



# 2 PETER

## *Study Notes*

## 2 Peter

**Author:** The Apostle Peter. As with all New Testament books, modern “scholars” debate whether or not Peter actually wrote this letter. Their primary arguments are based on the differences in language and content of First and Second Peter. With respect to the variation in language and grammar, 1 Peter was written through an amanuensis or secretary, which happened to be Silas (1 Peter 5: 12). There is no evidence that 2 Peter was written through the use of a secretary and can be safely assumed to have been written by Peter’s own hand. This accounts for any stylistic differences that one might cite.

And secondly, while the theme of submission during persecution is not primary in 2 Peter as it is in 1 Peter, letters were written to address a particular audience with a particular problem. Just as we see variations in the themes expressed in Paul’s writings, it is easy to accept that there would be variations in Peter’s as well.

And while some question that the earliest lists of Canonical books do not list 2 Peter as inspired, the Holy Spirit did lead the church fathers to adopt into Canon by the Council of Hippo in 393 AD.

Internal evidence clearly points to Petrine authorship. To begin with, the writer identifies himself as Simeon Peter. While some suggest that the inclusion of Simeon (or Simon, depending on the translation) implies a different person than the brother of the Apostle Andrew, we must remember that Peter’s Hebrew name was Simon. To use both names when writing himself seems no small stretch of the imagination. Also, Chapter 1, verse 18 reminds us that the letter’s author was present at Jesus’ transfiguration, which limits it to Peter, James, and John. James had been killed prior to this book’s authorship (see Acts 12:2) and the letter does not come anywhere close to fitting in with Johanne authorship. Lastly, in Chapter 3, verse 16, Peter refers to the difficulty of understanding all of Paul’s writings. Perhaps this is a good-natured dig at Paul’s treatment of him in Galatians 2: 11-14. Remember, that while these are God’s words dictated through the various writers, God does allow for the personality and style of the writer to show through.

**Date:** We can pretty surely place this letter as having been written between 67 and 68 AD. Tradition tells us that Peter was martyred during Nero’s reign, and Nero committed suicide in 68 AD to avoid a coup. Peter reflects that his end is coming soon in chapter 1, verse 14 and 15, so it is relatively close to the time of his martyrdom.

**Place of Origin:** Both First and Second Peter were written from Rome. Given the closeness of his martyrdom, it was probably written from a jail cell. This simple fisherman was a long way from the shores of Galilee, which he called home when he wrote this. It is worthwhile to take some time and reflect on just how far the Holy Spirit has brought Peter in the process of sanctification: from the rowdy and rugged fishermen who rarely opened his mouth without sticking his foot into it to the patient church father, going to his death because of the faith he professed. How has coming to know the risen Savior changed your life? How far do you still need to go?

***Destination & Audience:*** This is a trickier question. There are two theories that seem to prevail. First is that Peter is writing this as a second letter to the churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia – the churches he wrote 1 Peter to. This is supported by the reference to an earlier letter in chapter 3, verse 1.

The opponents of this theory suggest that the context of Peter's first letter is that of dealing with scoffers and false teachers, which is not part of 1 Peter. It is important, though to note that while the direct context is scoffers, the broad context that Peter is dealing with is facing these scoffers with patience as we persevere toward the end times. This theme is clearly addressed in 1 Peter 4: 1-11, so there is a parallel between the books.

The second theory is that these are Peter's final words to the Church, written as a last will and testament for the good of the faithful. Peter not only predicts his imminent death, but he also warns the church to stand firm in the future for scoffers will come. He also reminds them that Jesus is faithful and He will return for his Church. This letter also seems more intimate than 1 Peter in the advice and plea for perseverance.

While there are clearly overtones of his imminent death present, the imminence of the false teachers described in Chapter 2 and the extent of the book that is dedicated as a warning against these false teachers, seems too specific to only be a general warning for the church of his time. Surely, this is a warning for the church of his time and for all time, but it seems to me that the tone of the warning implies that these men are on their way to the specific church that is receiving this letter. The personal tone may simply be a reflection of his coming death.

In the end, just as with Jude, all we can do is make some educated guesses. We don't know for sure who his audience is because Peter does not tell us who his audience is. The purpose of this letter is clear though, Peter wishes to remind the faithful of the truth that they had been taught (see 1:12 and 3:1) and warn them of the danger that was to come. Due to the more personal nature of this letter, it may not have been meant for as wide a circulation as 1 Peter, but we do not know this for sure either.

My personal bias is that these false teachers that Peter is warning about are the same false teachers or are disciples of the same false teachers that Jude warned about in his letter. These false teachers could have reasonably migrated north when they were ousted from the churches near Jerusalem. As I argue in the study guide for Jude, I believe that Jude had earlier sought Peter's guidance on how to address these men. Since there is no need to reinvent the wheel, Peter makes similar arguments to warn the churches that they have set off for. This helps to explain the distinct parallels between their two books. In the end, this too, is just an educated guess. The important thing to remember is that God moved Peter to write this letter not only to warn a specific church or group of churches against false teachers, but also moved Peter to write this letter for our benefit in the church today. God is always faithful to His people and God is always purposeful in what he does.

## **Outline of 2 Peter:**

- I. Greeting (1:1-2)
- II. God's Call on the life of a Christian and the Christian's response (1:3-11)
  1. God's calling His people to glory (1:3-4)
  2. The Christian's response to God's call (1:5-11)
    - a. progression of faith to love (1: 5-7)
    - b. work to grow in grace (1: 8-11)
- III. Purpose (1:12-15)
- IV. Defense of Apostolic and Scriptural authority (1: 16-21)
  1. Defense of Apostolic authority (1: 16-18)
  2. Defense of Scriptural authority (1: 19-21)
- VI. Warnings against false teachers (2: 1-22)
  1. Warning of their imminent arrival (2:1-3)
  2. Warnings from history and God's Faithfulness through history (2: 4-10)
    - a. the fall of the angels (2: 4)
    - b. the fall of the ancient world and salvation of Noah's family (2: 5)
    - c. the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah and salvation of Lot's family (2:6-8)
    - d. reminder of God's competence in saving his people from trial (2: 9-10)
  3. Description of the false teachers (2: 11-17)
  4. Warning about the road these teachers travel along (2:18-22)
- V. The second coming of Christ, the imminent judgment of ungodly, and the new heavens and the new earth (3: 1-13)
  1. Have confidence in Christ's promise to return (3: 1-9)
  2. Have confidence that Judgment is coming (3: 10-12)
  3. Have confidence in the remaking of heaven and earth (3: 13)
- VI. Closing exhortation (3:14-18)

## **2 Peter, Chapter 1:**

***“Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:***

***May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”***  
***(2 Peter 1: 1-2, ESV)***

While I am not convinced that this letter is Peter’s last will and testament, it is clearly the last letter that Peter is writing. He knows that he will soon die, and there is a sense of solemnity within the tone of the text. Recently, I have been asked by a church in my hometown what I would preach if I were preaching what I knew was going to be my last sermon. Reflecting on this is a sobering thing to do. I think that we are seeing this come out in Peter’s greeting. Not only does he introduce himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, but first and foremost the emphasis is on his role as servant.

While servants play an important role in the master’s household, it is the master who gets the glory. A servant’s job is to always point to their master. This is how Peter saw himself. He goes on in his address to flatly state that all the elect of Jesus are of equal status. There are no kings but Christ in the church. There are no priests but Christ in the church, and there are no prophets but Christ in the church. These offices that were established for the proper governance of Israel back in Leviticus are now fully filled in Jesus Christ. Christ calls his church, and while Christ calls us to many roles within the church, all are on equal footing before the Lord. We are unworthy servants and nothing more.

As we reflect on our own roles within the church, we need to ask ourselves why we are doing what we are doing. Are you doing it for the praise of men? Or are you doing it because God has called you to do it? Do you get upset because you never seem to be recognized for what you do in God’s service? Jesus tells us that if our motivation is the praise of men, then that praise will be our reward in full (see Matthew 6: 2, 5, 16). The praise of men is shallow at best and it quickly evaporates when the fires of trial come. Seek to serve as a good and faithful servant that God, who sees what is done in secret will reward your service (Matthew 6: 18b, my translation).

Did you also notice that “a faith” is used in the singular sense? There is not more than one faith. There is but one faith that is formed in us by the Holy Spirit and preserved in us for the Glory of Jesus Christ. We are not one faith amongst many. Do you notice how even in his greeting, Peter is preparing to address the problem of false teachings? It is a reminder to us today, as pluralism and “tolerance” seems to rule in our society, that calling yourself a Christian means taking a stand for the exclusive truth of the Gospel. That is not a popular stance to take in our culture, but it is the truth. And this truth, this wonderful faith that we share as Christians, binds us together no matter how many miles or cultural barriers separate us.

And why is it that we are saved? Peter makes sure that there are no lingering questions in the minds of his readers. We are saved not because of any strength or merit of our own, but we were saved because of God’s righteousness. Because He is righteous, He has revealed His righteousness by calling a people to Himself, saving us from the cesspool of our sin.

And once again, Peter is happily reminding us that God is not a God of mere subsistence, but He is a God of abundance. His grace and peace are not stingily dolled out as does the orphanage's headmaster in a Dickens tale, but God's grace and abundance are multiplied in the life of the believer. This multiplication is not a health and wealth gospel as some would have it for what is being poured out is God's grace and peace, not temporal blessings. But dear Christian rejoice, because God's grace and peace are infinitely more valuable than any temporal blessing, for God's grace and peace are eternal.

And how are we told that God's grace and peace are multiplied? It is only through the knowledge of God and of Jesus, our Lord. True knowledge of God is not mere academic head knowledge, but it is a fuller knowledge that includes both the heart and the mind, the passions as well as the intellect. And this knowledge of God is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit as we grow in our faith and seek to grow in His written word. There are so many Christians who claim to have a strong faith, but have little or no knowledge of His word. Friend, do not fall into this trap, and fervently seek to know God through His written word.

***“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”***

***(2 Peter 1: 3-4, ESV)***

I once heard a preacher say that Jesus is all you will ever need, but you will never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have, and only then will you know that Jesus is all you need. Paul understood this concept (Philippians 4: 11-13) and Peter is reiterating it here. Peter is simply saying at the beginning of these verses that all things that have any pertinence to life itself, especially those things that deal with godliness, come from Jesus. These are the words of a man condemned to death. Peter understands that even his imminent martyrdom is in the hands of Jesus. I wonder, how many of us own this kind of faith? When personal tragedies happen, do we respond by asking “where was God?” or do we respond, like Peter, in the assurance that even though we mourn the events taking place, God is still quite in control, and if God designs that my death should glorify him, then so be it.

Also remember that Peter is writing to warn these churches that false teachers are on their way. Peter is confidently assuring them, in the face of death, that the faith that they have been taught is true and reliable. False teachers gain the strongest footholds either in congregations that can be made to doubt what they have been taught or congregations who uneducated in God's word. Peter is preparing these Christians against both of these threats.

And the threat of false teachers in our churches is just as real today as it was in Peter's day. Recently, for a class, I had to read and respond to the Humanist Manifestos I & II. I found that the primary error in both of these documents was that they elevated human reason above divine revelation. Sadly, unless human reason is bases itself in

divine revelation, it knows nothing but doubt. It is like trying to take an exam when you don't have the questions in front of you. It is impossible to find certainty apart from scripture. Yet people are seduced by the "worldly-wise" into doubting and then they are led into error.

Peter will build upon these themes, but see that you guard yourself and your family against doubt and ignorance when it comes to God's word. Faithful assurance and knowledge of God's written word will be your anchor against the raging sea of apostasy that threatens to capsize your faith.

A second aspect of this passage worth paying some attention to is that not only has Jesus granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness, but He has granted us precious and great promises. As the Apostle Paul writes, all the promises of God to us are yea and amen in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). As Christians, we are part of a covenant community that extends all of the way back to creation. If you want to boil things down to basics, there are only two covenant communities throughout history. The two communities are the children of the woman and the children of the serpent (see Genesis 3:15). And there is enmity between these two houses. One covenant leads to life and the other leads to death. Herein lies the state of the world and herein lies the explanation for all of the persecution that Christians face. And Peter recognizes that the false teachers who are on their way to these churches will use their serpent's tongues to deceive the faithful.

But in these promises that Christ gives to His people, lies the means to sanctification. For Jesus does not simply save his people, he molds and transforms them, giving them a portion of His divine nature, saving us from the inevitable result of original sin. Some would say that this divine nature that we partake of makes us divine. That statement could not be further from the truth.

When a man is born again, Christ imputes his righteousness to him and imputes some of his own character traits. The righteousness of Christ is what saves us from eternal judgment, for it is Jesus' righteousness that God looks at instead of the man's. But something more happens. Jesus does not save to let a man go on his merry way. No, there is a change in the man, and that change is a result of Jesus imputing some of his traits into the born again Christian. Jesus gives us three examples of these traits in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the merciful,... Blessed are the pure in heart,... Blessed are the peacemakers." (Matthew 5: 7-9). These attributes are not natural to man and if a man be truly a Christian, he will evidence all three of these virtues in his life to some degree.

You see, when you partake of something, you benefit from it, but there is no change of essence. Only God is God and even when we are fully glorified in the new creation, to spend eternity with our savior, we will not be many little God's running around. We will be immortal, but we will not be eternal. We had a beginning and if God so wills it, we can have an end. Yet, let us thank God that He is not capricious in His promises, but these promises, as Peter puts it in his first letter, this inheritance (1 Peter 1:4), is kept and maintained for you and you will be held in it for all eternity. Praise be to God!

*“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

*(2 Peter 1: 5-11, ESV)*

This section can be divided into two parts. First is the progression of faith to love in the believer and second is an exhortation to press on in your faith. But this passage as a whole emphasizes the response of the Christian to the saving work of Jesus. The Holy Spirit empowers growth in grace, but the true Christian hungers and thirsts for the things of God as well (see Matthew 5: 6).

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones uses the analogy of a farm to better illustrate what Peter is talking about. For the Christian, God has given him a farm, the implements to work the land, and seed to plant. None of this we gain on our own merit and none of this is ours by right—it is a good gift of God. And while the Holy Spirit trains us in the operation of the farm implements and guides our understanding of proper planting procedure, we must be about the labor of farming. It does little good to give a farm to someone who is just going to allow it to get overgrown. God expects us to work, but our work is not a condition of our salvation – the farm has already been given. The faithful Christian will seek to grow in grace, conforming to the image of Christ.

Thus Peter shows us the natural progression in the Christian of how faith grows and matures. While these things may be hard for us to quantify, be assured that the Holy Spirit knows and understands all things, and He will work these things in the life of the believer.

***Faith:*** this is where salvation begins. Without faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, there is no salvation, no eternity, no promises of God, and no growth in spiritual maturity; there is nothing but judgment and eternal damnation. While all other aspects of this progression are a joint effort of the Holy Spirit and the believer, Faith is entirely a work of the Holy Spirit, there is nothing that we contribute to Faith.

***Virtue:*** Virtue has become a word that is understood to mean any good character trait, but its older usage is one that refers to high moral character. The first step to maturing in faith as a Christian is to seek to live with an impeachable integrity. That means we need to behave like Christians not only in church, but also in the business world, in school, while driving on the highway during rush hour, while at home, and while nobody but Jesus is watching you.



**Knowledge:** Knowledge in the Bible speaks of more than academic smarts. It is an intimate knowledge of the subject. Knowledge in the Biblical sense demands a relationship to be formed. It is not good enough to simply memorize verses from the Bible (although this is a good thing), but we must truly seek to know God through His divine word. This is part of the reason that Jesus is referred to as the Word of God, because it is through God's word that He had made Himself known throughout history and it is through Jesus that He made Himself perfectly known in history.

**Self-Control:** The Christian is not to be wild like the waves, that is reserved for the false teachers (see Jude 13). Rather, the Christian is to be a reflection of the God whom he serves. God is a god of order, thus the life of a Christian should be ordered and controlled. Remember, we are not our own masters. We are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness, children of the serpent or children of the promise. Thus, don't be quick to chase after each new teaching that rears its ugly head in Christian circles. Strengthen your faith with a virtuous lifestyle, grow in knowledge of God, and discipline your life so that you will stand firm in the storms of trial.

**Steadfastness:** Steadfastness is the end result of a disciplined life. We are going to be tried and tested from every corner of our lives. We are going to have our faith challenged by false teachers who are trying to instill doubt. Yet, the true Christian perseveres to the end, holding steadfast to his faith.

**Godliness:** Adam Clarke, I think best defined godliness as:

*Piety towards God; a deep, reverential, religious fear; not only worshipping God with every becoming outward act, but adoring, loving, and magnifying him in the heart: a disposition indispensably necessary to salvation, but exceedingly rare among professors.*

Godliness is the mindset that encompasses the Christian life like an ornate frame does a fine portrait. It is what some people call a "world-and-life view" or a "worldview." It is the sign of a mature Christian and the result of walking in faith through trials and temptation. It is the natural end that God works in one who has persevered, holding steadfast in faith.

**Brotherly Affection:** The Greek word that Peter uses here is φιλαδελφίαν (philadelphia), which is where the city gets its name from. It refers to a brotherly love that is aimed toward other believers; as Peter puts it in his first epistle, "love the brotherhood" (1 Peter 2:17). There are often times of disharmony within a Christian fellowship. Believers are still human and still struggle with sin. This means that there will always be problems that need to be resolved. Even Peter himself needed to be redressed by Paul (see Galatians 2: 11-14). John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark, who served as Peter's secretary in Jerusalem also had a falling out with Paul (see Acts 15: 36-41). Yet, the mature Christian will seek to restore the relationship that was broken.

Oftentimes, relationships grow through trial and resolution. Think about those who are dearest to your heart. Think of your spouse or those friends who know you even better than you know yourself. How do you think that your relationship with them

matured to that point. Sure, shared good times do enrich relationships, but it is the hard times that cement a relationship together. These close people have been ones that you have not only laughed with, but they have been people who you have cried with, and have bled with. When all you can see are the blackened clouds of misfortune and trial, it is to be your fellow believers who stand beside you to ride out the storm. They are the ones who can rebuke you in error, but they will be the ones who hold you fast when the shadow of death is at your door. This is what Peter means by brotherly affection.

**Love:** Peter moves from using *φιλαδελφίαν* to the word *ἀγάπην* (agapēn). This is the agape love that we hear so much about in evangelical circles. Agape love is a love that is sacrificial and is not concerned with the response of the beloved. This is the love that drives God to be faithful to his covenant children, This is the kind of love that Paul describes in his first letter to the Corinthian church:

*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*(1 Corinthians 13:4-7, ESV)*

The old hymn comes to mind that goes “let them know we are Christians by our love...” People often wonder how a missionary can leave family, friends, and culture to travel to a foreign land to preach the gospel to the people there. In fact, it wasn’t that many years ago that being a missionary, particularly to places in Africa, was a one way trip. Diseases and hostile inhabitants have taken the lives of many, many missionaries. Why do they do it? Agape love.

This kind of love is the sign of a mature Christian. It is a love that best resembles God’s love for us because it is a love instilled in us by God himself. This is a love that was willing to sacrifice His own Son that we might be have salvation. To echo the hymn-writer, “What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul; what wondrous love is this O my soul.” This is the love that has driven missionaries like David Livingstone to push through Africa proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and this is the love that drove great evangelists like George Whitefield to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ even from his death bed. It has changed more lives than we can count and it has changed our own lives more than we can appreciate.

Peter is saying to the people of this church and to us today, this is where faith needs to lead. The question that we have to ask ourselves is whether or faith is heading in that direction. If they are not, then you are walking blind; you will only stumble. If your faith is growing in that direction, then be diligent and persevere in your faith. When Peter tells us to “make our election sure” (verse 10), he is not teaching that we need to prove our faith to God, but he is telling us that as we grow in faith, we will become surer and surer in the confidence of our own salvation.

Dear friend, before we leave this section of scripture, I think that it is important to dwell on one last issue. A question that I often hear asked is, “how do I know whether I am saved?” The answer to that question, of course, is that if you have sincerely repented of your sins and have fled to Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are surely saved. But a similar and perhaps more important question is addressed by Peter here in this text. Peter addresses the question, “how do I know whether my faith is healthy?” Just as your body

will wither and become useless if you ignore nutrition and exercise, so too will your faith if you ignore it. Christian, don't fall into that trap. It is a snare of the evil one. Strengthen your faith and make sure that you are on the road to spiritual maturity as Peter has laid out before us.

***“Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.”***  
***(2 Peter 1: 12-15, ESV)***

Here, we finally get to the purpose and intent of Peter's letter. This purpose is twofold; it is to remind them of the things of faith and to provide for them a document that will continue to remind them of these things after Peter has left this world. Peter knows his martyrdom is coming soon, and he wants to equip these churches to face the coming false teachers (as is made evident by the defense of scriptural and apostolic authority in the final verses of this chapter). This is not a general final testament, but it is a letter with a specific plan and purpose. Regardless of how you see Peter's intent, though, it is clearly a letter that is meant for the strengthening of the church through the ages, and is quite applicable to our situation today.

It is also worth noting how good it is in the life of a Christian to be reminded of the things of faith. We need to be reminded of how God's hand has been at work throughout time to draw a people to himself. We need to be reminded of the dangers that lurk in this world to draw us away from God. We need to be reminded of our responsibilities in living as a saved people. And we need to be reminded of how God moves personally in the life of each Christian to change, mold, and transform him in grace.

The true Christian is warmed by testimonies of God's hand at work. But the true Christian is also strengthened by the rebuke of scripture even when it does not apply directly to his life. It is a reminder to us as to just how important it is for the Christian to submit himself to the regular preaching of the Gospel and to join in fellowship with other believers. Dear Christian, it is also a reminder to you as to how important it is to let your mind and soul be consumed by the written word of God. Don't let a day go by that you do not burry your mind in a passage, do not let an hour go by where a verse is not on your lips, and do not let a moment go by where the weight of scripture is not being applied to your soul.

*“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. 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,’ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. “*

*(2 Peter 1: 16-18, ESV)*

Were this book simply a last will and testament, as some scholars suggest, I hardly think that Peter would have gone to such an extent to authenticate his apostolic calling. As we discussed at the beginning of the chapter, Peter introduces himself in this letter first as a servant and then as an apostle of Jesus Christ. In the first letter Peter wrote, he described himself as a “fellow elder” (1 Peter 5:1) and not as a chief elder or pope as the Catholic church would claim. Peter has come a long way from his days walking with Jesus on the shores of Galilee. He is no longer the impetuous fisherman who no sooner than he opens his mouth does he have to pull his foot out of it. Peter has grown in grace and spiritual maturity as he has exhorted the church to do earlier in this chapter. This section here is to establish for these churches beyond a shadow of a doubt that his testimony is authentic and that what the false teachers have to say is laced with lies.

And what experience does Peter use to demonstrate his person. There are certainly many in this man’s life that he could draw from: his calling that day on the boat, seeing the resurrected Christ, his sermon at Pentecost, etc... No, Peter chooses the transfiguration. For those who question Petrine authorship, these verses narrow down the possibilities because it was only Peter, James, John on the mountain with Jesus. Yet, I don’t think that narrowing down possible authorship is what Peter had in mind here.

Just stop for a moment and take yourself back to the Gospel account of the transfiguration. It is an event that is recorded for us in three of the four Gospels which should tell us something of its importance (see Matthew 17: 1-13, Mark 9: 2-13, & Luke 9: 28-36). Now try for a moment to put yourself in Peter’s sandals. Jesus has taken you aside with James and John, up on the mountain. And low and behold, something wonderful happens. Jesus is transfigured. It is a taste of the second advent of Christ when Jesus will come to reign in glory. Peter saw, if only for a moment, the true glory of Jesus Christ. Matthew describes his face shining like the sun (which should remind us of Moses after he spoke with God) and his clothes were like light (which should point us to the angels at the end of the Gospel that met the women and told them that Jesus had risen). Can you imagine how Peter must have felt? What joy! What rapture!

Six days earlier, Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. And now, now Peter sees the glory of God’s son face to face. Not in a thousand lifetimes could anything compare to this experience. Jesus tells us as Christians that we are to be the light of the world (see Matthew 5:14), but none of us generate that light from within. We are simply mirrors that reflect the light of Jesus into this sin-darkened world. Here, Peter is seeing face to face the source of that light.

This is the reason that Peter relates this part of his testimony. Even after thirty years the memory of seeing Jesus transfigured before his eyes stands crystal clear in his mind. It is his most treasured possession and he desires to share it with his readers. But

not only that, Peter knows his own death is soon to come. And then, then, he will once again see Jesus in His full glory face to face. And this time, it will not be over in a matter of moments, but he will worship in the presence of Christ in His full glory for all time. Peter recalls the transfiguration not simply to validate his apostolic authority, but he recalls the transfiguration because it has never left his mind and because it is currently on his mind.

And did you notice the innuendo that Peter makes in verse 16? What he is saying is that the false teachers that are coming are telling stories cooked up in their imaginations. Those stories may be clever, but they are still myth. Jude does the same thing when he tells us in verse 8 that these teachers are dreamers, relying on their imaginations.

Friend, pay close attention to whom you listen. False teachers do not wear signs that label them as such. Nor do they have fangs, pointy ears, and claws. Rather, they look and sound just like you and me. They have regular jobs, they have attended the best seminaries, they serve on all the best church committees, and they are generally likeable people. Yet there will be many likeable people in the bowels of Hell. These are people who have been destined for destruction since the beginning of time. They may look nice, but the sulfur of Hell runs through their veins, and dear Christian, you must guard yourself, your children, and your church against these men. Take up the rubric of scripture as your sole guide and companion. Judge what everyone says according to scripture. And if someone tells you otherwise, then beware!

***“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, knowing this first of all, that no prophesy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophesy 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: 19-21, ESV)***

But Peter also wants to make sure that we understand that he is not standing on his own authority. His apostolic authority rests in Christ but all of what has been taught and preached stands on the authority of God’s prophetic word in scripture. It is the guard and rubric of our faith. Through scripture we see God’s creating, sustaining, and recreating hand at work. We understand through scripture God’s redemptive work in our own lives and we are guided as to how we must live.

I have heard it said that Bible can be thought to stand for “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.” That is true, but the Bible is so much more. It is an intimate portrait of a God who loved the world so much that he was willing to sacrifice His only Son, that whoever would believe in Him might spend eternity with Him and not perish in the fires of judgment that they deserved. Friends, this is amazing stuff. “What a wondrous love is this, that caused the Lord of Bliss to bear the dreadful curse, oh my soul?”

God’s word is a lamp in the darkness. In fact, God spoke that word in the darkness of creation, and there was light. Marvelous and splendid light! To think that

here we see only as if through a glass darkly. Mark Twain used to like to misquote this verse and say that we only see through a glass eye darkly. The point is made. When we are in glory and we then see God's full glory face to face, then even the brightest day we can imagine is but utter blackness in comparison. Scripture is the only light we have until the second advent of Christ, when heaven and earth will be born again as well. Then, and only then, will the jots and tittles of the law fall away, and we will share the light of glory with our Lord and Savior.

One other note to close out the first chapter of this letter. Peter affirms the dual nature of scripture in verses 20 and 21. It is God's divine word. It is without fault or error, dictated to men by a God without fault or error. It is perfect and complete. Yet, you can still see the artistry and the heart of the men that God spoke through. As one of my professors says, you can see the fingerprints of the man, but the words are God's.

Here lies the ultimate authority in Peter's life and what Peter calls all Christians to have as their ultimate authority. It is God Himself as He has revealed Himself in scripture. That is an easy concept to understand but it is often a hard one to live by. At the end of the day, when all is said and done, ask yourself who you are living for. Is it yourself? Your kids? Your spouse? Your job? If it is not God at the focus and focal point of your life, then you are off track. All of these aforementioned things are good. But only when they are in their place and subject to God.

## 2 Peter, Chapter 2

***“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”***

*(2 Peter 2: 1-3, ESV)*

As mentioned earlier, Peter gives to these churches two warnings. We see the first here. This is the beginning of his warning against false teachers, but there is a sense of urgency that you can see in these verses. There is a sense that the false teacher’s arrival in these churches is imminent. There is much within this chapter that is reminiscent of the book of Jude. As we discussed when we discussed the book of Jude, it seems reasonable that as Jude was not an apostle, he would have gotten apostolic advice from Peter before he wrote his letter. When Peter, a number of years later, was facing a similar problem in churches under his care, this earlier discussion with Jude helped to frame this section of his letter.

The danger of false teachers in the church is one that can never be taken lightly. False teachers usually do not espouse radical doctrines that blatantly expose them for what they are, rather the doctrines that they teach usually contain some truth, but that truth is twisted and distorted. Jesus teaches against these men in the sermon on the mount telling us that they will find themselves crying out, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy and work miracles in your name?” But Jesus will respond, “Get away from me you evil one, I never knew you.”

Peter is getting at the same thing in this passage. In the day of judgment, the heretics and hypocrites will find themselves in the same predicament: condemnation to the fires of hell. Jesus said that you can judge a tree by its fruit; Peter is showing us clearly in this section just what the fruit of the wicked is like.

First, they will secretly be bringing in these heresies. They know full well that if the heresy is in the open, it will be exposed for the lie it is. But just as their master, Satan, in the garden did with Eve; they take a grain of truth and hide underneath of it a mountain of lies. Eve had not made God’s word the center of her life or she would not have fallen prey to the guile of the serpent. Oh how things would be different, brethren, if our first mother had rebuked Satan as our Savior did!

Their fruit is such that it might look good and fresh on the outside, but it is rotten to the core. It is a reminder to us that we need to look closely at the people who preach and teach in our communities. Just because they preach well, just because they know all of the facts and details surrounding the scriptures, just because their church is growing, does not mean that they are sent from God. You must look at their motives and their heart. What is the purpose of their preaching? Are they doing so for the glory of God, or are they preaching for their own glory? Is what they do motivated out of a love for God’s people and a desire to seek and save the lost? Or is what they do centered around their own agenda? Is it Reverend So and So’s church, or is it the church of Jesus Christ?

Just as an apple can look pretty on the outside but be rotten to the core, so can our pastors and teachers. Look at how far people like Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Baker fell. These were men who were looked up to by thousands and I have no doubt that many were lead to Christ under their teaching. But they fell because the motivation for their ministry changed from being the Glory of God to the glory of themselves. Look at how many pastors within our own denomination have been dismissed from their duties and defrocked because of adulterous relationships. This ought to disgust us just as it disgusts us when we bite into a rotten piece of fruit.

But there is another danger that Peter is pointing to. There are some whose bad fruits are more obvious than others. Yet, they tell us what we want to hear and we follow them anyway. Friends this is a far more dangerous sin because it involves not only deception but also willful disobedience on your part. There are men in our society today that preach a health and wealth gospel, for example. They teach you that if you just pray hard enough and just have enough faith, God is not only going to provide you with all of your needs, but all of your wants as well. They say that God loves us and does not want us to suffer.

We know that what they espouse is a lie. Jesus himself taught us that a servant will never be treated better than his master and that we ought to expect times of trial and tribulation. Yet, when we look at our wallets and our paycheck and wonder where this week's grocery money is coming from or how we are going to pay the electric bill, this kind of preaching sounds awfully good. We are tempted to fall into their trap.

When loved ones die that are not born again Christians, the lies of those who preach a second-chance theology or a universalistic theology sound quite good. How many times have we been to a funeral where the pastor, in an attempt to comfort the family, said, "he is in a better place." Do we know that? If Christ did not save the person, the place where he now resides is a place of eternal torment.

When we are driven by our own lusts or desires, we hear the lies like, "God will forgive you anyway" or "God is love and love covers a multitude of sins." These are lies, we know them to be lies, they will lead us off of the straight and narrow path, yet we listen to them anyway.

Jude calls these men shepherds who only feed themselves. Peter tells us that they will exploit you with their lies. In the end, the Bible is consistent in its treatment of these men. They have been condemned from before the foundation of the earth and their destruction is at hand. Christian, do not chance following these men or being seduced by their teaching. Their father is the devil and the path that they will lead you down is one whose end is destruction. Make the scriptures your only guide and charge the preachers and teachers in your midst to do the same.



***“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over the lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.”***

***(2 Peter 2: 4-10a, ESV)***

This passage should feel quite familiar if you remember the letter of Jude. While Peter is not making direct quotes, the ideas are the same. Peter is looking back at history to convey two messages. First, God will not spare the evildoers and false teachers. A place has been reserved for them in the very bowels of hell. Yet, God also knows how to spare his people from the wrath that reigns down around them.

This passage is also a clear reminder that it is God’s habit to save a remnant for himself. Those who purport a universalistic theology would do well to heed Peter’s teaching in this verse. How many people were in Noah’s civilization at the time? Hundreds? Thousands? Hundreds of thousands? How many animals perished in the flood? How many children perished in the flood? And to those who would hold to free choice, not one of the animals in Noah’s day had a say as to whether they boarded the ark or not. One might make an argument that the adults in Noah’s village had a choice. He preached to them both by word and action for 120 years while he was building the ark. But did the youngsters? How about those who lived days travel away—the flood was total.

God’s election falls under the domain of God’s righteous sovereignty. It always has and it always will. God the father has elected a people for himself from the very beginning of time, God the Holy Spirit calls them forth, quickening their hearts, and conforming them to the image of Jesus, God the Son. That God the Son might have a suitable bride. All who want to deny God’s sovereign election, preferring to think of salvation as being a choice entirely of their own are not only rejecting history, but they are rejecting God’s holy word.

Does that mean that we are automatons in the things of salvation? By no means! Christian theology is not deterministic for regardless of the influence that is exerted on our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit; never do we feel compelled against our will by God’s Holy Spirit. However much God has influenced our activities, we still retain at least the perception of free choice, which makes us fully responsible for our actions. Yet, we must recognize that it is God who has quickened our hearts that were dead to sin and it is God who is master over the lives of his people.

Yet, how is it that a loving God would condemn millions to eternal damnation while only saving a few? When we ask this question it demonstrates that we do not truly understand the heinous nature of our sin. God is pure and holy. In fact, God is the origin and only definition of holiness. And man, because our first father sinned, has inherited a

disease called sin. John Calvin once said that sin is not mankind's nature, but it is our derangement. Being holy, sin is something that God cannot tolerate, for he is just and righteous. Even the smallest mark of sin would stand out like a beacon next to God. In some ways it is like a brand new, white shirt. Even the smallest stain that gets on it stands out. Why? Because it does not belong there.

It is the same with God. Because of our sin, we do not belong with him. What we deserve is his wrath. So the question must not be, "why does not God save more," but the question must be, "why does God save any?" And the answer to that is because God is gracious and loving. And to what measure did God go to save a people for himself? He sent his perfect and holy son to walk this earth with us, to teach us His ways, to be abused by the children of the devil, and to be handed up and die on a cross. While he was on the cross, Jesus accepted the wrath that we deserved and bore that on his shoulders. The only one who did not need to be saved was the only one who could bear the punishment for those—for you and I—who desperately need saving. Dear Christian, if you are ever tempted to take your salvation for granted, if you ever wonder whether God is capable of forgiving your sin, if you ever begin to think that you do not really matter in the larger scope of things, put that thought out of your mind. Jesus, God the Son, suffered, bled, and died for you personally that you might know him and spend eternity with him. He did for you personally what you could never have done for yourself, paying the ultimate price in the process. God is a great God and he greatly deserves your honor and affection. Never forget this and never let these false teachers cause your mind to stray from that fact.

It is also worth noting here that even the angels, creatures far more magnificent than humans, were not spared punishment. Think about it, the angels had been in the very presence of God himself in all of his glory, yet many of them chose disobedience and sin. And now they wait, in darkness and chains, bound in this world until their final judgment is pronounced. Christian, if you do not think that this world is darkness you forget that these angels had seen God's full glory and even the brightest day here on earth is but pitch-blackness compared to the glory of God. Their fate has been sealed, but God has offered us poor humans redemption if we look to his son as redeemer and Lord.

Verse 10 is also worth noting for two reasons. This verse lists two sins that are paramount in God's eyes: indulging in the lust of defiling passion and despising authority. The first reason that this is important is that it gives us a peek into the sins that the false teachers were promoting, which was a sin of antinomianism or one of rejecting the law of God. They took the attitude that God is a forgiving God so "live and let live." It is the "do whatever you want to do as long as you are not stepping on the toes of your neighbor." The second reason is that this lie is still alive and kicking today, even in our churches.

God created you. Immoral practices defile that creation. What you do with and to your body either honors or dishonors your creator. Think about it this way. Your child draws you a picture and with great pride and pleasure he presents that picture to you to hang on your office wall. What do you think your child's response would be if you tried to redraw portions that you didn't care for? He would be furious. So why is it that we Christians feel that we can be so free with our bodies. God has created them; we need to honor them.

But also, God has placed us under Jesus' authority. In turn, whenever we sin, we are spitting in the face of God's rule and despising the sacrifice that Jesus made. What is worse than disrespecting a father (Note that this father, by the way, created the very fabric of the universe with his word, who preached for 144 hours and brought all of creation into being)? Disrespecting his son, who, by the way, has been put in Lordship over all things. God will bring punishment on these evildoers.

There is one other thing that is worth making note of in this passage. Peter describes Lot as a righteous man living amongst the unrighteous, and his soul ached because of their unrighteousness. The word that Peter uses for torment is "βασανίζω." This term is synonymous with torture. Revelation 12:2 uses this term to refer to the pains of a woman giving birth and in Matthew 8:29, the demons in speaking with Jesus use this term to speak of the torment of eternal judgment. There is also the use of this term in Mark 6:48 to describe rowing against the wind. The idea that Peter is expressing is that Lot's soul was consumed and wracked with pain because of the wickedness around him. The pain was so real that it was physical as well as spiritual. The question, dear Christian, is this: "does your soul ache in the same way that righteous Lot's did, or have you become so desensitized to the wickedness of the culture around you that you just ignore it?"

David describes what it means to have your soul tormented because of unrighteous people around you in this way:

*"I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed  
with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.  
My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weak  
because of all my foes."*

*(Psalm 6: 6-7, ESV)*

Dear Christian, is this a picture of your soul, tormented by the enemies of God that have become so bold in our culture. They revel in their idolatry and sinfulness, cursing God by word and deed, and we so often shrug it off...

***"Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, revealing their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.***

***These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.***

*(2 Peter 2: 10b-17, ESV)*

Peter, like Jude, is a preacher, and as preachers are want to do, uses many illustrations to ingrain in our minds what these false teachers are like.

***Bold and Willful:*** these men are arrogant, they do what the angels dare not do, and that is to blaspheme God. Their reckless behavior will reward them with eternal punishment, but in the process, they will lead others to destruction. How dangerous our careless words can be when we speak of God. If we are not grounded in the scriptures, with a mature understanding of doctrine, and a healthy faith, we ought not make any statements of theology. This is the problem with most modern “scholarship.” Their beginning point is not the scripture, but “what does this passage mean to me?” Brethren, this is arrogance! It is pure hubris! They speak of what they do not know; times have not changed much in 2000 years.

***They revel in the daytime:*** They are so bold in their sin that they do not try to hide it from anyone. Again we find that Peter’s letter is just as applicable to us today as it was to his audience all of those years ago. This is one of the mysteries of the Holy Spirit, how as he was writing the scriptures through these men, he knew our needs even today. The scriptures are relevant not just to the era in which they were written but are relevant for all time. Jesus said as much when he said that not a jot or a tittle of the prophets or the law will pass away until this earth passes away. There will never be a time when the scriptures are not relevant to the lives of man.

Sinners in our culture are becoming increasingly more blatant in their sins. They want to shock you and slap you in the face with it. Homosexuality is becoming the thing of sit-coms and “family” shows. Lying is seen as acceptable if you can get away with it. Movie heroes are the ones who take the law into their own hands or are the criminals themselves. Christian, stray from this. It is a sin to indulge in these things. God has not called us to come out of the closet as our society would bid us, but God has called us to clean the closet out and live holy lives, shining the light of the gospel into every dark corner and crevice of our being.

***They have eyes full of adultery:*** They are filled with lust. Again, times have changed little. Adultery has become acceptable in the eyes of our society. Yet, God has ordained marriage from the very beginning of creation and when people make light of it, break it apart, throw it away, take it for granted, or disrespect it, they are saying to God that his righteous laws are worthless. This, my friends, is a very dangerous thing to do. God has ordained marriage for our benefit from the very beginning of creation. It is a holy ordinance and we ought to treat it with dignity and respect.

***They have hearts trained for greed:*** As Jude writes of these false teachers, they are shepherds who only feed themselves. Jesus said that if we are to lead, we must be the servants of all. If you want to judge the fruit of a pastor, teacher, or leader in the church, look to his heart. Is money his motivation? Is glory his motivation? If it is, then I exhort you to flee from his council. His advice will lead you astray and he is not sent of God. The motive of a pastor sent from God is love; do not confuse the two.

***They have followed the way of Balaam:*** Balaam was paid money to curse God's people. He also tried to seduce God's people into disobeying God's law. If you ever have someone tell you that the Christian no longer has any obligation to the law of God, rebuke them, for they are not of God. God's law is holy and just and while our salvation is through faith in Christ, not obedience to the law (as it has always been even in Old Testament times), God's law is still the best rule of life that we can use to grow in our sanctification. It teaches how to live our lives in a holy manner and how to grow more like Christ. Jesus himself obeyed every letter of the law. If we claim to be his servants, why is it that we think we are exempt?

***They are waterless springs:*** Jesus said of himself that he is the source of living water. And he is the only spring of it. These men claim to offer water to parched souls, but all they have to give is dust and filth. There is no life in them. This can be said of the followers of Allah, of Buddha, of humanism, of strict Roman Catholicism, or of liberal Christianity that teaches all sorts of lies. The way of salvation is clear. Believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, as your Lord and as your Savior and he will save you. Now there is some unpacking of what it means to be Lord and Savior—for as Jesus says, “If you love me, then obey my teachings,” but there is no other way to the father but through the son.

These dry wells, these false teachers, are destined for one place, and that is to join their master, the Devil. Do not be snared by their traps, for their desire is your destruction, not your growth.

***“For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For it, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: ‘The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.’”***

***(2 Peter 2: 18-22, ESV)***

A lion, when hunting its prey, always seeks the sick or wounded animals, not the strong and robust ones. Why is this? Because, the sick animals are easy prey. Brethren, the same is true with spiritual growth. False teachers lead astray those who are ignorant of scripture. This is why it was so important to Peter to show this church how to grow in faith in chapter 1 of the letter. He understands that the best defense against false teaching is a mature faith. So many people think that faith is all they need. Well, faith is the criterion for heaven, but you need more than just a simple faith to persevere through the trials of this life. You must make the Holy Scriptures part of the fabric of your life. As Paul puts it in Ephesians 6, put on the whole armor of God.

And no matter what the false teachers promise, remember that you are a slave to whatever rules over you. You cannot and will never be your own master. The question that remains is “whom will you serve?” Will you serve God or will you serve Satan? These are the only 2 options. Especially now that you know the truth, don’t let yourself stray from it. If you do, you will not only be guilty of ignorance and sin, but you will be guilty of apostasy, rejecting the very word of God. That is a dangerous place to be.

Peter gives us a rather graphic illustration of this. A dog returns to its own vomit. That vomit is your sin. The sad thing is that so many people, as repulsive as that sin may be, choose to return to their wickedness. Friends, for the prodigal son to return to his father’s house, he had to leave the pig sty behind. Don’t let yourself become comfortable in the muck and the mire of this world. If you are a Christian, your citizenship lies not here but in the world to come where Christ has prepared an inheritance for you. Don’t squander it and don’t take it for granted. May God be magnified in your life and may you flee from the false teachers who would lead you astray.

## **2 Peter, Chapter 3:**

*“This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. “*

*(2 Peter 3: 1-3, ESV)*

I think that it is ironic that as Peter is writing this letter, the one thing that he would have definitely been surrounded with was scoffers. Roman prison cells were not particularly friendly places for Christians to be. For Peter, the reality of these scoffers was all too real, but he also realized that this is human nature: to scoff at that which you don't understand. Peter also knew first hand as to just how dangerous scoffers can be. The whole purpose behind scoffing is to win an argument by demoralization rather than by addressing the issue at hand. You cannot refute the truth. Thus the enemy will resort to persecution and mockery.

It is this comment about “the second letter” that leads scholars to believe that the recipients were the same churches that the first letter was written to. We cannot know for sure, but it seems unlikely that the Holy Spirit would preserve “Part A” of one series of letters and “Part B” of a second series of letters without giving us ample reason to assert that the second one was destined for an entirely different audience. That being said, there are quite a few similar themes that Peter develops in both of his epistles that strengthens the argument that these letters were addressed to the same audience. Issues of perseverance in the midst of challenges, God's preservation of his called people, and an emphasis on the redemptive work of all three members of the trinity play an important role in both of these letters.

This points us then to verse 1 and 2 of this chapter, which tells us then that both books were written not only to address specific issues within the congregation, but also to provide those congregations with a “way of reminder” of the essentials of living in the Christian faith. The letters of Peter serve as a “Petrine” practical theology, which was designed to be used to teach the people of God how to live as people of God in a pagan world.

And what is that core thing he wants to stir up in the minds of the people who he is writing to? Remember what God has done in history to draw us as a people to himself. A personal relationship with Jesus is essential to salvation, but we must always remember that we are part of a corporate body; we are not Lone Ranger Christians running about. God has brought us into community with one another for worship, for mutual encouragement and growth, and for service, namely the proclaiming of the Gospel to the unbelieving world. If we constantly keep before us the continued faithfulness of God even in times of trial, then it will bring great encouragement and strength to our service, for we are servants of the same great God.

Dear friends, look to your own life. Check the way in which you are living. One of the great problems in the Christian church today is that we have become timid in our witness to the world. We do not stand up for what we know is right because we are afraid of being labeled “goofy” or a “fundy” and we often do not take a stand for the truth

of the Gospel in our homes and in our workplaces. Christian, we serve the same God that delivered Daniel from the lions, Lot from the Sodomites, and our dear friend Peter from jail. Yet, God can also choose to be glorified in our trials and even through our death. Look at the martyrs of church history. Look at the lives of your brothers and sisters who are either living in chains or being tortured and executed for the faith in nations around you. Yet, they hold to the faith because they know that it is truth. Yet, we here are uncomfortable with the idea of witnessing to our neighbor for fear that he might not invite you over to his bar-b-ques any more. If you truly trust in God's sovereignty, then you must be willing to step out in faith when God opens or shuts a door of opportunity.

And we are in the last times. The last times started with the death and resurrection of Jesus and will continue until he returns. And with that, the prediction of Peter is true, false teachers are all around us. Beware, dear Christian, for they seek to destroy your soul.

***“They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever, since the father’s fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.’ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heaven’s existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. By the same word the heavens and the earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.***

***But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”***

***(2 Peter 3: 4-9. ESV)***

There is some discussion amongst scholars as to who is the “they” that Peter speaks of here. Some suggest that this is what the scoffers are saying to mock the Christians and some argue that these are the words of those in the family of Christ that are doubting their faith because of the words of the scoffers. The natural reading of the text, though, would imply that this is the kind of thing that the scoffers are saying to taunt Christians.

They are saying, “you talk about a second coming and you talk about resurrection, but nothing is really new under the sun. People live, they die, and everyone else moves on.” They are saying, “Where is this God of yours?” This taunt is reminiscent of the taunt that the unbelievers laid toward Christ while he was on the cross, “You say you will destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself.” (Matthew 27:40) Oh how the rebukes of mockers will be silenced in the flames of Hell. Christian, when you face these people, do so not in frustration and anger, but with pity, for they do not understand the wickedness that they let through their lips. We stand on the promises given to us by Christ Jesus himself, the mocks of those who taunt us question the legitimacy of Jesus’ very words. And friends, your hearts should tremble at the idea of taunting God. Their act is no mere foolishness but it is insanity!



Yet, we stand here, nearly two-thousand years after Christ won the war with Satan, there on that Roman Cross, and the mocks of sinners sometimes make us wonder, “how long o Lord, how long?” Many Christians find themselves in despair over this very question. How long will you wait? We see the wickedness of the world around us and we are tempted to wonder whether we have understood the promises of Christ’s return correctly.

Dear friends, do not despair, but rejoice in God’s timing. It is the very long-suffering patience of God that has brought you into the kingdom. Had God set final judgment at the time of resurrection, neither you nor I would have had the pleasure of knowing Christ as savior and friend. And, as long as God’s patience perseveres, even as we are in the midst of trials and persecution, we ought see this as one more chance to proclaim the Gospel to the people around us.

The reality of life is that all of life is for the Glory of God. Redemption is not about us but redemptive history is about God and his glory. God made the earth and all that is in it, God destroyed the world with water once because of its wickedness, he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire as a sign of the judgment that is to come upon unbelievers, and if the two cities of perversion were destroyed as a sign, how much more fierce will the fire from heaven be when it is sent again. The question that we must place before ourselves is not “when will Christ return,” but, “am I ready and are the ones whose life God puts me in contact with ready?”

Now many things have been made of the text in this passage about the relative lengths of God’s days. Peter here is quoting from Psalm 90:4, which in context is a prayer of Moses regarding the frailty of mankind. There are two emphases being made here. The first is in the contrast between Man and God. What we pass for longevity is but a passing breath in God’s economy. The most magnificent achievement of man is nothing next to the transcendence of God. How often we think that God will be impressed with us, though. God is great beyond our ability to describe and there is no and be no comparison between the works of God and the works of man.

The second thing that it is important to understand about the language of this passage is that we begin to see the minute and deliberate detail that God has put into his redemptive plan. We are prone to hurry and rush things along. And in doing so, we often complete the job in a hurried and haphazard fashion. Not so with God. His timing is perfect and he is patient and willing to spend whatever time he feels is appropriate to bring fulfillment to his plans. God is not capricious and he does nothing in a rushed or haphazard way. His plan for creation and history was perfect from the beginning and it continues to be perfect as it unfolds.

When I was young, I used to enjoy putting together plastic models. My favorite ones were World War II warships. They were pretty basic and straightforward. There was a one or two piece hull, a deck, some buildings, and lots of guns. I had a navy that would have dominated either theater of operations during the war. One thing that I was not good at putting together, though, were model cars. Model cars tend to have detailed engines with lots of small parts. I never had the patience to properly assemble these. I usually would just put the basic engine block together, slap it into the chassis, and glue the hood shut so no one could tell that I didn’t put together the engine right. I just never had the patience for them.

Aren't you glad that God is not like me? Aren't you glad that God does not simply slap the finishing touches on redemptive history to make it look complete without dealing with the details of redeeming his people? As Peter says, the Lord is not slow; he is patient. And praise be to God because it is through his long-suffering patience that all who have been set aside for redemption since the very beginning of time will be saved—all will reach repentance.

***“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.***

***Since all these things are thus to be dissolved what sort of people ought you to be in the lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”***

***(2 Peter 3: 10-13, ESV)***

To set these verses in context, you need to spend some time looking at Luke 12:35-40. Peter is alluding back to Jesus' parable about the watchmen waiting for their master to return. Jesus is driving home the fact that the key lies not in figuring out the day and hour of the master's return, but that the key lies simply in being ready for his return. There is also a foundational assumption that the return will happen.

No matter how vehement the mockers are, dear Christian, you must not fall prey to their arguments that Christ will not return. They feel that they have discovered all of the answers to the questions of life in the fields of science and philosophy, yet these mockers draw conclusions without understanding all of the facts. Jesus is not about facts and figures, he is not about science, and he is not about philosophy. Jesus is about saving undeserving people from an eternal punishment that they do deserve. No Christian ought to be without the assurance that Christ will return. He said he would, and to doubt any word that he gave us is to doubt the truth about any statement that we have from him, including the promise of eternal life.

Be assured that Jesus will return, so be ready for that day. He will come like a thief in the night, and many will be taken to judgment unawares. Many who have reveled in backsliding are going to find themselves on the pathway to destruction when it abruptly ends. These words of Peter's ought to encourage your heart. Yet, in the same vein, your heart also ought to weep for the lost.

There is much speculation about the nature of the new heavens and the new earth that are promised. And, until we arrive there, we undoubtedly will be left with many questions. But, we can be assured of two things from this passage. First is that the new heavens and earth will bear some similarity to what we are used to. It will be earthy and dirty, but there will be no thorns and thistles. All of earth will be modeled after the first and perfect garden in Eden. Our work will bring forth abundant fruit and it will be done with joy rather than by the sweat of the brow. How can we be sure of this? The language that Peter is using here is remolding language, not the language of utter destruction. God

created all things at the beginning and pronounced them good, why should he choose to do differently the second time through?

In many societies, the way you clear a field for planting is with fire. You section off the area you wish to work and then burn everything within to ashes. Then the ashes are tilled into the soil and you plant. Clearing ground in this way kills all the vegetation in the area, but the soil—which is the base element—is unharmed. The language that Peter is using carries this kind of connotation.

The second and most important thing that we can be sure of is that it will be a wonderful place, no matter what the geography is like. Why? God will be there. It will be a place where righteousness dwells. It will be a place where the people of God will be free from persecution and pain and will enjoy the presence of their Lord and Master. I long for this place, yet, while God has ordained that I be a pilgrim through this world, I will do so in order to be a pointer to my Savior. Let this be the vision of all of us. We hope for heaven, but while here on earth, that we seek to share that hope with others.

***“Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”***

***(2 Peter 3: 14-18, ESV)***

So what is the antidote for heresy? Growth in knowledge of Jesus Christ. And this growth comes from prayer, worship, fellowship, and diligent study of the scriptures. We live in a society that offers us many religious freedoms. We live in a society where Bibles are easily obtained. We live in a society where you have dozens of options as to which translation is easiest for you to understand. Yet, we live in a society where our church members are largely illiterate when it comes to the scriptures. We have no excuse and this illiteracy has caused many to stumble and fall.

Why is it that we are often more prone to pick up a television remote than our Bibles when we want to relax. Often, we talk about the need to “turn off the brain” for a while. Yet, our brains were never designed to be turned off. When we go to sleep at night, our brain gets its best rest not by turning off but by dreaming. I believe that you will find that you will ease much more mental stress by stopping your worries and spending an hour reading and meditating on scripture than by watching an hour of television. TV can be a fine and wonderful thing, but I would venture to argue that all of us spend more time with it than we should. You need to pose the question to yourself and ask yourself which relationship you are investing in more heavily: that of God or that of television. Seek to grow in grace.

Before I close out this letter, I want to draw your attention to the comment that Peter makes about Paul. Yes, Paul's letters are sometimes hard to understand, but I think that there is far more to the issue than that. If this letter is written to one of the churches that the first epistle was written to, which it likely was, then we need to realize that Peter was sending this letter to the churches in Galatia amongst others. And, it was in Paul's letter to the Galatians that he related about his face-to-face confrontation with Peter. I think that this is the way in which Peter gets in a friendly jab at old Paul—the last word, so to speak. And, of course, it is with the church that is inside of the inside joke.

This passage, though, shows us something very important about Paul's letters, though. Peter equates them with the Old Testament scriptures. Even this early in the life of the church, the apostolic letters were considered to be inspired by God and thus scriptural or canonical. It is an important reminder that the New Testament canon was not something that just happened to be agreed upon by a majority vote years later. The councils that made the Canon official merely were affirming that which the Christian church had held, even as far back as when these letters and books were being written.

Peter closes this letter with the same exhortation that he began it: seek to be found without blemish or spot and at peace. How is this accomplished? By growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the straight way and the narrow gate; he is the way, the truth, and the light; there is salvation in no one other than in him. Nurture that relationship for all that you are worth because it is more valuable than all that you have.

There is one other question that must be reflected on as we put away this letter and move on to other books of the Bible to study. These are the last words that Peter ever gave to these churches. In fact, there is a good chance that by the time the churches read this letter, Peter was already dead. His final words to us as well are "To Christ be the glory now and forever." Dear Christian, if you were expecting to go to your death soon, would these be the last words out of your lips? Will this be how people remember you, that you glorified God even in your death? Reflect on your life this day, because to live and to die for the Glory of God is what being a Christian is all about.

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