

2 Peter 1:1-11

Lesson 1

The epistle of “...2 Peter may be one of the most relevant New Testament works in the increasingly contentious and pluralistic context of the twenty-first,” according to Vinson, Wilson and Mills.¹ Second Peter belongs to two different literary genres, the letter and the testament. At 3:1 the text clearly states that the author considers it to be a letter: It is also sent to a specific set of addresses (“to those who have received a faith equal in honor to ours...”) as one might expect to be the case with a letter. Despite being a letter this work also belongs to the genre of ancient Jewish literature known as the “farewell speech” or “testament.”²

In the period that some have designated as the “intertestamental period” there were a considerable

¹ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, in the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2010), p. 261.

² Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, in the Word Biblical Commentary Series, vol. 50 (Waco TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1983), p. 131.

number of works that were purported to be the last words of Old Testament heroes, such as the 12 Patriarchs, Moses, Enoch, Job, Adam and Eve etc. Such testaments had two main types of content: (1) Ethical admonitions that were to be passed on to the descendants of the patriarch or the nation. (2) Revelations of what is to happen in the future, which was often given in accordance with the ancient belief that the last hours of a great man were a time when he was endowed with a special prophetic knowledge of the future.³ This aspect of Second Peter will be discussed more fully in Lesson 2.

In light of this, a great many evangelical scholars would accept that the Apostle Peter may not have actually written Second Peter, but those same scholars would not doubt the authority of this book for the church despite the fact that there was dispute even in the ancient world regarding both authorship and authority.⁴ The Bodmer

³ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 131.

⁴ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.25.3 "Among the disputed books, although they are well known and approved by many, is reputed that called the Epistle of James and Jude. Also the "Second Epistle of Peter," and those called "The Second and Third of John," whether they

papyri, which date from the early third century A. D., are the first absolutely certain evidence of the writing that we know today as Second Peter. All earlier references to this work are open to debate. The best guess given by most scholars is that it was written sometime between 120 and 150 A. D. There is also no good evidence for the location of its writing. These uncertainties about authorship, date and audience mean that the historical context of the work cannot be determined accurately. The imagery and the arguments that are used in Second Peter have a great many parallels in the ancient Roman world. As a consequence the exploration of the meaning and source of those images covers a wide spectrum of sources such as Jewish, Greek, Roman and Christian texts.⁵

Taking all that has been said above, lets recap, we cannot be certain of where Second Peter was written, to

are of the evangelist or of some other of the same name.” from Christian Frederick Cruse, trans., *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 110.

⁵ Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude A Commentary*, in The New Testament Library commentary series (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 209.

whom it was written and there is at least some debate about who wrote it, though I think the work is definitely from the Apostle Peter. Recognizing this suggests a certain level of caution in ascribing motives to the author in areas of disputed meaning. All of this to the side though, Second Peter contains a powerful and clear message and as was stated at the outset is perhaps particularly relevant in the context of the modern churches tendency toward pluralism and relativism. This book is very firm in its advocacy of the authority of the apostolic message which is to be followed without fail rejecting any other competing message.

1 Συμεὼν Πέτρος δοῦλος καὶ ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
τοῖς ἰσότιμον ἡμῖν λαχοῦσιν πίστιν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ
ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

**1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,
To those who have received a faith equal in honor to
ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus
Christ:**

While the use of the Hebrew spelling “Simeon” is unusual, there is no doubt about who this “Simeon Peter” is

supposed to be. The designation “apostle” and the reference to being an eyewitness to the transfiguration at 1:16-18 make it plain that this Simeon Peter is Simon Peter the companion and Apostle of Jesus Christ. All in all the Hebrew spelling of the name remains a curiosity that defies any definitive explanation. The designation of Peter as “slave and apostle of Jesus Christ” mirrors the designation that Paul gives to himself in Romans 1:1 and Titus 1:1. This was a common epithet in early Christianity. It is difficult to know whether the author here intends the full theological possibilities of the term “slave” (δοῦλος) to be in place or whether this is simply a traditional naming. In any case the letter does not develop the sense of radical ownership and obedience implied in this term.⁶

Modern readers tend to view the title “slave” of “servant”(δοῦλος) in terms of humble service, not hierarchy or power, but very often special agents of God are identified using this term. Those special agents include kings, patriarchs, prophets and such notable names as Moses,

⁶ Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude A Commentary*, pp. 214-215.

Samuel, David and Ahijah. Courtiers at the court of Saul referred to themselves as “servants” (1 Samuel 18:5, 30); King Ahaz addressed the king of Assyria as his “servant” (2 Kings 16:7). Even those who are Christians are “servants of God” and thus are trusted members of the court of people that surrounds God. What is said here is not some form of self-deprecation, this is an honorific title of honor and stature. This identification is the basis upon which the audience should take the remarks that follow seriously.⁷

The author needs to display his credentials because what follows involves a significant rebuke. Being a slave of Christ is an honorific title that plays a part in Peter’s resume being given as a reason that his audience should listen to him; it is a title of authority.

The term “Apostle” requires little explanation in association with Jesus Christ but is also a highly honorific title that is given to indicate that what follows is to be taken very seriously. This document is not addressed to any

⁷ Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, in *The Anchor Bible series*, Vol. 37C (New Haven CN: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 143-144.

particular church or person as in a locale, but it is instead addressed to all who share the same belief in the one true God and Jesus.⁸ The author will seek to align himself with Christ but also to indicate that the faith of his audience is in no way inferior to his as an apostle and slave of Jesus Christ. There is no distinction, in the sense that all believers owe their salvation to the same source, Jesus Christ.⁹

Some have seen in the comparison here an indication that the faith of Gentiles is of equal status to the faith of the Jews. There is however, no trace of such a conflict in this work and therefore a better explanation is that the faith of the author is being compared with that of his recipients. In this way he is saying that there are no stepchildren in the kingdom of God all have a faith of equal status. The faith of the believers who were not actually witnesses of the life of Jesus Christ and who did not walk with Him is in no way

⁸ Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p. 143

⁹ Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, In the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series, Revised ed. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), p. 68.

inferior to the faith of those that did.¹⁰

The next word “righteousness” can be taken in more than one manner. Some take this to mean a participation in the righteousness of God and Jesus Christ. This places the focus on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Certainly this is a doctrine that is taught in other parts of the New Testament, but it is unlikely to be the case here. The term “righteousness” is used elsewhere in Second Peter in reference to an ethical quality. It is highly probable that this latter meaning is what is in view here. The connection then is that God does not play favorites but gives equal consideration and equal salvation to all His children.¹¹

Faith is the gift of God offered equally to all and it is precious and equal because of its source not because of the recipient.¹²

2 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πληθυνθείη ἐν ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ
καὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν.

¹⁰ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 167.

¹¹ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 168.

¹² Catherine Gunsalus González, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude*, The Belief a Theological Commentary on the Bible series (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), pp. 164-165.

² May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

The opening of this letter ends with a prayer of blessing upon the recipients. The usage of the terms “grace” and “peace” reflect both the Hellenistic and the Jewish flavor of this greeting. “Grace” derives from the Greek setting where subjects receive favor from a ruling authority. “Peace” echoes the Hebrew term *shalom*, which is the “well-being” found in relationship to God and God’s people.¹³

The usage here of the term “knowledge” addresses the concept among those within Judaism that contrasted their knowledge of God with pagan ignorance of the true God.¹⁴ This term will be used many times in Second Peter and it truly will prove to be a core concept that will reflect an important theme as not only relational knowledge of God and Jesus but it also has an ethical element, which reflects knowledge of the gospel narrative, knowledge of the true

¹³ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 292.

¹⁴ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 170.

character of God and Jesus.¹⁵

3 Ὡς πάντα ἡμῖν τῆς θείας δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ τὰ πρὸς ζωὴν
καὶ εὐσέβειαν δεδωρημένης διὰ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ
καλέσαντος ἡμᾶς ἰδίᾳ δόξῃ καὶ ἀρετῇ,

**3 Because His divine power has granted to us all things
needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of
him who called us by his own glory and excellence.**

Verses three and four are linked together and will be discussed as a unit.

This verse is dominated by the terminology of “divine power” and this concept rests at the center of the message that the author wishes to convey. Some have seen this terminology as a capitulation to Hellenistic dualism such as would be highly prominent in later Gnosticism. Perhaps if taken in isolation one might be able to come to such a conclusion, but verse 4 clarifies the context in which this terminology is used here. The phrase “precious and very great promises” of God in Christ is the germ of the rest of the letter. This letter does not convey a dualism of the

¹⁵ Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude A Commentary*, p. 216.

material world and the spiritual world, but a first glimpse of the conviction of Peter that sin corrupts and grace redeems.¹⁶

The moral and theological significance of “corruption” that entered the world because of lust are clear: the world is not innately corrupt; and yet the world is permeated by the corrupting influence of sin. The means to “escape” from the corrupting influence of sin can be found by looking both backward and forward. The promises that God has made to humanity are absolutely reliable and they have been secured by “divine power” and are the means, by which the followers of Christ have to live a godly life. These divine promises must be nurtured (vv. 5-9) and require faithful thinking and living. Ultimately God will bring judgment upon the world and usher in the “new heavens” and the “new earth.” It is likely that the author envisions the ultimate attainment of the “divine nature” as being

¹⁶ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 296.

associated with the final coming of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

The basic narrative is plain enough here: it is that God (or Jesus) has given gifts and promises that enable those who receive them to have life, to partake ultimately of the divine nature and to flee from the corruption of the world. The imagery given with regard to passions being the source of corruption and death refers back to the story of the Garden of Eden at least for the Jews. This imagery would also resonate with the Greco-Roman world who with tremendous intensity pursued escape from the power of the passions with their power to destroy. The Greeks would likely hear this promise as the fulfillment of the life of virtue while the Jews would hear it as an undoing of the results of the sin of Adam. The Christians in the original audience may have heard both of these messages.¹⁸

4 δι' ὧν τὰ τίμια καὶ μέγιστα ἡμῖν ἐπαγγέλματα δεδώρηται,
ἵνα διὰ τούτων γένησθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως
ἀποφυγόντες τῆς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ φθορᾶς.

¹⁷ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, pp. 296-297.

¹⁸ Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude A Commentary*, p. 219.

⁴Therefore he has bestowed upon us the precious and very great promises in order that through them you might become participants in the divine nature, escaping from the moral corruption in the desires of the world.

⁵ Καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο δὲ σπουδὴν πᾶσαν παρεισενέγκαντες ἐπιχορηγήσατε ἐν τῇ πίστει ὑμῶν τὴν ἀρετὴν, ἐν δὲ τῇ ἀρετῇ τὴν γνῶσιν,

⁵For this very reason, you must eagerly make every effort to support your faith with excellence, and excellence with knowledge,

The phrase “For this reason” links this section firmly to the previous section. Peter is a proponent of a very active faith that does not rest on the laurels of what God has begun, but relies upon the recipient to apply effort in concert with the work of God to continually build and grow in godliness. In secular language the phrase, “you must eagerly make every effort to support your faith” “...to provide at one’s own expense” what is necessary. The

certainty of the work of God here empowers the follower to cultivate a moral life that is consistently godly. It appears that the audience here has somehow diminished the need for moral development as a result of their denial of judgment (cf. 1:8-9; 2:3b-10a). Peter is calling upon his audience to be lavish time and effort in order that they devote to develop their Christian lives.¹⁹

For Peter, being a Christian was more than a hobby or a pass-time it was to be an obsession that was rooted in the work of God as the source of the power necessary to accomplish the goal as set forth by God. We are to be active participants with God and not passive instruments of God's power. God chooses to allow us to participate with Him rather than forcing us to do so.

6 ἐν δὲ τῇ γνώσει τὴν ἐγκράτειαν, ἐν δὲ τῇ ἐγκρατεία τὴν ὑπομονήν, ἐν δὲ τῇ ὑπομονῇ τὴν εὐσέβειαν,

6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness,

¹⁹ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, pp. 297-298.

Here is the continuation of the string of pearls that are strung together in fashion reminiscent of the list produced by Paul in his writings. In this verse the list begins “knowledge,” which is the discernment, which is needed by the Christian for a virtuous life and is progressively acquired.²⁰ The call in these verses is only possible because of the divine giving that is enumerated in the previous verses. It is not possible strictly through human effort, but it is more than possible with God’s gift, it is a necessity. The virtues here grow as a result of the combination of the gift of God and intense human effort working together.²¹

7 ἐν δὲ τῇ εὐσεβείᾳ τὴν φιλαδελφίαν, ἐν δὲ τῇ φιλαδελφίᾳ τὴν ἀγάπην.

7 and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love.

The term translated here as “mutual affection is the Greek term *philadelphia* and evokes here the love that binds families together and when used by Christians in particular

²⁰ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 186.

²¹ Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude A Commentary*, p. 220.

is the love within the Christian community. The placement of the term *agape* at the end of this verse is almost certainly intentional. It is this love that forms the umbrella under which all aspects of the Christian life take place. In general terms this word evokes a sense of gentleness and self-sacrifice.²² The thought here is likely very similar to that of Colossians 3:14,²³ which means that love coordinates and unites all the other virtues.²⁴

8 ταῦτα γὰρ ὑμῖν ὑπάρχοντα καὶ πλεονάζοντα οὐκ ἀργοὺς οὐδὲ ἀκάρπους καθίστησιν εἰς τὴν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπίγνωσιν·

8 For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This sentence employs a construction that is known as a “litotes” which means that understatement is used in the sense that the negatives are used to make a positive statement. The idea being that the virtuous Christian will

²² Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude A Commentary*, p. 220.

²³ **Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.**

²⁴ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 187.

increase, leaves open the question of the fate of those who are indolent and unproductive. This is intentional and cautionary at this point.²⁵ There is no excuse for being content with the present state of attainment; the Christian life is one that ever moves with determination and intent toward the goal. Lack of spiritual growth is a sign of spiritual death like the wheat that becomes choked by weeds and dies in the parable of Jesus.²⁶

The knowledge referred to here is the knowledge of Jesus Christ and it drives the one who receives it to be more and more like him, and in doing so this will be obvious because of the virtuous life that becomes more and more compelling to the possessor of this knowledge.²⁷

9 ὧ γὰρ μὴ πάρεστιν ταῦτα, τυφλός ἐστιν μυωπάζων,
λήθην λαβὼν τοῦ καθαρισμοῦ τῶν πάλαι αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτιῶν.

9 For anyone who lacks these things is nearsighted and blind, and is forgetful of the cleansing of past sins.

²⁵ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 301.

²⁶ Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, In the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series, Revised ed., p. 81.

²⁷ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, pp. 188-189.

The verb that is translated here as “nearsighted” occurs only here in the New Testament and its usage here with “blind” seems odd since it should refer to a less severe condition than blindness. It is likely that there is a wordplay taking place between these two words that is intended to convey the idea of refusal to see the truth as at Matthew 15:14; 23:16, 24; Luke 6:39; John 9:40-41; 12:40; Romans 2:19; and 2 Corinthians 4:14. There are also texts like 1 John 2:11 and Revelation 3:17 that are particularly relevant to the discussion here of the decision on the part of the person to remain blind.²⁸ That decision reflects a choice made by a person to remain blind. The implication here is that people do have a choice.

In the latter part of verse nine it is almost certain that baptism is in view. The knowledge of Jesus Christ came to those who were cleansed of their past sins as illumination giving sight to the blind (cf. Hebrews 6:4; 10:32; 2 Corinthians 4:4), but Christians who do not carry through the moral implications of this knowledge have effectively

²⁸ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 189.

become blind to the knowledge once again.²⁹ As the letter unfolds this will describe those who are the opponents of Peter and he will accuse them of apostasy. The mild rebuke here will give way to harsh condemnation in chapter two.³⁰

10 διὸ μᾶλλον, ἀδελφοί, σπουδάσατε βεβαίαν ὑμῶν τὴν κλήσιν καὶ ἐκλογήν ποιῆσθαι· ταῦτα γὰρ ποιοῦντες οὐ μὴ πταίσητέ ποτε.

10 Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble.

Peter would not leave those who have stumbled with the impression that this stumbling means they have fallen into darkness with no way out or back to a vibrant relationship with God. The warning that is given here is a call not to give up, it is not message intended to cause those who have stumbled to give up and quit. It is a clarion call to

²⁹ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 189.

³⁰ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 302.

focus and “confirm your call and election.”³¹

Christ has called the believer into His kingdom and promised to him immortality (v. 4), but an appropriate moral response is required. This passage does not mean that moral progress is an indicator that a person has received some form of guarantee from God. It does however mean that the ethical fruits are objectively necessary for the attainment of final salvation. The author of 2 Peter is concerned with the ethical fruits of faith (1:5) and with moral effort, which is only possible through grace (1:2-3). Paul also refers to this same thing at Galatians 5:19-21.³² If the author here appears to be emphasizing the role of mankind in salvation it is important to remember the nature of the danger of moral apostasy that is being faced by his audience which is apostasy as a result of the influence

³¹ David R. Helm, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude - Sharing Christ's Sufferings*, in the Preaching the Word series (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2008), p. 199.

³² **19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

of teachers who evidently held that immorality incurred no danger of judgment.³³ The source of the danger faced by this audience is a danger that entails their efforts. They can either follow the apostolic truth, or the message of the false teachers, which will lead them away from God and ultimately to destruction and ruin.

11 οὕτως γὰρ πλουσίως ἐπιχορηγηθήσεται ὑμῖν ἡ εἴσοδος εἰς τὴν αἰώνιον βασιλείαν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

11 For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

In spite of the emphasis on human participation in salvation, this section ends as it began with an attribution of “entry into the eternal kingdom” being provided. The phrase “eternal kingdom” occurs only here in the New Testament and may be dependent upon Daniel 7:27. In view of the eschatology given in chapter three, the eternal kingdom here is not simply “heaven” but is a looking

³³ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 190.

forward to the coming reign of God in righteousness in the new heaven and the new earth (3:13).³⁴ This understanding of the final state of mankind reflects a view that God will ultimately destroy the earth, as He has before (Genesis 6-7), and in the place of this heaven and earth put a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness truly resides.

Synopsis

Peter begins by stating his credentials so that his audience will give the proper attention to what he has to say. At the same time, he wants his audience to know that their faith is of equal importance to his because both are from the same source, “God and Jesus Christ.” He will then cite the source for “all things needed for life and godliness”, it comes as a gift through the “divine power.” He goes on to challenge them to follow through and combine their efforts with what God has already provided as the essential element in salvation. In order for this to be truly as effective

³⁴ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 192.

as it was intended the audience must participate with God so that they may enter into the eternal kingdom. A hint of the problem created by the false teachers in introduced here.

Main Points

1. We should listen to the Apostolic message.
2. Divine power has been granted to those who have been called.
3. We are called to combine fervent effort with God's divine power in order to avoid ineffectiveness. This is necessary in order to insure entrance into the "eternal kingdom."