

Truth + Obedience = Growth

An Overview of 2 Peter

2 Peter: Introduction

- At the time of this letter, Peter senses that his death is near.
- This is the last written word that we have from the apostle.
- It was very likely written from a prison cell in Rome, as was 2 Timothy, the last letter we have from the apostle Paul.

- Both Paul and Peter, in their final letters, emphasize knowing, studying, preaching and teaching of the Word of God – combined with obedience to it.
- This is the true path of Christian growth.
- It is also the way to protect ourselves from all forms of error that arise within the church – whether past, present or future.

- A few years earlier, probably prior to his imprisonment, Peter wrote his first letter to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor.
- In that letter he dealt with the outward threats of persecution and suffering.
- In this letter he assumes his readers know his previous one (3:1).
- He now deals with the inward threats of complacency and false doctrine.

- In the earliest days of the church, the primary controversy with false teaching involved an overly Jewish emphasis.
- The “Judaizers,” tried to put Old Testament requirements upon non-Jewish believers.
- The later threat that Peter addresses here poses an almost opposite problem.
- Wrong doctrine is leading to a blatant disregard for moral requirements.

- The false teaching which 2 Peter confronts stems from compromise with the surrounding pagan, Greco-Roman environment.
- Several things reveal this tendency:
 - Their decreasing reliance upon Scripture (1:19-21)
 - Their denial of Christ’s redemption (2:1)
 - Their blatant laxity in moral principles (2:12-14)
 - Growing skepticism about Christ’s return (3:3-4)

- T. Fornberg describes the problem in this way:
 - *“... the adversaries consisted of theologically unaware Christians who compromised with ideas current in the world around them.”*
- Richard Bauckham adds:
 - *“Perhaps they saw themselves as rather daring young radicals trying to clear a lot of traditional nonsense out of the church.”*

- In our present environment the church faces exactly the same kind of difficulty.
 - *“Experience of contemporary church life ... presents us with similarly baffling examples of those whose early faith and ministry bore every sign of genuineness, yet who later denied the ‘Lord who bought them’ (2:1). Not infrequently, this has led to the practice of immorality of the most shameful kind (described in 2 Pet. 2).”*
 - *Lucas & Green, The Message of 2 Peter & Jude: The Promise of His Coming.*
- The danger of false teaching is, if anything, worse today than it was in Peter’s time.
- The pseudo-Christianity that Peter addresses here is especially attractive in the pluralistic environment of the USA.
- It’s tempting to back off of beliefs that make non-Christians feel uncomfortable.
- Yet those beliefs are precisely the ones that make the church distinctively Christian.

Contrast with 1 Peter

- Peter’s two letters have very little in common.
- As we said, they address different things:
 - 1 Peter deals with the dangers of persecution and suffering that threaten the church from without.
 - 2 Peter deals with the danger of false teaching and the smugness to which it leads – a danger that arises from within.

Similarity with Jude

- The first similarity we may notice is that both of these letters remain largely ignored, even by churches who value biblical teaching.
- In fact, unless someone is committed to going through all the books of the Bible, these letters may not be studied at all.
- Luke Timothy Johnson notes this in his book, *The Writings of the New Testament*:
 - *“The second letter of Peter and the letter of Jude are marginalized in the NT canon, disliked when not disowned. Even those who find merit in them do not rank them among the important NT writings. They are seldom read and less often studied ...*
 - *“In truth, the letters are not easy to read. They are not, first of all, pleasant reading ...*
 - *“Neither are they easy to understand. In broad terms they are simple enough: both defend the common heritage against distortion and corruption.*
 - *“But [they] presuppose traditions no longer fully available to us. Reading them requires a greater decoding ability than is needed for other parts of the New Testament.”*
- Jude and 2 Peter are both written to condemn false teaching – a kind that resulted in moral laxity in both cases.
- Reading the two letters side-by-side reveals similarities in over a dozen verses, the majority in 2 Peter 2. Both of them connect back with the words of Christ in Luke 17:26-32.

- But Jude and 2 Peter are not identical either.
- They are different letters, written by different authors with somewhat different goals.
- Peter and Jude must have known one another and probably served together at times.
- Peter, in addition to his warning, is trying to encourage the spiritual growth of his readers.
 - *“2 Peter, then, is a homily on Christian growth, set in the context of threats to Christian stability from a type of destructive and heretical teaching (2:1–3) that is as common today as it was in apostolic times and that seems to hold out a perpetual attraction to some vigorous evangelical communities.”*
 - Lucas & Green, *The Message of 2 Peter & Jude: The Promise of His Coming*.
- 2 Peter Peter’s Purpose
- We can sum up the overall purpose of 2 Peter in the following points:
 - To motivate believers in Christian growth.
 - To remind them that growth is based on a combination of both knowledge and obedience.
 - To encourage watchfulness in light of the Lord’s promised – and therefore certain – return.
 - To guard against any and all pseudo-Christian teaching that would claim otherwise.
- For Peter, an authentic “knowledge” of God requires following both “the way of truth” (2:2) and “the way of righteousness” (2:21).
- Christians, and therefore teachers within the church, need both:
 - pure and correct thinking (3:1)
 - pure and correct living (3:14)
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- 2 Peter Reading the Letter
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- Reading 2 Peter should only take about ten minutes. It isn’t really very long.
- As we read through the letter, look for material pertaining to the following topics:
 - The importance of the Scriptures.
 - The vital link between the knowledge of God and obedience.
 - The seriousness of doctrinal error.

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2 Peter Conclusions

- Earlier we said that we could sum up the purpose of 2 Peter in the following points:
 - To motivate believers in Christian growth.
 - To remind them that growth is based on a combination of both knowledge and obedience.
 - To encourage watchfulness in light of the Lord's promised – and therefore certain – return.
 - To guard against any and all pseudo-Christian teaching that would claim otherwise.

- Again, as we went through the letter we saw:
 - The importance of the Scriptures.
In fact, we saw some of the clearest statements regarding divine inspiration in the Bible.
 - The vital link between the knowledge of God and obedience.
We might also add that distorting such knowledge is vitally linked to disobedience.
 - The seriousness of doctrinal error.
Scripture-twisting is why many will be lost.

- 2 Peter sounds an alarm:
- Churches can be attacked from outside to the point of near destruction.
- We see this today in places like Iran, Sudan, and North Korea.
- But worse yet can be the self-destructive tendency within churches which is the direct result of false teaching and lax morals.

- As we draw to a close, let's remind ourselves that simple growth in knowledge, while absolutely essential, is not enough.
- We need to make sure that our own growth or discipleship is obedience-based.
- Christians, and therefore Christian teachers, need both:
 - pure and correct thinking
 - pure and correct living

- *"If in 2 Peter there is an almost unimaginable severity for the apostate and the false prophet, there is also a vista, beyond our dreams, of unbounded joys for those who, never forgetful of what has been done for them (1:9), daily seek to increase, more and more, in the grace and knowledge of God."*
 - Lucas & Green, *The Message of 2 Peter & Jude: The Promise of His Coming*.

- Let's finish up by rereading the final two verses of the letter, 2 Peter 3:17-18.
- They are actually a perfect summary of the whole book, which teaches us that:

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