

Second Peter

Part 1 – The Real Thing

2 Peter 1:1-2

In his second epistle, the apostle Peter is concerned with the proliferation of false teachers and phony gospels that were appearing in the churches. He uses strong words to condemn those who would lead God's people astray with a false gospel into a false Christianity. With an impressive economy of words, Peter affirms to his readers the genuineness of God's Word, the trustworthiness of the Lord's apostles, and the necessity of believing the authentic gospel.

1. Genuine Apostles: The Gospel's Guardians

Vs. 1a – “Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ”

The author identifies himself as “Simeon Peter.” Do not be thrown off by the use of “Simeon” instead of “Simon.” *Simeon* is the Hebrew form of the Greek (or, Hellenized) *Simon* which were used interchangeably. “While the transliteration *Simon* was a Greek name, it was adopted as the equivalent of the biblical *Simeon*, the name of the son of Jacob (Genesis 29:33).”¹ Peter's use of the Hebrew form of his original name may be a function of his being an apostle whose ministry was primarily to his fellow Jews (as opposed to Paul who became the great apostle to the Gentiles). In chapter 3, the author clearly identifies himself as Peter, the author of the previous epistle under that name: “This is now the second letter I am writing to you beloved” (vs. 1). Also, in chapter one, the author refers to witnessing the transfiguration of Christ, an event witnessed only by Peter, James, and John (vs. 16; cf. Matt. 17, Mark 9, Luke 9, John 1). So, the man writing this letter is the very same Simon Peter called by Jesus and appointed as an apostle.

The Lord changed his name at Caesarea Philippi when Peter made his great confession of faith. Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” And Simon answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” To which Jesus replied, “I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...” (Matthew 16:15ff). Peter (*petros*) means rock or stone. It is a name which reflects Jesus' aspiration for Peter. The waffling man Simon will become a rock. This speaks to the Spirit's work of regeneration. When the Lord saves us, we become new creations (2 Cor. 5:17). We take on new qualities and begin to love new things. The man who wrote First and Second Peter is steady and calm and courageous under pressure and persecution. What a contrast to what he used to be!

Peter wrote this letter as he was facing condemnation from the Roman authorities (1:14-15). Though the Bible does not record Peter's death, it is likely that he, along with Paul, was martyred under Nero sometime between 64 and 68 AD.

Peter identifies himself in two ways:

a) “Servant...of Jesus Christ” – The term “servant” (*doulos*) can just as easily be translated “slave.” In one sense Peter is simply claiming to be an ordinary disciple of Jesus. At the same time he is following the long-established pattern of God's people. In the Old Testament, Israel considered it a privilege to be called the servant of God (Isa. 41:8; 49:3). All of Israel's religious and civil leaders were known as the servants of God. But this was not just a formality. When they were at their best, God's people understood that they lived under his sovereign rule and that their lives were at his disposal. Even the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar was called God's servant, not because of his willingness, but because the Lord used him to return Israel from exile (Jer. 25:9; 27:6; 43:10). Peter is a servant of Jesus Christ willingly and whole-heartedly.

b) “Apostle of Jesus Christ” – An apostle (*apostolos*) is a messenger commissioned to speak and act on behalf of another. In the New Testament, the term apostle refers to those 12 men specifically chosen by Jesus to be his representatives; those upon whom he founded his church. Because of the unique position and authority of the apostles, there arose within churches jealous opportunists who claimed falsely to be apostles. Peter addresses them directly in this letter. By appealing to his role as a genuine apostle of Jesus, Peter is signaling his authority to name and uproot false teaching and false teachers.

Recent generations of Protestants have thought too little of the apostles. While we certainly deny that Peter was the first Pope (as claimed by the Roman Catholic Church), we must nevertheless acknowledge that

¹ Gene Green, *Jude & 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) p. 172

Jesus built his church upon the foundation of the apostles (Acts 2:42; Eph 2:20; Rev. 21:14). They were the first to preach and to guard the gospel. They established the first churches by giving them their body of doctrine and appointing elders and deacons. And that is why we trust their words as coming from the Lord.

2. Genuine Christians: The Gospel's Power

Vs 1b – “To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ”

Peter and the other apostles had the enormous privilege of seeing and knowing the risen Christ. They were recipients and stewards of the Lord's revealed word. And yet Peter refers to his readers as those “who have obtained [or, received] a faith of equal standing with ours...” There is some debate over whether Peter is using “a faith” in reference to the body of doctrine taught by the apostles (Jude 3) or their personal experience of believing in Christ. In the end, we probably don't have to choose between the two. Saving faith necessarily involves believing that body of truth passed along to us from the apostles (the New Testament). In this sense, there is no way to separate “the faith” from “faith.”

The gospel creates a people “of equal standing” with the apostles themselves. This is because in Christ we all partake of and benefit from the same “righteousness.” That is, “the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” The gospel creates a new people who stand on equal footing before the Lord because they partake in the same righteousness. The gospel “is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe” (Rom. 1:16).

3. Genuine Growth: The Gospel's Results

Vs. 2 – “May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”

In the writings of Paul and Peter we see a pattern of linking grace and peace. This is the basic grammar of the gospel: God makes peace with sinners wholly by his grace. “Grace means the generous heart of God who determines to treat sinful men and women as he lovingly wishes rather than as they actually deserve. It is God the Father's sovereign good pleasure, totally unmerited by us, which raises us from the ash-heap to a throne of glory.”² On the basis of grace alone, God makes peace with sinners (Rom. 5:1).

Peter prays that “grace and peace” will be “multiplied” to them. This is the language of growth. And, as Peter explains, grace and peace grow “in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” The term translated knowledge (*epignosis*) encompasses a number of ideas ranging from personal knowledge of someone to discovery of a fact to giving proper acknowledgment to someone. For Peter, “personal knowledge is in mind here” and is connected directly to conversion (1:3, 8; 2:20; in 2:21 twice as a verb).³ Knowledge of God divorced from genuine growth degenerates into vanity. The knowledge of the Lord that Peter has in mind is that which springs from genuine affection and growing Christlikeness. Beginning in verse three Peter describes the sort of genuine growth that the gospel produces.

4. The Genuine Christ: The Gospel's Substance

The gospel begins not with its effects but with its Substance, Jesus Christ. That is why the Bible's doctrine of Christ must not be compromised. While other world religions can survive without its founder, Christianity is inseparable from the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Notice how the apostle describes Jesus...

a. “Our God and Savior”

- Both God and Savior are, biblically, titles of deity. Of course the first seems obvious. But in Scripture, the title “Savior” is an equally divine title. From the very beginning, Christianity was founded upon the belief that Jesus was God in flesh and that as God he came into the world to save sinners. So here Peter is articulating the most fundamental truth of the gospel, apart from which there is no gospel.

b. “Our Lord”

- Second Peter “was written to people who claim Jesus as Savior but do not obey him as Lord.”⁴ No wonder we routinely see a link between Jesus being both Savior and Lord. Some years prior, Peter preached to the crowds at Jerusalem saying of Jesus, “God has made him both Lord and Christ...And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation’” (Acts 2:36ff).

² Dick Lucas & Michael Green, *The Message of 2 Peter & Jude*, TBST (Downers Grove: IVP, 1995) p. 36

³ Gene Green, p. 176

⁴ Lucas & Green, p. 41