

Surveying the Text: 2 Peter

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INTRODUCTION:

In his first epistle, Peter is equipping his readers for the persecution that will soon be upon them. In this letter, he is equipping his readers to deal with the problem of licentious false teachers.

THE TEXT:

“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:3–8).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

The apostle is here preparing his readers to withstand the blandishments of false teachers, emissaries of sexual license, who are willing to offer sexual bribes to gain and keep followers. But Peter knows that preparation to deal with this kind of thing must be *a wall of virtue*. It will insufficient simply to know that something “is bad on paper.” If we only have *that* kind of knowledge, when the assault comes, we will see something very much like what we have seen in our culture over the last ten years. Everything falls apart with extraordinary rapidity.

God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (v. 3). Through knowledge of Christ, we have received great and precious promises which enable us to partake of the divine nature and “unpartake” of the world’s corruptions (v. 4). Although it is the grace of God, a gift from God, this does not mean that we do nothing. No, Peter sets before us a ladder with eight rungs. We are to climb it by *adding* to, or *supplementing*, or *supplying* the next thing to the previous one (v. 5). First add virtue to faith (v. 5). Then add knowledge to virtue (v. 5). The next thing should be self-control added to knowledge (v. 6). Steadfastness should go on top of self-control (v. 6). Godliness is added to steadfastness (v. 6). Brotherly affection goes over godliness (v. 7), and love goes on top of the first seven (v. 7). If these characteristics are 1. yours and 2. increasing, growing, then they will keep you from being unfruitful and ineffective (v. 8)—that is, unfruitful and ineffective in the light of what Peter addresses in the rest of the letter. *This* prepares you for *that*, and nothing else does.

AUTHORSHIP:

If you read the careful commentaries, including the evangelical ones, there will be studied examination of the question of the Petrine authorship of this epistle. This is because of the stylistic differences between 1 and 2 Peter, because of the intertextuality between this book and Jude, and also because of some of the historical debates about it. Left out of the discussion, strikingly, is the issue of Scripture's self-authentication and the egregious problem of what follows if 2 Peter is excluded. If this is not from the apostle Peter, it was written by an evil man. He identifies himself as Peter (2 Pet. 1:1), he claims to have been an eyewitness of the transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:18), he writes the whole book to respond to *false* witnesses (2 Pet. 2:1), he maintains that he is not making up stories himself (2 Pet. 1:16), he claims to have been the one that Jesus told of his death at the end of John (2 Pet. 1:14), and he implies that he is an intimate of the beloved apostle Paul (2 Pet. 3:15). And if the church has received the work of *this* scamp for two thousand years, then that has devastating ramifications elsewhere.

The word *Christian* and the word *believer* really should be interchangeable. We ought not to be characterized by unbelief. A man who wants 2 Peter out of the canon is dangerous, but at least he is honest. A man who believes that Peter didn't write it, but who wants to keep the epistle in the canon anyway, is someone who makes God out to be as dishonest as he is being. It is not too late to pray for his soul, but you had better pray hard.

THE FALSE PROPHET OF FALSE TEACHING:

The images and word pictures of false doctrine come in rapid succession—they promulgate damnable heresies (2 Pet. 2:1), they are coming to swift destruction (2 Pet. 2:1), they make merchandise of their dupes (2 Pet. 2:3), their damnation is not sleeping (2 Pet. 2:3), they are natural brute beasts (2 Pet. 2:12), they are spots and blemishes (2 Pet. 2:13), they are wells without water (2 Pet. 2:17), they are clouds in a tempest (2 Pet. 2:17), the mists of darkness will welcome them forever (2 Pet. 2:17), they are dogs with their own vomit (2 Pet. 2:22), and sows returned to their muck (2 Pet. 2:22).

The false promise of this kind of licentious short-term thinking is cut short by the climactic events of 70 A.D.—vividly described in the third chapter. Remember that the world that was ending in that time was the old Judaic aeon, and that this had happened once before. Peter was not preparing them for the end of the space/time continuum—rather he was preparing them for the same kind of change that had happened at the time of Noah's flood. When they scoff that the world will not be consumed by fire, they forget what happened to the world of Noah (2 Pet. 3:6).

The created order was created out of nothing. The Judaic aeon was created out of the antediluvian era. The Christian era was created out of the Judaic aeon. And the eternal state will be created out of this one.

GROW IN GRACE:

The letter concludes by telling us to “grow in grace,” and to do so in “the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” He is the one who must receive all the glory, and as He does, we return to the top of the letter. Knowledge of *Him* is the only true liberation (2 Pet. 1:3). This is how we escape the corruptions of the world—by worshiping and glorifying Jesus Christ. *Worship Him*. As long as you are in the body, you are either swimming up the river or floating down it.



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