

Intro to Second Peter; Growing Spiritually (2 Peter 1:1-15)

Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

I. Introduction to the Second Letter of Peter

- a. Overview of the letter itself.
 - i. Written by “Simon Peter, apostle”.
 - ii. Quite different from **1 Peter** in many ways.
 1. While **1 Peter** was focused on encouraging Christians to *persevere through suffering*, **2 Peter** has a much different emphasis.
 2. Peter does not specifically identify the audience he was addressing in this letter.
 - a. In **chapter 3**, he says, “Beloved, I now write to you *this second epistle* (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder) ...” (**2 Peter 3:1**, NKJV)
 - b. *Perhaps* he is writing this letter to the same people his first letter was written to, in which case it would be to Christians in the northern part of Asia Minor (northwest Turkey today).
 - iii. Peter believes that the end of his life is near. Therefore, I assume this was written close to the end of Peter’s life; perhaps while he was imprisoned in Rome, before he was executed there.
 1. “Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing *that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me*. Moreover, I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things *after my decease*.” (**2 Peter 1:13–15**, NKJV)
 - a. When Peter refers here to how Jesus had shown him how his life would end, perhaps he is referring to what Jesus said in **John 21**.
 - i. “*(Jesus said)* ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will

gird you and carry you where you do not wish.'
This He spoke, signifying by what death he
would glorify God..." (**John 21:18-19**, NKJV)

2. I think of this letter as being like a 'Farewell Address'.
 - a. The parting words and warnings of someone who had been so close to Jesus take on great significance.
 - b. Peter is concerned about *what will happen to those left behind*, after he is gone.
 - i. This is similar to how Jesus expressed his parting concerns in **John 14-17** and **Matthew 24-25**: both *exhortations* and *warnings*.
- iv. The main theme of this letter is: *Do not be led astray*.
 1. False teachers are coming into the church, who will lead many astray.
 2. They are immoral, depraved people.
 3. Don't be surprised when you see it happening. This kind of thing has happened throughout history. This is nothing new.
 4. God will take care of them, in the end.
 5. Don't fall for their lies. They pretend to offer freedom, but in reality they are slaves to depravity.
 6. To stay strong in the face of false teachers:
 - a. Cling to the Word of God and never let go. This is your light shining in a dark place.
 - b. Keep growing spiritually, becoming more like Christ.
- v. Another important, related theme: Jesus is coming back. We must be prepared for that; it could happen at any time.
 1. Don't believe those who scoff and doubt His return.
 2. It will catch many by surprise, those who are unprepared.
- vi. Of all the letters in the New Testament, the one most similar to **2 Peter** is the letter of **Jude**.
 1. Similar themes, similar examples, similar phrases used.

2. I encourage you to *read both of these short letters* as we are going through this current series of lessons on **2 Peter**.
- b. There has been an unusual amount of historic (and also modern) controversy regarding the authenticity of this letter.
 - i. (It is my understanding that) it took longer for this letter to be universally accepted as Scripture than any other part of the New Testament.
 1. From notes in study Bibles or commentaries, you may be aware of statements that it was not added to the canon of Scripture *until the late fourth century* (late 300's).
 - a. At the church Councils of Hippo and Carthage (393 and 397 AD), there was finally clear and general agreement on which books should be considered inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore included in the New Testament.
 - b. However, these councils did not make something inspired. The *apostles were inspired* when they *spoke or wrote* the word of God. Therefore, their letters were inspired *before the ink dried*, not 300 years later.
 - i. The inspiration of Scripture comes from *the Holy Spirit*, not from a church council.
 - c. The challenge before the church was to determine, among all the writings that claimed apostolic origin, which ones were authentic. Which letters actually were written by the apostles or apostolic men?
 - i. Sometimes that took a while to come to consensus on; as was the case with **2 Peter**.
 2. Modern scholars (especially liberal Protestants critical of inspiration in general) have again called its inspiration and authorship into question.
 3. In many commentaries and study Bibles, you will run across questions about whether Peter actually wrote it, and whether this letter should have been included in the New Testament.
 - ii. Common criticisms (offered *by those who question* the inspiration of **2 Peter**) that I have encountered include:

1. The writing style and language is alleged to be different from that found in **1 Peter**.
 - a. However, as it says in **1 Peter 5:12**, Sylvanus was an assistant, like a secretary, writing on behalf of Peter in his first letter.
 - b. In this second letter of Peter, he may have been writing the letter himself, without assistance, or with a different assistant.
 - c. We should note that some conservative scholars have countered that the claim of there being great difference between the language and styles of the two letters of Peter is *overstated*.
 - i. They insist that the difference in language and style between **1 Peter** and **2 Peter** is *no greater than what we find in Paul's letters*; for example, comparing **1 Corinthians** with **2 Corinthians**.
2. The relatively late acceptance of Peter's second letter by the church.
 - a. Eusebius, in *Ecclesiastical History*, writes that Origen had said, "(Peter) has left one epistle undisputed. Suppose also, the second was left by him, for on this there is some doubt."
 - i. (Source: Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 6. Chapter 25)
 - ii. Note that Origen, who lived before Eusebius, was writing c. 220-255 AD.
 - b. Also, I have seen several claims that earlier Christian writers, such as Clement of Rome, were likely quoting from or paraphrasing from **2 Peter**.
 - i. (Note: I have not yet had the time to confirm this claim to my satisfaction.)
 - c. Very early third century (early 200's) papyrus manuscript, designated *Bodmer P-72* (originally from Egypt) shows earlier acceptance of this letter as Scripture.

- i. I actually viewed it online at the Vatican Library website.
 - ii. This ancient papyrus manuscript had the text of **1 Peter, 2 Peter** and **Jude**.
 - iii. I could see with my own eyes, from the Greek writing (text in all capital letters, no spaces between words in the text, unfamiliar font, other challenges), “Peter’s first epistle” ending at the bottom of the page that the scribe had identified as “22”; and “Peter’s second epistle” starting at the top of the page designated “23”.
- 3. Some have claimed that the writer of **2 Peter** was copying from **Jude**, since the two letters are so similar (implying that **2 Peter** must have come later, after the apostle Peter had died).
 - a. Yet, Jude may have been borrowing from **2 Peter**, or both may have been drawing from a common source.
 - b. The fact that **Matthew** and **Luke** follow **Mark** so closely, or that there are common sections of **Kings, Chronicles** and **Isaiah** does not undermine our faith in the inspiration of any of those books!
- iii. Some have made the claim that we should respect **2 Peter** as part of Scripture, *even if the apostle Peter didn’t write it*.
 - 1. However, either the apostle Peter wrote this letter, or someone who was *a liar* did!
 - a. The author identifies himself as Simon Peter, the apostle.
 - b. He says the Lord told him how he would die.
 - c. He even says he was present with Jesus and heard the voice of God the Father speaking to Him from the cloud, *on the Mountain of Transfiguration!*
 - 2. There is no heretical agenda (gnostic or otherwise) being advanced in this letter, as in some of the spurious works that have the name of ‘Peter’ attached to them.
 - a. There is nothing I can see in this letter that contradicts anything Jesus or the other apostles taught.

- b. In this letter, Peter backs up the authority of Paul, someone whose writings Peter said had been twisted by others.

II. Growing to Become More Like Christ

- a. Read **2 Peter 1:1-15**.
- b. **Question:** How can we be confident of our salvation?
 - i. **Many struggle with this question.**
 - 1. Calvinists and some other Protestants have a simple answer to this question (alleging that once we put our trust in Jesus, we cannot lose our salvation regardless of how we live).
 - a. However, that is a false answer based on this passage and so many others in the New Testament.
 - ii. Peter says we can “make our calling and election sure” if we are *growing in these things*, continually.
 - 1. Peter speaks about “election” here. However, this is far from the Calvinist concept of “unconditional election” (God arbitrarily choosing whoever he wants to be saved, based on nothing they have done).
 - 2. We choose whether or not we want to become part of the class of those who are elect and also choose whether we wish to remain there.
 - iii. If we are committed to spiritual growth (not just barely surviving spiritually and attending a church), we will not stumble. We must be growing in the range of spiritual qualities described by Peter.
 - 1. **Question:** Have you been growing in these qualities? Or have you slid back or stalled out from where you were earlier in your Christian walk?
 - 2. **Challenge:** *Ask other strong Christians* who have known you if they see evidence of you growing spiritually in these areas mentioned here by Peter (or in the areas Paul discussed in **Ephesians 3:14-5:15**).
- c. Commit yourself to growing spiritually all the time, being filled more and more with love and with the Holy Spirit.
 - i. This is not a mechanical thing; it is about *transformation*.

- ii. Ask for more of the Holy Spirit (**Luke 11:13**).
 - iii. *Seeking God* (**Hebrews 11:6**) is not just for unbelievers; it is *the challenge of a lifetime*.
- d. Peter speaks of his body as being like a tent, which he is about to put away.
- i. Jesus had told Peter about the difficult way in which he would die. (**John 21:15-19**)
 - ii. Our bodies like '*tents*' (the same word as '*tabernacle*').
 - 1. The tabernacle was a portable structure (a tent) that did not last.
 - 2. The tabernacle constructed in the Wilderness, in **Exodus**, was replaced with a permanent structure (a stone temple) during the time of King Solomon.
 - 3. Similarly, our bodies will be replaced at the resurrection with similar dwellings, transformed physical bodies which will last forever (**1 Corinthians 15**).
 - iii. Read **2 Corinthians 5:1-4**.
 - 1. Our bodies are like tents that we will soon enough put away and ultimately replaced with something permanent.
- e. Let us consider our own mortality and the brevity of this life.
- i. Read **Psalm 39:1-6** (designated **Psalm 38:1-6** in the LXX).
 - 1. David is aware that his time is limited. He asks the Lord to show him how much time he has left, that he may know the number of his remaining days.
 - 2. David describes his life as being but "handbreadths".
 - a. A handbreadth was an ancient measurement, the width of the palm of a person's hand (typically about 4 inches or 10 centimeters).
 - 3. **Question:** How much more time do *you* have?
 - 4. Peter saw that the end of his life was approaching. With that in mind, he left behind this important letter for those whom he cared about. Let us be reminded that our own time is short, and we must be ready to put our own tents aside, as well.