

October 26, 2008 by Steve Brandon



Know and Grow

2 Peter

1. Know the Truth.

2. Grow in Godliness.

This morning, we begin our exposition of the book of 2 Peter. I think that the best way to begin is by experiencing it like the original hearers first experienced it. Peter wrote this epistle, gave it to a messenger who delivered it to the churches. It was then read to the churches. It would be good for you right now to read through the entire letter. To help you along, here is a brief summary of what takes place in each chapter of the book.

Chapter 1 - Our salvation, how firm it is!

Chapter 2 - False teachers, how bad they are!

Chapter 3 - The judgment, how it will come! [\[1\]](#)

With good reason, we call this letter, "The Second Letter of Peter." Peter explains, "This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you" (3:1). The first letter, of course, was the one we finished two weeks ago, which we call "The First Letter of Peter" (or 1 Peter for short). Apparently, they were written to the same group of people. They had received his first letter, and now they are receiving this second letter from Peter. As we found out from Peter's first letter, we know that these are scattered believers reside in the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1). These are regions of Asia minor, which is modern day Turkey.

Though the recipients of the letter might be the same, these letters are much different. First of all, they are different in purpose. Peter had written his first letter to these Christians because they were experiencing a tremendous amount of persecution from those outside the church. Peter had given them counsel as to how to deal with it. He told them to know that they have a glory awaiting them later, so be willing to suffer now. This second letter is being written because of a problem within the church. False teachers had arisen who were leading many astray in their teachings. Peter gave them counsel as to how to deal with it. He told them to know the truth and to grow in godliness.

Second, these letters are different in substance. In Peter's first epistle, he mentions nothing about false teachers. But, false teachers are mentioned often in 2 Peter. Indeed, combating the false teaching is the whole burden for Peter's writing of his second letter, as he devotes all of chapter 2 to the issue. And his counsel in chapters 1 and 3 comes because of the false teaching of others.

Thirdly, these letters are different in style. In his first letter, Peter quotes scripture generously. But, in the second letter, Peter quotes very little Old Testament Scripture. In his first letter, Peter had a wide range of application, given to servants and wives and husbands and citizens. But, in the second letter, Peter gives no directed application to any particular group of people, but lumps all of his application together. In 1 Peter, only a little is mentioned about Peter's own life and experience. But, in 2 Peter, several references are made to his life and experiences. He mentions how he is soon to die (1:14). He mentions his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration (1:16-21). He mentions how he knows Paul and has read his letters (3:16), finding them difficult to understand. Furthermore, there is a great difference in vocabulary used as well.

Now, these differences have caused many scholars to doubt whether or not Peter actually wrote this letter. I don't believe that now is the time (or place) to go into all of their reasons, but they are many. One commentator put forth eleven different reasons why people doubt that Peter wrote this letter and then proceeds to answer these objections. [\[2\]](#)

But, I will say that I believe that Peter wrote these words. And, I believe that they are profitable for us to hear today. The message of 2 Peter can be summarized in three words: "Know and Grow." Peter tells us in this epistle to know Jesus and know the salvation that He provides. Know it and be firm in it. Hold onto it. Be steadfast in it. Don't be carried away by those who try to pull you from it. But, Peter's message doesn't stop there. He also says, "Grow in it." The salvation that Jesus provides for us is wonderful. But, it's not merely an academic exercise. Rather, it also contains your life. You should be growing in your faith. You should be growing in your knowledge of Him. You should be diligent to see that it happens. This is my prayer for Rock Valley Bible Church over the next four months as we study this letter together. Let's look at my first point, ...

1. Know the Truth.

Over and over and over again in this letter, Peter talks much about our knowledge of the truth and of our knowledge of Christ and how important it is in our spiritual growth. We see it imbedded right into Peter's greeting to these people: "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (1:2). Peter is saying that he longs for God's grace and peace to abound in your life. May it be multiplied to you. Peter pleads for exponential growth in your life.

And how does this take place? It takes place in your knowledge of God. I guarantee you. If you know little about the knowledge of God, then

you will be little in grace and peace. But, if you know much about the knowledge of God, then the opportunity exists for there to be much grace and much peace in your life. The knowledge of God is the key to growing in grace and peace.

In the next verse, (verse 3), we again see the knowledge of God being mentioned. "Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (verse 3). The promise of this verse is vast. Peter is saying that we have everything that we need to live a godly life. But, how do we come by this? "through the true knowledge of Him." See, you can't have everything that you need for godliness apart from knowing God. It just doesn't work this way. The knowledge of God is the road to a godly life. Your thinking affects your living. Your knowledge of God affects your godliness.

Down in verse 5 we see Peter again emphasizing the need for us to know the truth. He writes, "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge." The knowledge of God is one of the things that you are given to pursue as believers in Christ. Avenues for this include Bible reading, prayer, sermon listening, or reading Christian books. Peter tells us to be always learning, always growing, always discovering.

However, one thing that is particularly interesting about the Christian walk is that our learning isn't always something new. Often, it's the same old things that we need to learn over and over and over again. Peter writes a few verses later, "Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you" (1:12). In other words, Peter tells his readers that they already know the truth. And yet, there is need to be reminded again and again of the truth.

These folks had known the truth. They had believe in the truth. They had been established in the truth. And Peter says, "I will ... remind you of them" (verse 12). In fact, Peter goes further. In verse 13, he says, "I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder" (verse 13).

Why do you think that we gather as a church every week? It's not so much for us to learn something new. Rather, it's for us to be reminded of the things that we already know. When Paul went to Corinth, he preached the gospel to them as of first importance. They received it and believed it (1 Cor. 15:3-4). And yet, Paul would never move on from the message of the cross. He said, "I determined to know nothing among you, except for Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

This is the challenge of the preacher. I've got one message: Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Every week, I need to remind you all of that message. But, I can't merely say the same words, sounding like a broken record. This won't do. Rather, I need to bring the same truth to you all in a fresh way. As we walk through the Bible, verse by verse, each week, there are always new things to discover. But, they are always different angles of the same theme. You need to be reminded.

You need to be reminded that you are a sinner. You need to be reminded that your only hope for forgiveness is in the cross of Christ. You can't make up for your sins by righteous behavior. Good deeds cannot make atonement for wrongs done. There needs to be a sacrifice of another to make the wrongs right. That sacrifice is in Christ. You don't merit a better standing before God by righteous behavior. I don't care how much Bible reading you do or how much of the Scripture you have memorized or how many ladies in distress you have helped, you cannot improve upon the sacrifice of Christ. So, believe in Him. If you already believe in Him, I exhort you, press on in your belief of Him!

That's that you need to know. That's Peter's burden. You can see it in Peter's very first verse. "To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Our faith is in the righteousness of another. Our faith is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us through faith.

Sadly, there are many in this world who doubt this message. They don't really believe it. Many times, it's because they don't know if it's really true. They think that it's an old story that was made up. Beginning in verse 16, Peter says, "I didn't make it up. It's true. I saw it with my own eyes." He writes, ...

2 Peter 1:16-18

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased." and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

There was a day in the life of Jesus when He took three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John, on a trek up a mountain. While on that mountain, Jesus was transfigured before them. That is, He became white and began to shine. It was the glory of God shining through Him. Just about time as Jesus was shining, God, the Father's voice thundered from heaven, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him" (Matt. 17:5). Peter was there to see it all. Peter was there to hear it all.

Should we be able to speak with Peter, he would tell us of what he saw and heard. He wouldn't tell us a made-up story. He would tell us what he experienced with his own eyes and ears. The implication is this: His testimony about Jesus is true. The reason why Peter says these things is because it's something that we need to know. We need to know that our faith is grounded in reality, not in "cleverly devised tales."

Continuing on in verses 19-21, Peter speaks about the truthfulness of the Scriptures, which we need to know if we are to grow in Christ likeness. "So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts" (1:19). Peter is telling us to pay attention to the Scriptures. God has made them sure. They are to be known by us.

Do you know the truth? Do you know the truth about your salvation? Are you firm in your knowledge?

Chapter 2 contains a discussion about false teachers. The very first verse of this chapter is a good summary, "But, false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them."

False teachers are going to arise who will seek to lead people astray from the truth. They will be sneaky about it. They will introduce these heresies "secretly." It's not in the public forum that they will make their views known. Rather, they will infiltrate the people and discuss them behind closed doors, in their own homes. So corrupt will be their teaching, that they will actually turn Christianity on its head: denying Christ.

They won't only take a few after them. Rather, verse 2 indicates that "Many will follow their sensuality." They will do much harm to the church, both inside the church and outside the church as verse 2 makes clear, "and because of them, the way of truth will be maligned." Whenever a big-name preacher falls into sin, it does much harm to the church of Christ. There are those on the inside who despair in the failure of their leader. There are those outside the church who mock Christianity as a sham, due to this one preacher's behavior. This is Peter's point in verse 2, "the way of truth will be maligned."

Throughout the entire chapter, Peter speaks of these teachers. His language is picturesque. He calls them, "unreasoning animals" (verse 12). They are brutes. Peter says that they are "stains and blemishes" (verse 13), like blotches on your garment that you cannot remove. He calls them "accursed children" (verse 14). He calls them "springs without water and mists driven by a storm" (verse 17). He says that they promise freedom to others, while they, themselves are "slaves of corruption" (verse 19). Finally, in verse 22, he says, "It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'a sow, after washing returns to wallowing in the mire.'"

Though there are no commands in the entire chapter, the implication is clear. Be firm in your knowledge of God, that you aren't carried away by the error of these false teachers. Know that their doom is sure. Verse 3 says that "their judgment from long ago is not idle and their destruction is not asleep." Verse 9 says that God is able to "keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment." Verse 12 says that they "will ... be destroyed." According to verse 17, "the black darkness has been reserved [for them]." Don't join in with them. Rather, hold onto the truth. Know the truth.

In chapter 3, we see much the same thing. Peter begins with a discussion about how we need to know what God has given to us. "This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles" (2 Peter 3:1-2). These words are similar to what Peter spoke back in 1:12-15. You know the truth. It's not anything new. The prophets spoke about it. Jesus spoke about it. The apostles spoke about it. I'm merely reminding you of the truth. You need to stand firm in it.

Chapter 3 is all about knowing of the future judgment that's coming. Peter writes of one important thing that we need to know.

2 Peter 3:3-4

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking. And in their mocking, they are denying that a future judgment is coming. They are saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation"

Peter says that their problem is that they don't know the truth. They deny the future because they don't know about the past. They don't know that all hasn't been the same from the beginning. They don't know that God created the heavens and the earth, speaking it into existence (verse 5). They don't know that God once destroyed the world with a flood (verse 6). And, they don't know that God will come again and destroy the world with fire! (verse 7). Their problem is that they don't know!

They mock His delay in returning. But, they fail to realize that God has delayed His return, because he is waiting for repentance to take place (verse 9). But, Peter tells us to make sure that we know the truth.

Finally, Peter exhorts us in light of what we know, "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness." See, the antidote to those who deny the coming judgment is a knowledge of God and a knowledge of his word that has promise "new heavens and a new earth" (verse 13).

Throughout this entire letter, Peter's point is that we need to "Know the Truth." However, Peter doesn't stop there. He has another message that comes along with this one. He says, ...

2. Grow in Godliness.

In other words, grow in your love for the Savior. Grow in your character. We see this clearly in verse 18, Peter's last statement in the book, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." As much as Peter has exhorted his readers to know the Savior, he has also instructed them to grow in Him.

We see this throughout the epistle. Let's begin here in chapter 3, working our way back to chapter 1. Peter had just been discussing the coming judgment of God. All won't be continuing on just as it has been before. Rather, we will see God coming back to destroy the earth. and knowing this about the future ought to change your life today. He writes, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness" (3:11). Your knowledge ought to change the way that you live. The more convinced you are of His second coming, the more devoted you will be to live in holy conduct and godliness.

And throughout this epistle, Peter encourages his readers to press on. It's not like you ever attain a measure of godliness and are content with it. Rather, you grow in your godliness. He mentions this in verse 14, "Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless." Peter's calling us to a diligence in our godliness. We don't merely let godliness to

happen. Rather, we take some active steps to pursue after it. We "follow hard after God" (Psalm 63:8). We pursue Him. We grow in Him.

This was the fundamental problem with the false teachers that Peter mentions in chapter 2. They didn't grow in their knowledge of Christ. Rather, they lived sensual lives of sin. This is clear. When you look carefully at chapter 2, you will find that Peter mentions only one verse that talks about what these false teachers were actually teaching. The rest of chapter 2 describes the wickedness of these false teachers. And when Peter addresses their teaching, it is only with generalities. Peter writes, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves" (2:1). Peter describes their teaching as "destructive heresies." Somehow, they "denied the Master." But, that's it. The rest of the chapter is spent describing their wickedness.

At first thought, you might think this to be a strange thing. "If you are going to speak against these false teachers, Peter, why not address their errors? Why address their lives?" The answer to this question is really quite simple. What you believe affects the way that you live. If your life is wrong, your beliefs are certainly wrong.

Look at how wrong these teachers were in their lives. We see them identified as being "sensual" in verse 2. That is, they are fleshly people. In verse 3 we seem them being identified as "greedy." This means that money was their god.

Down in verse 10 we see that they "indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires." That is, they fully engaged themselves in sin. In the same verse we discover that they "despise authority." They refuse the rebuke of another. They are "daring." They are always living on the edge and pushing the envelope. They are "self-willed." They do their own thing. Furthermore, "they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties." They boldly tread where they ought to have great fear. In the book of Jude, we read of how Michael, the archangel disputed with the devil. But, as powerful as Michael is, he didn't dare pronounce a railing judgment against him (Jude 10). But, these false teachers had no fear of rebuking the demonic world. Such was their arrogance.

They follow their own lusts, like an "unreasoning animal" (verse 12), who has no conscience. They were "doing wrong" (verse 13). They "count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime" (verse 13). Rather than doing their wickedness at night in the cover of darkness (1 Thess. 5:7). They happily parade their wickedness for all to see!

We see their wickedness further described in verse 14, "having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin." Rather than making a covenant with their eyes not to gaze upon a woman lustfully (Job 31:1), they happily engaged in the process. They were "enticing unstable souls." That is, they went against the weakest of people and attempted to trap them. They had "a heart trained in greed." They were well practiced in their deceptive devices.

In verse 15 we again see their greed coming out in that they follow in the same way as Balaam, "who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (verse 15). They were preachers for hire who would gladly tickle your ears in exchange for a few silver coins (2 Tim. 4:3).

Verse 18 continues how they "speak out arrogant words of vanity." In other words, they are proud. They "entice by fleshly desires." They use the lust of the flesh to gain a following. They knew the ways of modern advertising long before it came to be. They would entice the ones who "barely escape from the ones who live in error." That is, they go after the weakest of people, seeking to draw them in. In verse 19, we see that they are "slaves of corruption." Sin has so entangled them that they are slaves of sin. They are trapped in their sin. In verse 20, we see that they are "entangled in the defilements of the world." Like a fly caught in a spider's web, so are they caught in their sin and they cannot escape.

So, think about this. Peter has spent an entire chapter talking about the false teachers of his day. He doesn't go after their teaching. He goes after their lives. He details for us the wickedness of their lives. So, what's that to teach us? **The primary error of these teachers is that they have failed in their lives.** They have failed to grow in godliness. Instead, they have gone the opposite direction. They have pursued their sin, rather than God. It's not like they don't know about God. In verse 20, we see that these people obtained a knowledge about Jesus, enough to help them escape the defilements of the world. And yet, because they didn't grow, they fell back into their own sinful ways, worse than before.

Would the truth be known, I bet that they first failed in their lives before they failed in their theology. This is the usual path of error. Normally, there is a sin, which people seek to cover up. It's not that they come to the Bible and decide that it teaches that homosexuality is permitted. Rather, they are engaged in the sinful activity and then twist the Scripture to form a theology that permits them to continue in their sin. And that's the path that these false teachers take.

So, do you want to protect yourself from heading down the wrong path yourself? Grow in godliness, and there will be no need to twist the Scriptures to meet your own desire. This is why Peter writes at the end of chapter 1, how "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (1:20). God inspired men to write the Scriptures. It is His interpretation that we seek, not our own. Scripture is not up to your own interpretation. So, grow in godliness.

Peter makes this point strongly in chapter 1, ...

2 Peter 1:5-7

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.

Here we see seven character traits that we ought to pursue in faith. These all draw us into the direction of godliness. Peter says in verse 5 that we ought to apply "all diligence" in our pursuit of these things. Paul told Timothy, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Tim.

4:7). Peter's message here is similar. "Apply all diligence in your growth in godliness."

You see this again in verse 8, "For if these [seven] qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." If these character traits are your and you are growing in them, then your knowledge of Christ (and the truth) will continue to increase. So, grow in godliness. Notice how cyclical this is. As you grow in your godliness, you will increase in your knowledge of God. As you increase in your knowledge of God and apply what you know, you will increase in your godliness. **Knowing is the path to growing. Growing is the path to knowing.**

Look now in verse 10, "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;" Literally, "be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and electing you." Do you want to be sure that you are one of the elect? Pursue these things. Pursue moral excellence. Pursue knowledge. Pursue self-control. Pursue perseverance. Pursue godliness. Pursue brotherly kindness. Pursue love. As you practice these things, you will be all the more certain about God's calling and choosing of you.

Your increasing godliness is the sign that you are one of the elect. Because, those who God chooses, He changes. And those He changes will be growing in their godliness. Do you think that growing in godliness is important? Look at what Peter says in verse 11, "for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you." This is how we enter the kingdom of Jesus. We enter as redeemed sinners, who know more and more of what it means to live a godly life.

It's not these things themselves that save you. We will see next week (in verse 1) that our righteousness is not of ourselves. Rather, we receive the righteousness of Jesus. But, when God saves us, He sanctifies us. "God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification, by the spirit and faith in the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Our sanctification is our path to entering His kingdom.

So, ... (1) Know the Truth; and (2) Grow in Godliness.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 26, 2008 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] When I originally delivered this message, I quoted the book from memory at this point in the message.

[2] The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 12, pp. 258-260, written by See Edwin A. Blum.