

# Study 8: 2nd Peter Chapter 1

## **Introduction**

Peter reveals the purpose behind the letter in the first chapter, which is to encourage us to grow our faith in the christian values, and to be constantly reminded of these things. Peter's motivation was especially important in the light of his coming death, and the letter is a kind of "farewell letter". Our faith is not "blind faith" but is built on evidence. And Peter is able to bring that evidence to the fore because he was an eyewitness of Jesus.

## **Body of the Study**

### **Introduction: The Important Things**

#### **The Salutation**

#### **Our Relationship with God**

#### **Growing as Christians**

#### **Peter's Exhortation to the Brethren**

#### **The Basis of Belief**

## **Homework and preparation for next week:**

*Read the notes as a review of the study*

*Read chapter 2 in preparation for the next study.*

*Peter says, "God has given us everything we need for life and godliness" (2:1:3). What does godliness mean, and how do we (or should we) express it in our lives?*

*Based on what Peter says in this letter, what was his attitude towards his forthcoming death? How should we view our lives? Peter showed his concern for the brethren as he approached the end of his life. What should we be doing in our lives right now in a similar vein? If you knew that the end of your life was near, what would you do differently?*

## Notes for study 8: 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter Chapter 1

Peter reveals the purpose behind the letter in the first chapter, which is to encourage us to grow our faith in the christian values, and to be constantly reminded of these things. Peter's motivation was especially important in the light of his coming death, and the letter is a kind of "farewell letter". Our faith is not "blind faith" but is built on evidence. And Peter is able to bring that evidence to the fore because he was an eyewitness of Jesus.

### ***Introduction: The Important Things***

From the introduction and conclusion, we can glean some information about Peter's purpose in writing the letter, and the things that he regards as important.

Two related things stand out from the introduction – living righteous and godly lives, and growing in our knowledge of God.

We begin our growth cycle by adding to our faith goodness; and to goodness, *knowledge*, and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, *godliness* ...(2:1:5-7). We must *grow* in the *knowledge* of God (2:3:18), and *possess these qualities in increasing measure* (2:1:8), so that we can *participate in the divine nature* (2:1:4). We have *knowledge of God* (2:1:2) through our *knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (2:1:2; 2:1:8; 2:3:18).

We have *everything we need for life and godliness* (2:1:3) in *abundance* (2:1:2), and we have *been cleansed from our past sins* (2:1:9) and are a *secure position* (2:3:17). However, we must be careful that we don't become *nearsighted and blind* (2:1:9), becoming ineffective and unproductive (2:1:8), so we must *be on our guard* (2:3:17) that we don't get *carried away by the error of lawless men* (2:3:17).

### ***The Salutation***

The letter begins with a brief salutation "...*To those who have obtained like precious faith with us...*" (2:1:1 NKJV). As previously discussed, the letter is addressed to the same group as the first letter – those in northern Asia Minor. Our faith comes because of Jesus Christ. Whilst *faith* means *belief*, we can have *faith in anything* (ie we can believe anything – and some people do!), but that is not the kind of faith that Peter has in mind here. We believe in God because of the evidence of Jesus, and we have been brought (and bought) back to God "...*by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ...*" (2:1:1 NKJV). We have been made right (justified) by Christ's sacrifice, and because of that we have obtained the common faith of all of Christ's followers.

The usual greetings of many of the letters of the New Testament is expressed "...*Grace and Peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord...*" (2:1:2 NKJV). As discussed above, *knowledge* is a key train of thought through the letter, and it is the *knowledge* that we have of God and of the Lord upon which we build our personal faith.

### ***Our Relationship with God***

We have been blessed by having been brought back into a relationship with God, through Jesus' sacrifice. And through the example of His perfect life, we have wonderful examples of how we ought to behave in this world. We can learn about Him through the things that are written in the scriptures, and through all of the above "...*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness...*" (2:1:3 NIV). God ensures that we are complete – we have nothing lacking! We have everything that we need, although that does not mean that we will have everything that we want! God's prime concern is our spiritual lives, and that we can be fully equipped to live godly lives for Him.

He gives us the power to live such lives “...through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue...” (2:1:3 NKJV).

Verse 4 is a pivotal verse in the letter. God has blessed us, and we are able to participate in God’s divine nature, which is another way of saying that we have Christ’s work of reconciliation is complete. “...Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires...” (2:1:4 NIV). Because of His reconciliation we have escaped the sinful corruption of the world. Of course, there is an Implication here (as in other places such as Eph 2) that we ought not to return back to it!

### **Growing as Christians**

Peter builds a line of argument: We have been rescued from sin, we have knowledge of God by Jesus, and more than just being rescued, we have been blessed as God’s heirs. “...For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; <sup>6</sup> and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; <sup>7</sup> and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love...” (2:1:5-7 NIV). The chain of thought here starts with *faith*, and ends with *love*. The idea of *adding to our faith* brings with it the requirement for action – as Peter says, we need to *make every effort* to do it!

Peter outlines our growth pattern here. It starts out with faith – belief in God – and then we need to develop goodness – one of the qualities of Christ (2:1:3). So, as christians, we need to grow into and develop the characteristics of Christ (which should go without saying!). Then, we need to grow in *knowledge*. We should note that growing in *goodness* (becoming like Christ) should come before we gain *knowledge*. So, the pursuit of knowledge is not the most important thing in life – but that is not to say it’s not important, or that we shouldn’t do it.

The "knowledge" (GK G1194) that is to be added to faith is the advance into the will of God. The false teachers (eventually known as the Gnostics) claimed a superior knowledge. The apostles stressed that it was necessary for those who know God to live a godly life (cf. 1Jn 2:3-4; 5:18) and that Christ taught them the will of the Father (Jn 15:15). (NIVBC).

After these things, we need to gain self-control. Jesus was the perfect example of this, and was in perfect control in every situation. We need to have self-control over what we say, and also over how we act (behave). The next virtue is to go from self-control to patience. James outlined this in Js 5:7-11. When we have achieved all of these things, then we need to move to godliness – again emulating the characteristics of Christ. But that is not the end of the matter. We need to stop just looking at our inward characteristics, and look to how we can help and serve those around us as we develop *brotherly kindness*. Being kind to others is one thing, but whilst *brotherly love* (*philadelphia*) is one thing, the ultimate goal is *agape* love.

Brotherly kindness denotes the warmth of affection that should characterize the fellowship of believers, and love is the queen of the virtues (cf. 1Co 13), denoting self-sacrificing action in behalf of another. This love flows from God who is himself love (1Jn 4:8) and who reaches out to the world (Jn 3:16; 1Jn 3:16). Godly people who participate in the divine nature must abound in love. (NIVBC)

The application of these virtues is made in the next verse “...For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (2:1:8 NIV). Not only are we to have these qualities, but we must continue to grow in them – *in increasing measure* – then we will be both effective and productive in our christian lives. But the reverse also applies “...he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins...” (2:1:9 NKJV). We cannot claim to belong to Christ (ie be christians) and *not* grow in the christian virtues. If we think that we can ignore them, then we are both blind and have not grasped the

significance of Christ's sacrifice, which bought us out of our life of sin (c/f 1 Cor 6:20 *you are not your own, you are bought with a price*).

Peter sums up the situation with a call to action "...Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble..." (2:1:10 NKJV). There is an implication here – that we can stumble – and then our calling and election will not be sure. Whilst God guarantees His faithfulness (1 Cor 10:13), and no one can take away our inheritance (Jn 10:27-29), but that does not mean that we can't give it up! And that is exactly the point that Peter makes here. We need to be diligent in our christian faith, and to continue to grow in the christian virtues – and if we do, then our eternal security is assured.

The outcome of our faithfulness will be our eternal reward in heaven, where we will be eternally blessed in God's presence "...and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..." (2:1:11 NIV).

### **Peter's Exhortation to the Brethren**

The epistle is written as a kind of farewell letter by Peter, and in the next few verses he expresses his desire that the brethren carefully consider their situation. The apostles had been given a special role in taking the gospel into the world, but the time of the end of their personal mission was approaching. We don't know exactly where and when most of them died, but if they were about the same age as Jesus (therefore born in "AD 1")<sup>1</sup> then by this time they would have been well into their 60's if they were still alive. John was the last to die around 100 AD. Peter recognises that the time of his death is near, and also recognises his responsibility. "...Therefore I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know them, and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you,..." (2:1:12-13 NKJV). We can see here Peter's purpose in writing the letter – to help the brethren to remain faithful, and to continue growing in the christian graces. Jesus had described to Peter that he would die in unpleasant and constrained circumstances (Jn 21:18-19), and he recognised that statement "...knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me..." (2:1:14 NKJV). The word *tent* means *dwelling place* and in this case is a euphemism for our body. This is clear from the context, as can be seen in the next verse "...Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease...". Peter explains that one of the purposes in writing the letter is so that we can have a permanent record of his instruction.

### **The Basis of Belief**

We can be assured of the things that Peter wrote (and of course, not just the things written by Peter, but the things written by all of the apostles and prophets!). The New Testament (and the Old Testament) is based on solid evidence "...We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty..." (2:1:16 NIV). The apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus. They were with Jesus for three years, they saw His suffering and death, they saw His resurrection, and they saw His ascension.

Also, Peter was an eyewitness at Jesus' transfiguration, and cites that event as further evidence of the surety of his witness statement "...For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." <sup>18</sup> We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain..." (2:1:17-18 NIV).

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion on dating the time of the New Testament, see my "Introduction to the book of Acts" study.

Peter emphatically says, "We [i.e., Peter, James, and John] heard this voice that came from heaven," while they were with Jesus "on the sacred mountain." It was the Transfiguration that transformed the mountain from a common one into a "sacred" (GK G41) one. As for the place of the Transfiguration, Mount Hermon (over nine thousand feet high and near Caesarea Philippi, where the event that preceded the Transfiguration took place) is the most likely choice (NIVBC).

The account that Peter gives of the transfiguration differs slightly from those of the gospels. Schreiner<sup>2</sup> says:

Peter's words here do not correspond exactly with any of them. The NIV translates Matt 17:5 and 2 Pet 1:17 exactly the same, but there are some minor differences between the accounts in Greek. For example, "this is" (*houtos estin*) is placed first in the sentence in Matthew, Peter has *eis hon* instead of Matthew's *en ho*, and only Peter has *ego*. Mark and Luke do not have the same statement about God being well pleased, and so they differ even more dramatically from 2 Peter. Some scholars argue that Peter's tradition is independent here. Such a view is not surprising if Peter was the true author. He could remember the event without consulting any other sources...

However, the certainty of the basis for belief is also given by the accounts of the Old Testament prophets, which were fulfilled hundreds of years later in Christ. "... *We have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts...*" (2:1:19 NKJV). The OT scriptures foresaw and predicted Christ, and Peter describes their words as being like *light shining in a dark place* (the world).

The prophecies were not made up by men, and they were attested as being true by their fulfilment "... *Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.*"<sup>21</sup> *For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit...*" (2:1:20-21 NIV). The things that the prophets spoke were not things that they made up along the way. They were the things that God had revealed to them through the Holy Spirit. [Incidentally, this shows us that whilst the Holy Spirit was made manifest and evident to men at Pentecost, it was through the action of the Holy Spirit that the prophets received their inspiration. And so, the Holy Spirit was active in the world before Pentecost, and is not just a New Testament phenomenon.]

In the same way, the things that the apostles spoke and declared were the revelation from God, and not things that they made up. The interpretation of scripture must be the one which the Holy Spirit intended it to be. We cannot individually "interpret" the scripture to mean whatever we think it means to us. Rather, we need to study to understand what God's original intention for the message was, and then (and only then) can we apply those principles to our lives and present situation.

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<sup>2</sup> Schreiner, p. 315