

A Study of 2 Peter

Lesson One

Chapter 1 – Know that Your Place is Secure!

Goals

1. To understand the knowledge that is ours in Christ
2. To understand where we can find that knowledge
3. To understand that Scripture is GOD’S Word

Introduction

It’s pretty important to know things. Every April the IRS wants to know about your income. We want to know scores of ballgames and weather reports. So we watch ESPN, the weather channel, or check the Internet. Knowledge is important. Even more important than sports scores and weather forecasts is knowledge about our eternal condition. What is our eternal condition? How do we know about it?

- **Background of 2 Peter**

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

Why?

“In summary, chapter 1 shows what Christendom was to be like at the time of the pure gospel. Chapter 2 shows how it was to be in the time of the pope and the doctrines of men. Chapter 3 shows how, after this, people will despise both the gospel and all doctrine, and will believe nothing – and this is now in full swing – until Christ comes” (*Luther’s Works* 35:292).

- **Know that you are saved**

2 Peter 1:1-4 – 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: ²Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. ³His 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. ⁴Through 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.

List some of the different ways Peter emphasizes that we have nothing to do with our salvation.

Peter says we have been given God’s great and precious promises? Can you name some?

What does it mean that we “participate in the divine nature”? What doesn’t it mean? For help, read Romans 8:9-17, 1 Corinthians 6:19, Ephesians 2:19-22, and Colossians 1:27 and 3:15-17.

- **Knowing that I’m saved, what do I do next?**

2 Peter 1:5-11 – ⁵For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸For 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. ⁹But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. ¹⁰Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, ¹¹and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

True or False – Peter is saying that WE make our calling and election sure, that is, it is our work that makes us one of God’s elect, one of the saved. Why or why not? Can you think of some passages that make this clear?

In groups of two or three, discuss Peter’s list of spiritual fruits (verses 5-7). What stands out to you? What is the most challenging for you? If you were making a New Year’s resolution, which would you choose and how would you go about trying to carry it out?

- **How do I know what God says?**

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

Why do we need to be constantly reminded “of these things?”

Peter says he will make every effort to remind his readers “of these things.” What efforts can we make?

2 Peter 1:16-21 – *¹⁶We 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. ¹⁷For 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.” ¹⁸We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. ¹⁹And 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. ²⁰Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. ²¹For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

Why do we trust the words of the prophets and apostles?

What are some things that shake our confidence that the Bible IS God’s Word (verbally inspired)?

Key Words: Holy (perfect, sinless, divine), Inspired (breathed into), Inerrant (without error), Infallible (absolutely trustworthy and sure), source and norm of doctrine and life

- **Summary**

I know that I am saved by Christ, His work on my behalf, applied personally to me through faith. My doing or effort achieves nothing. Based on that, I know that I am called to grow in my faith by living a God-pleasing life. God has empowered me to do that. How do I know all these things? God’s true, holy, inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word tells me everything I need to know. It reminds me of God’s undeserved love and directs me in the paths He desires me to walk.

A Study of 2 Peter

Lesson Two

Chapter 2 – Know That False Teachers Are Coming!

Goals

1. To come to grips with false teachers in the Church
2. To see how God describes these teachers
3. To look at a couple of modern examples of false teachings within the Church

Introduction

This chapter of 2 Peter is very similar to the book of Jude, especially verses 4-16. Some scholars say that proves that the Bible is just a hodge-podge of scraps picked up here and there by editors and put together under the name of influential leaders. However, quite the opposite is true. That Peter borrowed from Jude (or vice versa) is not surprising. The problems they describe, false teachings and teachers within the Church are ones that plague the Church at all places and all times.

- **False teachers exist within the Church**

2 Peter 2:1-3 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. ² Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 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.

What two promises does Peter make about false teachers? Cf. Matthew 24:4-14

How can we determine who these teachers are? Cf. Matthew 7:15-23, 1 John 4:1. Why must we test their teachings, not just “style” issues (like popularity, talent, beautiful worship space, etc.)?

True or False – It’s no big deal if false teachers and teachings are in the Church, since I know the truth. It’s better to avoid confrontation and division than to go through the difficult process of testing teachings and refuting what is false. Cf. Galatians 1:6-10, 5:9

Agree or Disagree – It is enough to state what we believe and leave it at that.

- **God protects His faithful flock**

2 Peter 2:4-9 ⁴ 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; ⁵ 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; ⁶ 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; ⁷ and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men ⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— ⁹ 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.

Peter offers four examples of God's gracious protection. List them. What pattern does this establish for us? What does this tell us about our God?

How would you respond to this statement: "I might as well give up. No one believes in Jesus, I'm the only one I know. Everyone is so involved in their lives. There's just no point."

- **A description of the teachers**

2 Peter 2:10-12 ¹⁰This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; ¹¹yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. ¹² 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.

What is the basic sin at the heart of such behavior (cf. Genesis 3:1-6)? How is that sin revealed?

2 Peter 2:13-16 ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! ¹⁵ They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. ¹⁶ 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.

Peter says God will pay back false teachers for the harm that they do. Read Revelation 6:9-10, Psalm 137:8. Do these words make you uncomfortable? Does this mean we are called to execute God's vengeance? Read Deuteronomy 32:35, Romans 12:19,

Peter says these false teachers have followed the way of Balaam (cf. Numbers 22-25, 31:8, 16). Balaam was a fortune teller hired to curse the nation of Israel. God told him not to. He disobeyed. Later, when cursing didn't work, he told his boss to tempt Israel with Moabite women and idolatry. This worked. 24,000 Israelites were killed in a plague as punishment. Balaam's sin was ignoring God's clear Word ("Don't curse Israel") and desiring money more than spiritual peace. How do the false teachers described by Peter "follow the way of Balaam?" Can you think of some modern day examples?

2 Peter 2:17-19 ¹⁷ *These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them.* ¹⁸ *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.* ¹⁹ *They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.*

What do Peter's words ("springs without water," "mists," "empty, boastful words," "slaves of depravity") tell us about the teachings of false teachers?

What is "blackest darkness" referring to in verse 17? Is this a fair punishment for false teaching? Read Ezekiel 34:1-4, 10.

What warning does this sound for us as individual Christians, as members of this congregation, as members of our church body?

2 Peter 2:20-22 ²⁰ *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.* ²¹ *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.* ²² *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."*

Some churches believe that once you are saved, you are always saved. Does Peter teach that in these verses?

Does this verse teach that some people might suffer more punishment in hell than others? Cf. Luke 12:47

Again, what warning does that sound for us?

- **Examples – Then and Now!**

Then: Gnosticism

Now: Scientology and Mormonism

There's so much more than the Bible! It's for beginners. There is special knowledge to be had. Gnosticism rejected much of the Bible (the OT especially), the sacraments, that Jesus was a real person (docetism – since flesh is evil, He only appeared as a person).

Scientology and Mormonism is a modern day equivalent. The Bible is for beginners. There's more knowledge to be had. They preach new Scriptures – Dianetics, the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, Doctrines and Covenants. They reject that Jesus is true God, thus our only Savior from sins. Their religion is based on good works. It is empty and boastful words.

Then: Arianism

Now: Jehovah's Witnesses

Arius taught that Jesus was a created being, not equal to the Father. Thus, he destroyed the doctrine of the Trinity, Justification, the Atonement, Christology, etc. Amazingly, this teaching almost gained the upper hand in the Christian Church, and lingered for hundreds of years. The Nicene Creed was formulated to defend against it, also, later, the Athanasian Creed.

The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus is less than the Father. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was A God," is how they translate John 1:1. They are waterless springs, offering no comfort and hope, only blackest darkness.

Now: Issues in fellowship, unity, and tolerance

The prevailing attitude in our country, and around the world is: "Can't we all just get along?" This has seeped into religious issues. There is an organization, the World Council of Churches, whose intent and goal is to unite all denominations into one, to achieve perfect unity. To do this, they reject most doctrinal divisions as being divisive. They say it is enough to believe in Jesus.

Now we even have to hear people tell us that all religions are the same. We must honor and respect Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Mormon's, and all non-Christian religions as legitimate, viable paths to God. This assaults us even on the television in prime time programming ("Joan of Arcadia").

Now: The Jesus Seminar and “Christian” Dogmatics

The Jesus Seminar is a group of theologians who are trying to determine what, if any, of the statements attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were actually spoken by Him. This group votes on each verse of the Gospels, tagging them as words of Jesus, likely to have been spoken by Him, something He might have said, or something inserted by later writers, editors, church leaders. What a bold and arrogant renunciation of God’s authority.

Two “Lutheran” theologians, professors in the ELCA, Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, edited a dogmatics textbook which is used to instruct seminarians in the ELCA. The book denies basic doctrines of the faith, like verbal inspiration, the centrality of justification by faith, the reality of the Virgin Birth and the resurrection.

Others...?

Summary

God tells us clearly that false teachers and teachings will emerge from within the Church. God also tells us just as clearly that they will be punished for their wickedness. Until that time, we must carefully guard the pure Word of God by testing the spirits leading us, clearly stating what God’s Word teaches and doesn’t teach.

2 Peter 3:8-9 ⁸*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.* ⁹*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.*

- Why has God allowed 2,000 years to elapse since Jesus' life on earth?

2 Peter 3:10-14 ¹⁰*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.* ¹¹*Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives* ¹²*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.* ¹³*But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.* ¹⁴*So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

- What do the words “the day of the Lord” refer to?
- There have been many teachers who claimed to know the exact day when the end of the world would come. How does this verse tell us we should respond when someone says, “I know the exact day that Jesus will return!”? Read Matthew 24:29, 42-44.
- Instead of trying to calculate when Jesus will return, what does Peter encourage his readers to do?
- Again, how are these verses both a message of law and gospel?
- How do these passages help illuminate what Peter means when he tells us about a new heavens and a new earth, a home of righteousness: Isaiah 65:17-25, John 14:1-3, 1 John 3:2, Revelation 21:1-8, 22:1-5?

Some quotes from “Christian Dogmatics” by Braaten and Jenson

Below you will find a selection of quotations from the book “Christian Dogmatics” by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson. This two-volume work is used in the seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America in the training of their pastors. It was published in 1984. It illustrates the danger to be found in denying the authority and inspiration of God’s Word. While many of these quotations are not crass and obvious in their denials, they demonstrate a tendency to question clear Scriptural truths, and to let man’s reason and the results of so-called “critical” scholarship, along with ecumenical concerns to dominate thought, rather than the true Word of God. Comments in italics are meant as responses to the quotations.

- **Questioning the centrality of justification by faith alone:** “At some points in the history of Lutheranism, a full reception of the catholic dogmatic tradition has been hindered by an attempt of Lutheran confessionalism to deduce the whole of the church’s life and teaching from the special principle of Lutheran theology – the article of justification by faith alone. Whenever this reductionistic error has been committed, it has produced a particularly inhumane form of Lutheran sectarianism. We trust that all participants in this project of dogmatics are free of it” (Vol. 1: xviii).

All theology is Christology. That is the truth of Scripture. All Scripture is God-breathed and testifies about Christ. Since that is the case, all Scripture points back to the central doctrine of faith, that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone – by Jesus Christ alone.

- **Denials of the verbal inspiration of the Bible:** “The ultimate authority of Christian theology is not the Biblical canon as such, but the gospel of Jesus Christ to which the Scriptures bear witness – the ‘canon within the canon.’ Jesus Christ himself is the Lord of the Scriptures, the source and scope of its authority” (1:61).

This is an example of the error known as “gospel reductionism.” The position being advocated here is that the Bible is the Word of God only in so far as it actually is talking about the gospel and Jesus Christ. Anything else: historical events, scientific facts, geographic features, other doctrinal statements and positions, are liable and open to error and interpretation.

“Biblicism holds to an infallible Bible that can be the absolute authority in matters of belief and morals. The ancient doctrine of verbal inspiration survives. In some Christian groups the theory of inspiration is used to vouch for the absolute reliability of the Bible on all matters that relate to cosmology, biology, geography, chronology, and history. The Bible is used as a bulwark against the evolutionary hypothesis of modern natural science. The authority of Scripture for Luther and his followers was affirmed with respect to its chief purpose of declaring the gospel of Christ for faith and salvation. In modern Protestant fundamentalism, which ironically claims to bear the legacy of the Reformation, the authority of Scripture is extended to include infallible information on all kinds of subjects” (1:74).

Here again is an example of gospel reductionism. It is also being dishonest when it says that this position is in agreement with Luther and his followers. The earliest Lutherans had no concept that the Word of God was only the Word of God in so far as it “declared the gospel of Christ for faith and salvation.” They believed that all of Holy Scripture was God’s Word. The Formula of Concord clearly attests to the true and binding nature of all of God’s Word, not just where “the gospel of Christ for faith and salvation” is declared.

“Fundamentalist Biblicism is rejected by most theologians and is out of favor in most of the seminaries that train clergy for the parish ministry. They reject Biblicism not merely because historical science has disclosed errors and contradictions in the biblical writings, but rather because the authority of the Bible is elevated at the expense of the authority of Christ and his gospel. Non-fundamentalist Protestants also accept the Bible as the Word of God in some sense, but they point out that the concept of the Word of God, as Barth made clear, cannot be confined to the Bible. We cannot say that the Bible is the Word of God in a simplistic way, for the concept of the Word of God bears many diverse meanings in the classical Christian tradition” (1:75).

That is about as crass and clear as it gets. It demonstrates that science and reason are being held as judges over and above Scripture (line 2-3). It also creates a false distinction between the authority of the Word and Jesus. There is no distinction. Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1ff). The following quotation is also at the same level of crassness.

“Luther believed that the literal meaning of Scripture is identical with its historical content; things happened exactly as they were written down. Today it is impossible to assume the literal historicity of all things recorded. What the biblical authors report is not accepted as a literal transcript of the factual course of events. Therefore, critical scholars inquire behind the text and attempt to reconstruct the real history that took place (1:76-77).

And what happens when the Word of God is no longer the Word of God? Well, then everything comes into question and the ultimate authority is no longer God or Jesus, but me. “I think...” “This doesn’t seem reasonable to me...” “I don’t like this, so...”

“...the traditional demand for a complete consensus of doctrine may be wrongheaded, if even the Scriptures fail to contain such a consensus” (1:77).

- **The Incarnation of Christ (that is, the God became man, taking on human flesh) is brought into question:** “The notion of the preexistent Son of God becoming a human being in the womb of a virgin and then returning to his heavenly home is bound up with a mythological picture of the world that clashes with our modern scientific world view” (1:527).
- **The reality of the events of the Apostles Creed is denied, or at least questioned:** “The main statements of the Apostles’ Creed are so bound up with its mythological form that to get rid of the myth would destroy the creed *in toto*. Can modern people still be expected to accept the creed, with its mythological elements? We know that in the scientific picture of the world, the categories ‘above’ and ‘below’ do not make sense. Therefore the story of the descent of the Son of God to earth and his ascent into heaven cannot be taken literally. The question is whether the meaning of the myth of the incarnation can be saved without taking it literally, yet without getting rid of its mythic structure. Can it be interpreted in a way that both grasps the essence of the Christian message and does not misplace the scandal of the gospel” (1:529)?
- **The reality of the events of Christ’s life are questioned:** “The story of Christ in the Gospels is a mixture of historical events and mythological symbols. The purpose of the myth is to interpret the significance of the events. Today we must search the myth for the existential meaning of the events, and not take the myth at face value. We must ask about the existential significance of the myth of the preexistent Christ and of his cross and resurrection. To accept these as objective descriptions of a supernatural realm of happenings is to miss the point of the myth: to relate the apostolic kerygma to human existence” (1:529).

Basically, since miracles and supernatural things (like God becoming man, bread and wine being body and blood, people rising from the dead) don’t make sense and we don’t see them happening around us, it is impossible for the accounts of Scripture to be real events. Thus, they are myths, stories with a point. Scripture suddenly becomes a book of Aesop’s fables, if only we can understand the moral of the stories. However, that view of Scripture empties it of meaning. The reality of the events of Christ’s life are vitally important. If He didn’t really take on human flesh, live a perfect life of obedience, perform the miracles that fulfilled OT prophecy, suffer torture and death on a cross, and then rise bodily from death to life in the tomb and then appear before the disciples for 40 days before literally ascending into heaven – then we have no Savior, our sins are still upon our shoulders.

- **Salvation in other, non-Christian religions?** “The point we have been making is that the exclusive uniqueness of Jesus, mediated by the texts and traditions that announce his resurrection as the living Lord, drives us to discover his universal significance, not in another world after this one but in the real contexts of ongoing history. His true identity is still being disclosed in the encounter of the gospel with the world religions. The gospel does not meet the world religions on a one-way street, giving them the traditional symbols of Christology and receiving nothing back. The dialogue will be

a two-way street, in which the condition of openness to the other religions will be motivated by knowledge that they also somehow speak of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is the paradigm case of how one religion of another time and place can speak of Jesus Christ in a proleptic way. If the apostles and the church fathers could find anticipations of Christ in the Old Testament, we have a right to expect a similar thing in the texts and traditions of other religions. For God is not without witnesses in these religions....The ultimate horizon of this historically mediated universality is hope for an eternal restitution of all things in God” (1:567-568).

Braaten here ignores John 14:6 – “no one comes to the Father except through me.” Non-Christian religions do not speak of Jesus Christ, because they do not consider Him to be true God. If Jesus is not honored as God the Father is honored, then you are not even honoring the Father (John 5:23). This speaks plainly and boldly to Judaism and Islam, which both claim to worship the true God, but reject Jesus. This speaks plainly and boldly to the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons, who worship God, who mention Jesus, but do not honor Jesus as the Son of God, as equal to God the Father. This speaks plainly and boldly to Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Confucianism, and whatever other –ism you can find that claims to worship God, but rejects Jesus. These are false, empty, and demonic idols that will lead their followers only to hell.

Braaten also makes use of a false premise, saying that since Jesus was found in the OT, then we can expect to find Jesus in the Koran and the holy books of other faiths. The problem is that there is no other book given to men outside of the Bible which is inspired of God, and thus reveals to us the true Word of God – Jesus Christ.

Braaten’s last sentence makes clear his position – he is a hopeful universalist. He hopes for and seems to believe that in the end, no one will go to hell, despite the clear testimony of Scripture (Matthew 25:41, Luke 16:19-31). This would contradict God’s characteristics of holiness and justice.