

2 Peter 1

Exhortation To A Godly, Covenantal Lifestyle Based On The Authority Of God's Word

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENTS

After the two introductory verses in which the apostle greets his readers and wishes them God's peace, Peter points out to them what wonderful grace the omnipotent God has bestowed on them (vv. 3, 14). He earnestly urges them to walk ever more carefully in the fear of the Lord (vv. 5-9), so that they might work out their salvation in this way (vv. 10-11). Peter bases this admonition on his apostolic authority which does not have a human character, but which bears divine authority (vv. 12-21). He considers this to be his holy duty as apostle, and he does this all the more because he knows that his Master will soon discharge him from his service on earth (vv. 12-15). This exhortation rests on the sure prophetic Word that was confirmed when he was a witness of Christ's glorification on the mountain — the unquestionable guarantee that the proclamation of his coming in glory is completely reliable (vv. 16-21).

MAIN THOUGHTS

In coming to an understanding of this chapter (as well as the following one) attention should be paid to the comments in the 3rd and 4th sections of the introductory outline of the letters on Peter. There were many dangers threatening the church not only from the outside, but also from the inside. Therefore, the main point of this second letter is a warning against false teachers, their pernicious¹ doctrine, their mockery, and their ungodly walk of life. Peter starts by pointing out to the believers the infinite grace which has been given to them (who were Gentiles) by the mercy of God in Christ. He does this to strengthen them in the struggle of faith against the immensely dangerous front of false prophecy. The more they trust in the prophetic Word, the stronger will be their stand against the temptation to become apostate. This temptation comes to them in the doctrines and lifestyle of those false teachers, whom Peter sharply attacks in this epistle.

Three parts are easily distinguished in Chapter 1:

1. the greeting and blessing (vv. 1 and 2);
2. the admonition to strive as blessed ones in Christ for a closer, covenantal walk in which the believers work out their salvation (vv. 3-11);
3. basing this admonition on the authority of revealed Word, which declares Christ's coming in judgment. (vv. 12-21)

NOTES ON THE TEXT

Verses 1 and 2

The original text here has the Jewish pronunciation of the apostle's name: Symeon (cf. Acts 15:14). Both names are used here: "Simon Peter". This clearly indicates that he is the Peter of the college of apostles. (Emphasis should be placed on the fact that in the Gospel according to John he is frequently called Simon Peter. We can deduce from this evidence that later on the use of both names became a more common practice in order to distinguish him from others named Simon.)

¹ Ed. Note: ruinous, harmful

“Servant” means "slave" and "apostle" means "ambassador". The first word indicates Peter's submission to Christ who, as appears from the second word, has endowed him with authority over the believers.

"Righteousness" refers to the righteousness of Christ which God in his grace imputes to sinners. "God and Saviour" indicates the One Person of our Mediator.

The Greek verb for "received" actually means "obtained by lot"; it points to the divine decree. "Ours" refers not to the apostles as a group, but to the Christians from among the Jews, rather than the readers who were believers of heathen origin (cf. Acts 11:17; 15:7-11) — [see question 1](#).

The apostle often uses the word "knowledge" in this letter (1:3, 5, 6, 8; 2:20; 3:18) — [see question 2](#). This is not an intellectual knowledge but a knowledge of the heart and of faith (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, A 12). In the phrase "of God and of Jesus" (v.2), two persons are meant: God and the Mediator.

Verses 3 and 4

The context of the entire letter is important. These verses do not belong with verses 1 and 2, but rather with verse 5 ff., and give the urgent reason for the exhortation which follows in these verses.

"His" refers to God, or else to Jesus Christ as God. "Godliness" is derived from a verb which means: "to have pure respect for".

The NIV translation “by his own glory” is more accurate than “to his own glory”, as in the RSV. "Excellence" (or “goodness” in NIV) points to the omnipotence of God's calling, and therefore means "power".

"Divine power" does of course not mean that the believers will be deified. In the first place, the boundary line between Creator and creature can never be removed — [see question 3](#). In the second place, the Greek word used here for "power" does not indicate the being or the substance, but the disposition or the quality. The writer makes a contrast in this verse between “divine power” and “corruption” using the words "having escaped", etc.; thus it becomes evident that the holiness and incorruptibility of the divine nature are meant here. This "corruption" is caused by "lust". So it does not mean "perishableness", but "inner depravity". "World" (Greek: *cosmos*) here indicates the world of people who live in sin without fear of the Lord.

Verses 5-7

"For this very reason", God's work of salvation calls the believers to diligence in their task of sanctification. "Applying" [NASB] means, "introducing something besides": God's work comes first, the work of men (the fruit thereof) follows. That is the law of the Covenant: God works the salvation, the believer must work it out (cf. Philippians 2:12-13). "Add to" means, "minister additionally" or "minister abundantly". In "faith" the seven virtues which are mentioned are already determined; the exercise of faith automatically brings these fruits of the Spirit to light. Any thoughts concerning merits of good works are excluded — [see question 4](#). The seven virtues are: “goodness”, in the sense of "sound, valiant strength"; "knowledge", a show of strength accompanied by wisdom; "self-control"; "perseverance", "godliness" (see note on v. 3); "mutual affection", referring to the relationships in the communion of saints; and "love" (some translations add "towards all men", and rightly so) referring to the relationship with the neighbours among whom the believers live. Note again the main purpose of this letter is to warn against the

dangerous doctrines of false teachers. This summary of the fruits of faith is made in connection with a warning. Peter would have mentioned other ones as well (cf. Galatians 5:22; 2 Corinthians 6:4 ff.; Colossians 3:12 ff.), but he chose these in order to arm believers against the works of darkness at the very fore-front of false prophecy.

Verses 8 and 9

"Possess" means "have on hand".

"Ineffective" can better be translated from the Greek as "inactive", or "unworked". "Unproductive" is without fruits. "For your knowledge" is a better translation of "in your knowledge". This knowledge comes from "our Lord Jesus Christ"; the believers must make progress in their sanctification, living out of the Source: Jesus Christ. Whereas verse 8 indicates the positive side, verse 9 indicates the negative side. To neglect the practice of these virtues means to lack the bond of life with the Saviour in this central function of faith. Faith without works is dead (cf. James 2:14-26) — [see question 5](#). One who is "near-sighted and blind" can only see what is right in front of his eyes; he cannot distinguish that which is far away. The expression "forgetting" indicates someone who was converted as a result of the preaching but later reverts back to his former sinful life. Thus, such a person does not really live in the faith of that promise sealed to him in baptism, the sign and seal of the washing of regeneration. Therefore he can be called "blind" in a sacramental manner of speaking (cf. 1 Peter 3:21 and the note on this verse) — [see question 6](#).

Verses 10 and 11

Do not regard "calling" and "election" as dogmatic terms! "Election" does not refer to God's counsel in all places in Holy Scripture. This refers to the LORD's act of placing someone into his covenant, and giving him the opportunity to live under these promises and demands. This is his elective calling — [see question 7](#).

To "fall" indicates a fall into sin, and eternal death as a result (cf. Romans 11:11; James 2:1; 3:2). "Entrance" [NASB] does not indicate the physical entryway, but the act of going in (cf. Acts 13:24; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 2:1; Hebrews 10:19) — [see question 8](#). We should not consider that this entry into the "eternal kingdom" occurs only when dying — [see question 9](#). Those who have lived a godly life need have no fear on their death beds.

Verses 12-21

It should be kept in mind that Peter takes into account the erroneous doctrines of false teachers only when they are rooted in the revealed Word. Christians can resist the deadly snare of outwardly pious but inwardly ungodly doctrines.

Verses 12-15

In these verses Peter reveals his purpose for this letter and "reminds" them of the of the Gospel's truth.

"So", because God has shown to you such wondrous grace, you must work out your salvation. Compare "the truth you now have" to Colossians 1:6. "Right" here means: my duty, my holy duty as apostle.

"Tent of this body" meaning "tabernacle", refers to the body as the dwelling in which a person lives here on earth. The Greek word for "to refresh your memory" means "to awaken someone thoroughly" or "to keep someone fully awake". For "soon" the Greek word has the sense of

"suddenly". "Put it aside" indicates that it is a temporary absence from the body. In the original text the word "as" shows clearly that the information in verse 14b is different from that underlying verse 14a. The latter is founded on the well-known revelation given in John 21:18 (cf. 13:36). How this second communication occurred remains unknown. The contents of verse 15 do not necessarily refer to a subsequent letter which Peter is planning to send his readers; he may be referring to this letter under consideration.

Verse 16

"Did not follow" has the sense of "did not join in spiritually". "Stories" means myths.

In the original we find the word *parousia* for "coming" which is always used in the New Testament in connection with Christ's return. It means "a visit by a VIP", like a king who visits in his kingdom. In ancient times coins were often struck with an inscription such as "on the occasion of the *parousia* of..." It should be noted that false teachers particularly ridiculed the doctrine of the second coming.

Verses 17 and 18

The apostle had already witnessed the glory of the Saviour on the mount of the transfiguration. He received "honour" through the Father's words, and "glory" by the heavenly glory that radiated from him. This glory will again be seen on the last day. "Received ... from" underscores the fact that God the Father was the Author and Giver of this glory. "Majestic" refers to the greatness and magnificence of the divine majesty present on the mount. The word of the Father is quoted from Matthew 17:5 and Mark 9:7 (Luke 9:35 has "whom I have chosen" instead of "whom I love" — there is essentially no difference). "This voice" refers not only to the fact that there was actual speech, but especially to its contents.

"We" refers to the three disciples who were present on the mount.

Verse 19

The transfiguration and God's voice are a confirmation of the steadfastness and truth of the "prophetic message", here meaning the Scriptures of the Old Testament. This was "more certain", for the prophecy, which pointed to the coming Messiah as God or as Son of God, is confirmed in this transfiguration. (cf. Psalm 2; Isaiah 9:5; Micah 5:1)

"Light" is a symbol for God's Word (see Psalm 119:105). The verb "shining" indicates continuous action. "A dark place" is a description of the world in the grip of sin. Note the image of a traveller overtaken by a cloudy, starless night, who could hardly find his way. The roads in ancient times were uneven, rough, and full of holes. That is a symbol of this earthly life. Now God had lit his lamp in his Word and the "traveller" can find his way. Whoever pays heed to the "lantern" of the Word can walk safely until the day dawns. The Greek word for "morning star" means: "bringer of light" (*phosphoros*); this star appears just before dawn.

Verses 20 and 21

In these verses Peter gives the fundamental rule for understanding and explaining Scripture.

"Prophet's own" here means "arbitrary". The Greek word for "interpretation" is *epilyse*². This interpretation may not be arbitrary, but is bound to the Holy Spirit, who leads men to the truth. "Carried along" indicates the passiveness of the prophets: the initiative did not come from themselves — see questions 10 and 11.

² This is a word which Dr. Schilder used quite frequently, e.g. in Christ in His Sufferings.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is there no reason for thinking that the word "ours" in verse 1 refers only to the apostles; rather that the readers are other believing Jews?
2. Why is knowledge particularly emphasized in this epistle?
3. Which Roman Catholic doctrine concerning Christ eradicates the boundary line between Creator and creature? What is the Lutheran error on this point?
4. Can the Roman Catholic church use this text from the Scripture to support its doctrine about the merits of good works?
5. Does the phrase "faith without works is dead" (v.9) contradict what Paul says (for example in Romans and Galatians) that man never obtains righteousness by doing good works?
6. Could Peter's words in verse 9 be used by the Remonstrants as proof for their teaching, that it is possible for the saints to become apostate (cf. Canons of Dort, V, RE Articles 3; 7; 8)?
7. Election refers to the LORD's act of placing someone into his covenant and giving him the opportunity to live under these promises and demands. What is the co-operation of the covenant (cf. Acts 13:24; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 2:1; Hebrews 10:19)?
8. Is it Scriptural to emphasize the last words uttered by believers in the last moments of life (cf. Philippians 1:20-21)?
9. Does "men spoke... as they were carried along..." (v. 21) mean that the Bible writers' own activity was negated (cf. Luke 1:1-4)?
10. Is "carried along by the Holy Spirit" to be applied only to the actual speaking of a prophet or does it also apply to recording it in writing?

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