

What's the Point....of 2 Peter?

Mark Garner

Sometime after writing his first epistle, Peter wrote another letter to the same recipients. His first epistle had exhorted them to leave behind the desires and passions of this world, and to live as Jesus has called us to live. This time, he finds it necessary to warn them not to be distracted by erroneous teachings or opportunistic false teachers, but instead to focus on Jesus and the gospel.

Background & General Themes

The epistle of 2 Peter was written sometime after 1 Peter, and it was likely written in the middle of the decade of the 60's AD. He is writing to the same group of congregations throughout what is now central and northern Turkey, likely expecting the letter to be circulated amongst the churches in those areas.

The apostle explains that he is writing so that his readers would base their faith and hope on truths that will last forever. The difference between the temporary and the eternal is never going to be easy for us to grasp while we live in this physical world, so the apostle encourages us to continue learning more about God and his words, and to grow in our appreciation of the grace of God that comes through following Jesus humbly.

Grow In The Grace & Knowledge Of The Lord - Overview Of 2 Peter

Peter begins by reminding his readers that God provides us with everything that we need in order to live as God has called us to live, and he encourages us to let God nurture spiritual qualities in us. He also assures us that neither the prophecies nor the good news of Jesus arose by human ingenuity or initiative. The teachings of the gospel reflect God's own nature, and are not based on any human culture or philosophy. The gospel is a light shining in a dark place (2 Peter 1).

Yet those in darkness are often afraid of it, or are even opposed to it. Peter cautions us that some people will distort the teachings of the Scriptures, so he gives us a simple reminder to pay attention instead to the gospel, to Jesus, and to God's Word. We can find in the gospel a source of light that will get us through our earthly trials, and that will allow us to be with God for eternity. It is unfortunate, but inevitable, that there will always be opportunists who misrepresent the gospel for their own agendas. Peter is writing to faithful believers, to reassure them that God is aware of these false teachers, and we should not let them lead us astray (2 Peter 2).

In his first epistle, Peter reminded us of the perishable nature of this world and of everything in it. His caution about scoffers also reminds us of how little human nature really changes across the centuries. He also understands how discouraged believers can become in this fallen world, so he reminds that God always fulfills his promises, though often not when we expect him to. As the apostle writes, "with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." It is only by faith that we can look ahead with joyful anticipation to a new, eternal reality. And so Peter advises us to grow continually in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus. The depths of truth, understanding, and grace that we find in Jesus cannot be found anywhere else (2 Peter 3).

What's the Point....of 2 Peter?

Caleb Dillinger

2 Peter is a brief letter that offers encouragement, hope, and warning to all followers of Jesus. Despite the persecution that Christians can face, Peter reminds the church that they have everything they need by God's divine power. He states very clearly, "I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have" (2 Peter 1:12). Peter is not bringing anything new to the Christian religion in this letter, but he is highlighting important things, such as our Christian character, the glory of Christ, the reality of false prophets and teachers, and the Day of the Lord.

Essential to Peter's theology of Christian living is living a life to which Christ called us (2 Peter 1:3). This is seen in 1 Peter as well, so his teaching is consistent. There is (or should be) a clear distinction in behavior, attitude, and speech between those who follow Jesus and those who do not. In defense of this call to live differently, Peter reminds his readers that he is an eyewitness to the majesty of Jesus. This is not some fabricated myth to control the way people live. This call is based on testimony of Peter and others who were there with Jesus during his ministry and at the crucifixion and resurrection.

While Peter is an eyewitness and is teaching from his experiences with Jesus, there are false teachers now arising who will advocate sensuality and greed and heresy. This is so important today when reading 2 Peter, to remember that the false teachers and doctrines today are not something new - this has always been the case for the church. But the Lord will not leave false testimony and teachings; eventually falsehood will be destroyed. If I summarized 2 Peter chapter 2 in a single sentence, it would be "don't let your flesh dictate your spirituality."

But these scoffers and false teachers are not a surprise to Peter. The final chapter looks at the last day of the Lord, how the Lord will come in might and power, and how the church ought live "lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (2 Peter 3:11-12). But there is a promise: "we are waiting for new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

The point of reading 2 Peter today, in the twenty-first century, it to be reminded that this world will not last forever, that our toils will not last forever, that evil and falsehood will be judged and corrected by God, and that we should patiently, faithfully wait for the day of the Lord when all is made right.