses of the Excellent Glory -
1:18

Peter and the two other apostles, James and John, were with Christ on the mountain and heard the voice of God with their own ears!

B. The prophetic word - 2 Peter 1:19-21

God's words on the mountain concerning Christ confirmed the written word of the prophets. Thus, the prophetic word is sure and reliable. Believers are to heed the words of Scripture because they illuminate. They reveal God and are inspired by God.

1. The word illuminates - 1:19

Old Testament prophecy is the light in a world darkened by sin. It looks forward to the coming of the morning star, Jesus Christ.

2. The word reveals God - 1:20

Prophecy does not contain the personal ideas of the man who wrote it down. Biblical prophecy comes altogether from God and thus reveals His mind and His will.

3. The word is inspired by God - 1:21

It is God's Holy Spirit which moved and enabled the prophets to speak and to write. Their prophecies originated with God. The holy men were motivated by the will of God.

The Scriptures to which Peter referred were the Old Testament writings, since there was no New Testament at that time. Many of the letters which are now in our New Testament had been written, but they had not yet been organized into a canon of Scripture. Today we have the benefit of both the Old Testament writings and their fulfillment recorded in the New Testament. We are even more blessed than the original recipients of Peter's epistle.

The apostle Paul wrote that, *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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Application

As a Christian, it is God's word which equips you to live a virtuous life in a world of darkness. How often do you read and study the Scriptures? Do you have an adequate knowledge of Bible doctrine, thus having confidence in what you believe? Do you hold the Scriptures up to your life as a light to point out sin and error? Do you daily apply the word of God to your life so that you may grow in righteousness? Are your works your own plan and done in your own power, or are they inspired and endowed by the word of God?