

# THE BOOK OF SECOND PETER

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2Peter was written near the end of Peter's life (65-68AD) to the same readers his first letter was addressed. In 1Peter, he addresses persecution from those outside the church. Here he addresses the problem of false teachers and corruption within the church.

In both letters, Peter attempts to exhort believers to put their faith into practice. Specifically, he challenges believers to grow spiritually, to combat false teaching and, in view of the Lord's certain and imminent return, to conduct themselves and to direct their efforts and lifestyles accordingly. These three purposes could not be more relevant, urgently necessary and in need of bold advocacy in our own modern-day Christian culture.

## Chapter 1

1:1 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:

Servant and apostle; sent with authority from God - but which authority was to be used to serve the One who sent him; accomplishing *His* purposes. Peter unashamedly identifies the One by whom he has been sent; whom and whose interests he intends to represent and to *labor* for.

Note that in the bible (OT and NT; from Abram through David and the prophets, to Mary and the apostles), people of God identified themselves as *servants* of God. When addressing God, they referred to themselves as "Your servant" (Moses: Dt 3:23; 34:5; Ex 4:10 - David: 1Sa 23:10-11 - Mary: Lk 1:38 - Simeon: Lk 2:29). They could do so because they were indeed serving Him - *laboring* at it faithfully!

Today's Christians have fallen into the way of the surrounding secular culture, seeking to be served. As a result, not much laboring for the eternal purposes of God is going on among average, church-going Christians. We need to be reminded of Mk 10:45. Many Christians now believe that this status (being a Christian) allows them earthly privileges, allowances and provisions rather than recognizing *and being excited* in knowing that God now has a call on their lives for *eternal* purposes; that they are now to be living sacrifices as Rom 12:1 describes (and although "*spiritual*" is generally favored over the KJV's choice of "*reasonable*," the meaning conveyed by the KJV is quite appropriate).

Most of the NT letters use the opportunity of the opening verse(s) to encapsulate some poignant theology (Tit 1:1-3 may be the best example). Here, Peter mentions just a bare minimum of the profoundly good news.

Peter makes it clear that he is addressing believers (it would have been pointless for him to direct the exhortations and warnings of this letter to the unsaved). And note that their faith has been received, not earned.

1:2 Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

*Abundant* grace and peace - Many Christians today lack an *abundance* of God's intended blessings. The reason is given here: These blessings are fully realized and enjoyed only through "*knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*" (Phil 1:9-11; note that vs 10 contains the purpose; vs 11 the result - contrast Hos 4:6a). Do we know God, and Jesus our Lord? Are we building upon this knowledge? (2Pe 3:18) Are we living in the light of it? Or are we stifling our growth or regressing because we refuse to apply the knowledge which God has already imparted to us?

1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

*Everything* needed for life and godliness *has been given* to true believers.

"*Life*" refers to spiritual life; the result of rebirth. "*Godliness*" refers to the righteous outworking of that life in and through those who are reborn.

The very power of God Himself is required to enable this provision.

God accomplishes this by imparting a true knowledge of Himself. It is critical to realize that true knowledge is the basis for appreciating, enjoying and putting to maximum use *all* of the blessings and provisions of God.

God Himself calls us to salvation. He does so as a result of the perfect glory and goodness which reside in *Him* - not because of anything in *us*.

1:4 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.

Through and because of His perfect glory and goodness, God has given us the precious promises contained in the gospel: cleansing from sin,

reconciliation unto restored fellowship with Him, eternal life, the indwelling Holy Spirit, strength to resist the temptations we face, and much more.

Through these great promises, we are able to avoid the corruption of sin and evil in the world. This is not accomplished by successfully keeping new resolutions, or mastering self-discipline through the latest self-help techniques, or by ordering the latest books, CDs or methods through some infomercial or from the current charismatic persuader of the day.

Before our new birth, we had no ability or hope to overcome sin - there was no possibility of victory over it. But the new nature provides this ability, so we are no longer slaves to sin. We are able to choose and serve a new Master - righteousness. But we can, and still do choose to sin as well. Many Christians stumble, living lives void of victorious peace and blessing because they fail to recognize both sides of this truth.

Further, we are told that we participate in the divine nature; that is, having been reconciled to God through the finished work of Christ, we are in union with God, fellowshiping with him through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, and *sharing in His holiness* according to Heb 12:10 (all made possible by the supernatural work which has been accomplished in us).

1:5-7 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.

Here, early in his letter, Peter provides the essence of his overall admonition to his readers: God has revealed, provided and enabled; He now expects a reasonable response from us (Rom 12:1; 2Co 7:1; Heb 12:28). God's provision in vs 3 must be utilized for its designed purpose; the work and protection for which God intends it to enable us. If we truly appreciate how and why God has arranged for this provision (Jn 3:16), along with the unfathomably precious payment which secured it (1Pe 1:18-19), we should more than eagerly seek to fully employ it for God's glory.

Furthermore, if we are genuinely grateful for the marvelous promises of vs 4 - and understand their profound, ultimate effect on our eternal lives (even as only briefly characterized there) - then we should most naturally be motivated to the actions described here (*"for this very reason"*).

Finally, Peter's writing will show that the benefit of all this is twofold: First, it equips us to combat the inevitability of false teachers and their teachings; second, it prepares us to accomplish *our* role in God's overall [plan of](#)

salvation: to spread the wonderful message of the gospel, powerful for the salvation of all who will embrace it and believe (Rom 1:16).

So then, through God's grace, we have freely received the gift of faith. In and of itself, this is sufficient for our salvation. But God intends that this faith, and our knowledge of Jesus Christ, should be much more effective, productive and far-reaching than "merely" securing our salvation (Jn 15).

Therefore, we are charged with a responsibility to build upon this faith in order that it will be able to work and produce fruit according to God's purposes. Note that Jn 15 tells us that if we remain in Him, and He - in the form of His words or teaching - remains in us, we will bear *much* fruit. In the Christendom of the current culture, fruit-bearing is not abundant or even evident for the most part. The type, quantity and quality of fruit-bearing which God calls us to and expects from us requires committed Christians who are sold out and bought in completely, unashamed of the One who has called us and whom we represent (2Ti 1:7-8).

Neither will we produce fruit if we are ashamed of the message we bring (Rom 1:16). On the contrary, we ought to be quite *proud* of the message and its power - not at all ashamed to represent it! If we recognize that we are mere beggars seeking to share bread with other beggars (not hoarding a limited supply of perishable sustenance, but freely sharing the endless provision of eternal Bread; *Christ Himself!*), and if we appreciate the reconciliation which God has effected in our own relationship with Him (2Co 5:18-19; Col 1:20-22) through the provision of this Bread to us in the first place, we will enthusiastically fulfill our appointment of 2Co 5:20 - filled with genuine excitement (as the heavenly hosts of Lk 15:7, 10) at the prospect of seeing others joyfully reconciled to Him as well!

We must therefore possess a true appreciation for the supernatural work which God has accomplished in us, having literally brought us from death unto life (Jn 5:24; Rom 6:13). Do we realize what He has done for us? Really? Do we demonstrate our appreciation and gratitude through obedience and unabashed testimony - spreading the saving power and marvelous message of the Gospel through our lives and our words?

So many "Christians" of our day have settled into "comfortable religion;" ignoring God's directives and coveting temporary worldly provisions to the exclusion of the far greater offerings of God. Far too many local gathering halls for "God's people" have become merely magnets for pleasant socializing and "doin' church." But the design of Christian congregation is far more purposeful and profound than sheer pious, societal feel-goodism. And *true* "Church" is not something we *do* - it is the very essence of who

and what we *are!* Sadly, Judgment Day may find many, if not most of these were not truly Christians after all (Mt 7:23).

These verses clearly command us to build upon our faith (Jude 20); that it may become a *working* faith, a *fruit-bearing* faith; that we may be holy instruments in God's hands for noble purposes (2Ti 2:21). We need to be focused - set apart from the corruption of mere "religion" and false Christianity, and building upon the true gift of faith we have received.

And so, to our faith we must add goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. These "additions" are achieved through the working of the Holy Spirit in us. In order to obtain (possess) them then, we must be submitting ourselves to His influence and guidance; cooperating - not resisting, rebelling or ignoring.

1:8 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.

Note that the items listed in the previous verses are referred to as "*qualities.*" These qualities, or "characteristics," are to be the "salt" or "light" or "aroma" or "fragrance" of our very presence. Whenever we are wherever doing whatever, they must always be with us (Mt 5:13a, 14a; 2Co 2:15-16a) - because they *are* us! On one hand, we are to be known and identified by them - on the other, they are precisely what enable our effectiveness and productivity in putting our knowledge of Christ to work in the various ways we are called.

We are not to merely obtain these qualities as a 1-time accomplishment. We are told to possess them "*in increasing measure.*" This is an ongoing process; we need to always be working at this ("*make every effort*").

Finally on this point, we must not miss Peter's poignant warning: this effort is required to keep us from being *ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ!*

1:9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

As mentioned when we looked at vs 1, Peter is addressing *believers* - as most of the NT writings do. If a true child of God *does not* have the qualities mentioned in vss 5-7, he is "*nearsighted and blind!*" He has forgotten what God has done for him - and is able to do for others.

Basically, if what God has done for us does not motivate us to do what Peter is exhorting us to, this accuses us of being ungrateful; despising

God's grace and mercy! Tit 1:16 declares this more forcefully and ought to serve as a sobering wake-up call to the lethargic, dispassionate, comfortable religion of Christianity today. Paul tells Titus that "Christians" of this type claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. Then he describes them in a way which ought to cause solemn consideration, and which should move us to pray the Holy Spirit's conviction upon those whom the shoe fits. Paul says they are *detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good!* Who among us wants to wear that label? Paul addresses this more completely in 2Ti 3:1-5, speaking even more harshly of the religious churchgoers of the last days - and those are the days we are now living in. 2Co 13:5 calls us to examine and test ourselves.

1:10-11 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall,<sup>11</sup> and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Peter provides us with additional motivation to "*do these things.*" Just as we were previously urged to "*make every effort,*" we are now exhorted to "*be all the more eager.*" We may need to ask God to help us to be more diligent and eager.

We are given three reasons to motivate us:

The first is in order "to make our calling and election sure." However, let us be careful not to misunderstand this, and in so doing miss the encouragement being offered to us. What is meant here is not that we cause God to call us or elect us unto salvation by "doing these things." Nor is it saying that we must do them in order to maintain or strengthen the security of our salvation, or else risk losing it. It is encouraging us to do these things so that we will confidently enjoy the blessing of assurance *which is actually already there* - which God intends and provides as a wonderful, comforting awareness of our security *in Him*. As Peter briefly mentioned in vs 3 (and as he teaches more completely in his first letter), our salvation rests in the power of God - and is kept for us by Him (1Pe 1:3-5). (See separate posting on this site regarding [Eternal Security](#).)

The second motivating factor is that doing these things will keep us from falling. Just as Jn 15 shows us how to avoid malnourishment, here we are taught how to keep from stumbling. Diligently building upon our faith - growing continually as we are taught to do here (and in Col 2:6-7) - will put our spiritual knowledge to effective use with noble, eternal purpose.

And the last element of motivation which Peter cites is that we will receive a rich welcome into the Lord's Kingdom; that is, we will not merely be *allowed* in; we will be *joyfully and heartily welcomed!*

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To sum up what we have learned from verses 3-11 then:

Everything we need for the spiritual life of godliness which God calls us to is contained in our true knowledge of Him. This has been provided to us through the working of His power in us - because He is glorious and good.

Since God has been so gracious to us, we ought to make every effort to be effective and productive in putting to use what He has provided; and to do so in order to accomplish the noble purposes He calls us to.

This effectiveness and productiveness is assured when we continually build up our faith with goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. This is accomplished by submitting to the Holy Spirit's working in us. If we do not, we are warned that we will be ineffective and unproductive - and worse, we will be demonstrating our ungratefulness for what God has done for us.

As always, we benefit when we obey God's Word. Here, we find comfort in the awareness of our security in the Lord, protection from falling, and the joy of experiencing a rich welcome into God's eternal Kingdom.

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1:12-15 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. <sup>13</sup>I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, <sup>14</sup>because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. <sup>15</sup>And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

Note Peter's passion for the ongoing well-being of those entrusted to him. This is not like the hit-and-run "evangelism" of our day. Peter takes the responsibility seriously and completely. He encourages them in preparation for his passing from the scene. He does not want them to be unequipped - either for living the victorious life in Christ themselves, or for teaching others to do the same. Often in today's circles, folks at the top allow those in their charge to languish, fearful of losing their position and power if another should be able to fill their shoes.

1:16-18 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. <sup>17</sup>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.

Peter reminds his immediate audience that he (and others) had been eyewitnesses of the events of Jesus' life. Thus, He writes on the basis of first-hand knowledge. He appeals to their shared knowledge of those events, and to their respect for his authority and integrity, to emphasize the danger of falling victim to the ulterior motives of false teachers.

1:19-21 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. <sup>20</sup>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.

And now, because of the witnessed fulfillment of the message of the prophets, they were (and we are) blessed with a greater certainty of its legitimacy and profundity; that is, we have a greater confirmation, assurance and confidence in the prophets' writings. What had been prophesied in continuing, unified specificity and purpose had now come to pass. The clear implication is that we ought to respond, therefore, with greater trust in the message and in the One who sent it. Note the sober exhortation Peter issues: "*You will do well to pay attention to it!*"

As a word of warning for their protection (and ours), Peter points out that true men of God (and their teachings) are directed and influenced by the Holy Spirit for the purposes of God. Men who bring a message they have "discovered," invented or otherwise arrived at on their own are not true messengers of God, and their message is not to be trusted (2Jn 10-11).

Finally, it is a safeguard for us to understand and keep in mind that the OT contains the prophecies of God, the Gospels contain their fulfillment, and the letters of the apostles contain the interpretation. Contemporary teachers of God's Word (since the apostolic era) ought to be seeking not so much to interpret the scriptures as to be gaining greater understanding of the *apostles'* interpretation; that is, the inspired, inerrant interpretation provided for us by the Holy Spirit (2Ti 3:16-17). The task of today's servant

of God's Word is to instill in believers an increased confidence in a more accurate view of the apostles' interpretation, that it may therefore be most effectively applied in their daily lives. As always, 2Ti 2:15 remains the great aspiration of teacher and student alike.

## **Chapter 2**

The first chapter dealt with introductions, self-identification, self-characterization, reminders, encouragement, exhortation and promises. The close of chapter 1 now serves as an effective segue to chapter 2. Peter has cleverly and gently introduced three basic truths as a foundation for the pointed warnings to come.

First, Peter and his fellow workers spoke and taught with the authority of, on the basis of, and consistent with eyewitness experience. Second, since the word of the prophets had come to fulfillment in Christ, there now existed for Peter's audience a greater certainty, comfort and security in placing their trust in them. Accordingly, they must now be exhorted to fully embrace and apply them (as should we who have even greater certainty). And third, true men of God speaking the true Word of God must, and can *only* do so by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Wisdom and prophecy cannot originate in man - it must be of God.

Peter will develop and build upon these truths until the harshness of his warnings stand in stark contrast to the tone of his previous chapter.

As we continue, note that 2:1-3:7 parallels Jude 4-18. Both deal with warnings about false teachers while predicting their certain destruction. Differing views exist as to whether, and if so, which writer borrowed from the other - and whether the circumstances which led to their common warnings were contemporary or to develop later. Though I am uncertain as to the first issue, it appears that both writers were concerned about the doctrinal corruption of their own day.

Peter addresses this more generally and, while referring to the false teachers of his time and the damage they had already done, concerns himself more so with warning his readers of what to expect. He does not convey a sense of immediate urgency to the extent that Jude does.

Jude, however, deliberately changed the theme and focus of his letter (vss 3-4) to bring a greater measure of urgency to his readers. He endeavors to bring the matter to their more immediate awareness. His warning concerns a more imminent threat, as he informs his readers that godless men have already secretly slipped in among them. And though he, like Peter, provides a list of some general ways these false teachers will conduct

themselves, Jude specifically focuses on the issue of licentiousness and the danger this false teaching represents.

2:1-2 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. <sup>2</sup>Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

A common and effective technique: Peter reminds the audience of a truth they are aware of - and are in agreement with - in order to lend credence to a new truth about to be imparted. The people were very familiar with the numerous, well-documented false prophets of OT times. They knew of the troubles which their self-serving deceptions and political and social alliances had wrought for God's people. Peter warns that they (and us) will encounter a similar brood of deceivers.

Peter wastes no time in boldly declaring the final fate of these imposters. Note that in order for these deceivers to do their dirty work, all of them will ultimately be guilty of what Peter points out: denying the sovereign Lord.

The NT is replete with warnings about false teachers and false teachings. No one will be able to complain to God that they were not made aware of this danger. And beyond the warnings, God's Word provides all the instruction and protection we need to navigate this treacherous minefield.

Finally, Peter states quite matter-of-factly that many people will continue to fall for these deceptions, just as the people of old did. Therefore, it is profitable for us to note and share Peter's paramount concern in all this: that the way of truth is impugned. And when truth gains a bad reputation, God is not being magnified, glorified and praised as He deserves. In the chaos of so much false teaching of various, contradictory sorts, it becomes very difficult to evangelize the lost or to correct, rebuke or admonish the saved. We ought not to be so casual and unstirred by the modern-day prevalence of such destructive teachings.

Yet, more and more each day, truth is indeed being relegated to the back of the line and the lowest seat - if, in fact, it is allowed in line or given a seat at all. The masses, in sheep-like fashion, continue to follow the shameful substitutes for truth being foisted upon them. Though it is said that ignorance is bliss, this bliss will come to an abrupt and frightening end. And ultimately, according to God's Word, ignorance is not blissful at all - it condemns to hell! Rom 1:20 clearly states that we have no excuse.

2:3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

Peter then exposes the motivation of these false teachers: greed (2Co 2:17). We generally tend to associate greed and profit with money and material desires. Though that is usually part of it, and often a large part, we must understand that sometimes we easily fall prey to those who deceive us when they either succeed in hiding that motivation from us, or when their greed - or whatever they stand to profit - falls in other areas.

Some who attempt to mislead others do so for all types of power and influence - small and large in nature. Some do it just to do it. They derive pleasure from leading others into misery while seemingly gaining little or nothing. This makes their deception harder to recognize. Some do it out of jealousy - seeking to drag down those who seem to be better off in some way. And some of it seems so unconnected to matters we should concern ourselves with that we are tempted to allow it to co-exist with us. However, we can be assured that all of it works against God's design and wreaks havoc in the lives of those who are misled.

Nevertheless, the key to protecting ourselves is stated here. Peter says that the stories - the false truths propagated by these imposters - will be manufactured by the false teachers themselves. This is why we ought to take secure hold of the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:11. With that discipline in place, Joseph Smith (LDS), Charles Russell (JW), David Koresh (Branch Davidians), William Miller (SDA) and all the rest would not have succeeded in their deceptions. But again, Peter assures us that their future has long ago been settled from God's view and, as he says later in 3:9, God is not slow in keeping His promise.

2:4-10a For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; <sup>5</sup>if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; <sup>6</sup>if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; <sup>7</sup>and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men <sup>8</sup>(for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)- <sup>9</sup>if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the

day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. <sup>10</sup>This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.

In vss 4-8, Peter reminds his audience of three OT events which serve as testimony to, and the basis for the trustworthiness of his point in vs 9. Vs 4 speaks of the fallen angels, Satan's minions. Vs 5 contrasts God's judgment of the unrighteous with His merciful and gracious protection of Noah and his family. Vss 6-8 set God's wrathful destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah against His merciful and gracious rescue of Lot.

Vs 9 reveals the point of the previous verses: If God knows who the righteous and unrighteous are, if He is able to treat each according to His perfect justice, and if He is indeed powerful enough to execute His justice without fail, then Peter's audience need not concern themselves that these evildoers will somehow escape.

Vs 10a emphasizes the sure punishment of those who lead lifestyles bent on rebellion and the indulgence of sin. In this way, Peter encourages his audience not to be trapped by anger, bitterness or envy regarding those who seem unscathed by their evil. They will most assuredly be repaid.

2:10b-22 Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; <sup>11</sup>yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. <sup>12</sup>But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish. <sup>13</sup>They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. <sup>14</sup>With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed-an accursed brood! <sup>15</sup>They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. <sup>16</sup>But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey-a beast without speech-who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness. <sup>17</sup>These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. <sup>18</sup>For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. <sup>19</sup>They promise them freedom, while they themselves

are slaves of depravity-for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. <sup>20</sup>If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. <sup>21</sup>It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. <sup>22</sup>Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

For the remainder of chapter two, Peter describes the types of character and behavior which will be evident in those whose deceptions will lead to their own certain destruction. He does not mince words as he writes boldly and harshly, but with deliberate and sober purpose: He does not want his audience to take the matter lightly and thereby risk falling into the trap of such men (nonetheless, 2Ti 2:26 teaches that these men have *themselves* fallen into the trap of the devil; and 3:13 states that while they deceive others, they are being deceived themselves).

The Christian culture of our day needs to take a hard lesson from this. Incrementally over generations, and perhaps most evident and most rapidly over the last two or so, the workings of Satan through the imposters warned about here have done tremendous damage to the ability of truth to be heard over the din of false teaching, the invention of new teaching, and just plain psychobabble.

Vs 12 explains the core of the problem: These men are treading in areas they do not understand - and we are all familiar with 1Co 2:14 which says that they *cannot* understand them apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In vss 17-19, Peter illustrates how the teachings of these men are useless and unavailing. The parallel passage in Jude is even harder-hitting, with both teaching that the worst of punishments awaits these types of evildoers. Vs 18 highlights a particularly tragic fallout of the deceptions perpetrated by those who prey on the vulnerable: Folks who manage to free themselves from one or another of the world's traps risk a hasty escape into still one more - and perhaps the worst of all.

Again, the relevancy to modern culture is witnessed in the ongoing exploitation of folks desperately seeking help and delivery from various contemporary maladies - or seeking direction after just barely freeing themselves from the slavery of some debilitating trial. Not knowing where to turn, unaware of what they are getting themselves into, they find

themselves in the clutches of hucksters peddling their snake oil with various promotional allures and all sorts of enticing promises.

Then, there is the prevalence of endless, revolving door “rehabilitation” which threatens to ensnare the desperate with psychiatric and philosophical methods devoid of God and truth. Partnered with this is the endless selection of self-help and get-rich-quick books and CDs which, rather than providing cures or riches, merely bring greater trouble. As vs 19 indicates, the promoters of these schemes have no freedom to offer - they are themselves enslaved by their own depravity.

Furthermore, it is truly amazing that many who spread error nowadays, especially of the licentious type, use religion as a cover to sanction their conduct. While they deny God’s authority and sovereignty, they have a strange desire to gain credibility by fitting their shamefulness into His Word. It would seem more logical that they should simply ignore God and His Word completely; that they should, in effect, simply burn the bible.

Finally, vs 19b contains a truth long since lost on the prideful, arrogant, “just do it,” “believe in yourself” attitudes of our day. Just as the Pharisees responded to Jesus’ offer of freedom in Jn 8:31-33 by claiming that Abraham’s descendents had never been slaves of anyone (quite laughable), people today believe they can be their own masters. In actuality then, they are doubly trapped: First, they fail to even recognize their enslavement. And second, since modern culture promotes the notion that anything short of total individual sovereignty is a life of personal failure, they engage in an ongoing, futile endeavor to find fulfillment in their autonomy. Yet, powerless to control even the forces of this temporary life, they purport to rewrite the constitution of the eternal, deceiving themselves to believe that it must then respond to their rule.

Nevertheless, this verse teaches that we must and will indeed be slaves to something - and that something will be whatever we allow to master us. We can choose the Master of all and enjoy Him for all of eternity, or we can choose something or someone else (including ourselves) and reap the consequences of that choice forever, as well. Make no mistake, however, when the term of our chosen alternate expires - as it surely must - we will then, in any event, simply find ourselves mastered by the ultimate Master for the remainder of eternity after all.

Vss 20-21 provide further indictment of those who promulgate error. If they have come to know Jesus Christ to be the Lord and Savior that He is - not unto their own salvation but with an intellectual understanding and recognition of the supporting facts - and then choose to reject Him in favor

of sin's fleeting pleasures, they are worse off than having never known about Him at all. They have turned their backs on God and His free offer of reconciliation. There is now nowhere else for them to turn. Still, this does not preclude the possibility which God, in His grace, maintains for them; that they may yet return to Him in sincerity for true salvation. But the context indicates that they have rejected Him for good, fully aware of the choices before them, with an intellectual understanding of the merits and consequences of their options (Heb 6:4-6).

## **Chapter 3**

In addressing himself to the issue of false teachers and evildoers in chapter 2, Peter did not hold back his passion. With boldness and conviction, he delivered a blistering indictment of such men and erased any doubt that they might benefit in eternal ways or escape eternity's judgment. Here in chapter 3, he turns his attention back to his audience. His tone changes from one of anger and judgment to tenderness and concern. For the first time in this letter he addresses his audience as "dear friends" - and he does so four times in this chapter.

**3:1** Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.

Like Paul in Phil 3:1, Peter does not hesitate to repeat himself. Repetition and reminding are necessary and quite profitable. In fact, the OT is deliberately constructed with much repetition, in keeping with Jewish customary practice. Do we tell our children to be careful crossing the street just once? And note again the focus of Peter's concern: to stimulate his audience to wholesome thinking (and thereby, wholesome conduct). We need such noble purpose in today's leaders.

**3:2** I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Peter equates the OT prophets with the NT apostles. Both were God's ambassadors to the people. Both were commissioned to deliver God's Word. A greater awareness of, and respect for God's message and its true servants were needed. And this is most certainly still true now.

**3:3-4** First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. <sup>4</sup>They will say,

"Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

Sadly, this is a most prevalent phenomenon today. There is no fear among the lost of our culture in mocking God and His ways, or of scoffing at his warnings. And some of this (more and more) occurs in "churches!"

The mockers of Peter's day engaged in the same general error as those of our day. They abused God's merciful patience and sought to take advantage of the unwary by sneaking in new doctrine of their own invention - doctrine appealing to man's sinful nature and desires, and thereby finding widespread acceptance. Then, the extent of this acceptance is pointed to as the very proof of its legitimacy. But false doctrine can never become true, no matter how many millions come to accept it. Though we certainly understand this, we need to be more careful and courageous in holding our ground on the side of truth - and actively refuting error.

3:5-7 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. <sup>6</sup>By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. <sup>7</sup>By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

Peter defines and delivers the indictment of these false teachers. These scoffers are *deliberate* in their blasphemy. For their claims to be true, the teachings of God (and the record of His work) must be ignored or twisted. Two familiar historic events are used to illustrate this quite persuasively:

First, in His sovereign power and will, God created all things. Then, in the flood, He demonstrated His ability to execute His intended and promised judgment against disobedience and rebellion.

God's sovereign desire and ability to effect creation also brought the flood's destruction - in fulfillment of God's word to Noah. Therefore, the future destruction of the present heavens and earth will and must - again by God's same sovereign power, will and promise - also come to pass. God is not unable - nor will (or can) He otherwise fail to keep His word.

Again, the false teachers of Peter's time were no different than those of our own: whatever truth does not fit into their schemes is simply discarded. And no matter how impossible it becomes to bring integrity to their position, they attempt to force an appearance of solvency through greater belligerence, persuasion of more of the unwary, attraction to their own

charisma, and “successful” marketing of more error and greater evil - by which they (attempt to) suppress the truth (Rom 1:18).

3:8-10 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. <sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Turning again to his dear friends, Peter reminds them that *God* controls the events of time - not man. *When* He chooses to act is *His* prerogative - He will not be directed or mocked by men. And what shameful; how greatly irreverent, ungrateful and sinful it is that God is mocked precisely for choosing to be patient in noble and gracious purpose: that none should perish; that all should have ample opportunity to come to repentance - even the mockers and ingrates themselves!

Many folks deceive themselves into believing that they can enjoy the “best of both worlds;” that they can indulge sin now - and find time for God later. After all, He will wait for them to come around. But God warns us here, and liberally throughout the NT, that He may come for us at any moment; that we should therefore ready ourselves *now* because we cannot know when that will be (2Co 6:1-2; Lk 12:35-38; 1Th 5:1-6; Rev 3:3, and more). Only a fool would risk putting God off to accommodate his own convenience; to engage in sin and evil which offends and mocks the very God he will later audaciously petition for entrance to His holy Kingdom. Yet, even in the prevailing modern church culture, God’s patience is often misunderstood and abused; a temptation and a trap to many.

In any case, there is no such thing as the “best of both worlds” anyhow. The “best” of this world is corrupted and worthless; good for nothing. Mixing it with the best of God’s world would simply contaminate and destroy the whole. Of course, that is impossible anyway; God’s righteousness, holiness and Kingdom are eternally pure. The man who attempts to straddle the fence to enjoy the best of both sides deceives himself; he is firmly entrenched in the losing side only.

Each of us must stake our claim: Either we totally stand with God and righteousness, or we totally belong to Satan and evil. When we stand with God, He allows us to experience the peace and blessing of eternal things;

that is, even while we remain in this fleeting world, we may enjoy the eternal component of His temporal provisions.

Vs 10 delivers the sober warning alluded to above: The day of the Lord will indeed come, and it will come unexpectedly for those who are not prepared. Once again, Peter reminds us of the total destruction to come.

3:11-14 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives <sup>12</sup>as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. <sup>13</sup>But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. <sup>14</sup>So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

This summarizes, in essence, Peter's primary purpose for writing this letter (as stated at the outset of this overview): In view of the Lord's certain and imminent return, he challenges believers to grow spiritually and to conduct themselves accordingly. It is a very reasonable exhortation.

Remember that at the outset of this chapter, Peter's stated purpose was to stimulate his audience to wholesome thinking. Having laid out the necessary facts and possible pitfalls, he now poses the compelling question: If the destruction of this world is indeed coming - since its certainty relies on nothing less than God's omnipotence and the integrity of His promise - how shall the people of God conduct themselves meanwhile?

Peter knows that true believers must accept the premise. If our thinking has been properly stimulated, we must also wholeheartedly accept the course he advises; that is, we ought to be living holy and godly lives as we eagerly anticipate the fulfillment of God's Word with excited enthusiasm.

Though, for a time, we must withstand and overcome terrible and frightening events and trials (1Pe 1:6-7), we ought to rest nonetheless in God's unfailing love and the sufficiency of His grace, and upon His ultimate promises to us. Chief among these is eternal peace and comfort in our heavenly home of perfect and incorruptible righteousness; of never-ending joy in the awesome presence of God Himself!

And so, we ought to be greatly motivated to pursue the aspirations of vs 14: to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with God. Lest we become overwhelmed at such a noble and unreachable goal, let us be reminded that God's Word tells us that this achievement is guaranteed for true

believers - because it relies not on our own power and righteousness, but on that which *God* has worked, and continues to work, in us (Phil 1:6a; 1Th 5:23-24; Phil 2:12b-13; 2Co 1:21a). We will indeed be found perfect by Him! (Col 1:19-22; Rom 8:33; Jude 24-25)

3:15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

Peter restates his earlier point: God's patience is meant to provide opportunity for repentance unto salvation; it is not a sign of weakness or wavering. He appeals to his audience's familiarity with, and respect for Paul's writings which confirm this.

3:16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Peter gives testimony to the canonicity of Paul's writings, praising the consistency of their teachings. He defends them against criticism for the inevitable difficulties to be found, warning that those who choose to distort such scriptural difficulties - rather than endeavoring to understand them - do so at their own great peril.

3:17 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.

A closing summary: First, Peter encourages his audience by expressing confidence in their knowledge of the truth. Then he gently warns them one last time to guard themselves against the dangers he has presented.

The last part of this verse has given rise to some controversy but it need not be so. Peter is merely referring to the security which comes from resting upon and proceeding in truth; in continuing to do what we know is right, maintaining close and proper relationship with God. "Fall from your secure position" does not refer to the losing of one's salvation, but merely describes the discomfort and unsettledness caused by a loss of secure communion with God; the confusion of not sensing (or desiring) His close presence which results from dabbling in sin and error. (Again, refer to the separate posting on this site which addresses [Eternal Security](#).)

This is like the child, alone in his room and doing something he knows is wrong. When he hears dad approach, there is a start; a desire that dad should stay away, a fright which accompanies being caught, the disruption of peaceful relationship, and the need for correction and discipline. But he is nevertheless still dad's child - and, in the ideal, dad does not love him any less. There is simply a temporary "falling from a secure position," as mentioned here. When the child is behaving as he should, however, dad's presence is welcomed with excitement and joy.

And so, Peter warns us to avoid the errors of false teaching and evil men in order that we should maintain the security of a peaceful, unhindered relationship with God who has saved us, will always love us, and will never leave or forsake us. Even as eternal children of God, we lose the sense of our secure position when we fall into sin and error - though from God's view, we always remain secure indeed.

**3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.**

Peter adds a final word of advice and instruction. This augments his more detailed instruction of 1:5-8. We must be growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. The primary means to this end consists in maintaining close communion with the One who has saved us; who will protect us and provide for us. This intimate communion is achieved through prayer; studying and meditating upon God's Word; ongoing submission to the Holy Spirit's guidance and correction; godly fellowship with maturing members of Christ's body who are equipped and willing to encourage and challenge us; fasting; witnessing to the lost; participating in the work of ministry as gifted and called; and, among fellow believers, teaching and being taught - discipling and being discipled (and many other God-centered and God-honoring efforts). This is an ongoing, never-completed process while we remain in this life. We must maintain a constant awareness of this need, and tend to it as a first priority.

Obedience to God strengthens our eternal bond with Him, even as our remaining impurities continue to be worked out. Walking closely with Him in spirit and in truth facilitates His work in us and provides opportunity for spiritual growth as we are able to hear, understand, and know Him better.

These, then, are the most effective ways to protect ourselves from the evil designs of false teachers and their false teaching.

Finally, in a closing doxology, Peter reminds us that, as always, the glory in all of this - as in everything righteous - is God's, now and forever.