

A Growth That Endures...



A VERSE BY
VERSE
EXPOSITION
OF THE
EPISTLE OF
2ND PETER

The Gospel of the Apostles 2 Peter 1:1-2 (715)

There are two things I want you to get this morning. The first is the big idea of the entire letter. The second is the big idea of verses 1-2. And so we begin our study of II Peter by considering the entire letter and Peter's reason for writing it in the first place.

The situation this letter was intended to address was both troublesome and dangerous. Ignorant and arrogant men who obscured, maligned, and twisted the truth of the gospel had gained a hearing in the churches. A deadly poison had entered the body and was beginning to course through its veins.

One commentary refers to these teachers of error as "fakes" (Lucas and Green, p. 28). These men were themselves fakes and they peddled forgeries of the gospel. Forgery is the making or adapting objects or documents with the intention to deceive. Tom Keating was born in London in 1918. After World War II he began to restore paintings for a living and mainly worked as a house painter. He also exhibited his own paintings but failed to make a break into the art market. He

retaliated by creating forgeries to fool the experts. Keating claimed to have forged over 2000 paintings of over 100 different artists – Degas, Gainsborough, and Rembrandt among them. Who knows how many people were deceived and robbed by Keating’s counterfeit artwork. Forgeries have always been peddled within the church. “Muddled individuals pass on a mixture of easy platitudes, biblical-sounding phrases and a view of life that is twisted out of any recognizable biblical shape. Such Christian con-men are the reason Peter wrote this letter. They not only prey on people’s wallets or good nature; ultimately they can wreck our eternal destiny, since a false gospel tells lies about God” (p. 28).

Such men had, in fact, infiltrated the community of faith. Peter says in **2:1**, *false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you*. Their influence was already being felt. It appears that some within the fellowship were already in jeopardy - **2:2**, *and many will follow their sensuality*; **2:14**, *enticing unstable souls*; **2:18**, *they entice ... those who barely escape the ones who live in error*.

What were these men like? They were not like traveling salesmen. They lived and worked *among* the saints (**2:1**). They were men with whom the believers were familiar. But *secretly*, deceptively they were introducing their *destructive* errors (**2:1**). They were men whose early faith and ministry gave evidence of genuineness but who later denied the Lord (**2:1, 20-22**). They were greedy men (**2:3, 14**). They were arrogant men (**2:10**). They were worldly men dominated by lusts and engaged in all kinds of sinful pleasures (**2:13-14**).

What were these guys teaching? On what point had they gotten lost in the weeds of error? Basically, their eschatology was all messed up. They erred in their doctrine of the return of Christ. Peter tips us off in **1:16**, *For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* **2 Peter 3:3-4**, *knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."* Richard Bauckham suggests that the error was "eschatological skepticism." Here's how he explains that: "The [return] of Jesus Christ had been expected during the lifetime of the apostles, but the first Christian generation had now passed away, and in the view of the false teachers this proved the primitive Christian eschatological expectation to have been wholly mistaken (**3:4, 9a**). There would be no eschatological judgment (**2:3b**), no divine intervention to eliminate evil and establish a world of righteousness" (p. 154).

Now whenever a central essential doctrine of the faith is denied it opens the door to all manner of theological error and sinful living. In this case, first of all, the reliability of the Word of God is cast into doubt. Indeed, the false teachers charged the apostles with making up, inventing the doctrine of Christ's coming. Second, the judgment of God was cast into doubt. They reasoned, if Christ isn't coming then there will be no final accounting at all. God's threats are empty. Third, the reality and power of demonic forces was cast into doubt. Peter says in **2:10b**, *Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties.* Fourth, if Christ is not coming the sovereignty and power of God was cast into doubt (**3:3-4**). Fifth, if Christ is not coming apostolic authority itself is cast into doubt (**1:16; 2:10a**). Sixth, since Christ was not coming these men felt free to

belittle both the person and work of Christ (2:1). And finally, these *unprincipled men* (2:7), unrestrained by any doctrinal or moral authority, indulged in all manner of reckless and sinful living. You see if the foundational elements of our faith are compromised the entire house will eventually begin to crumble.

What's the danger? What effect does this sort of thing have on the church? Error introduced into the mainstream of Christian teaching (2:1) will have a destabilizing impact upon the church. Now practically speaking what does this look like? Peter gives us some pretty good indications. Error destabilizes the church by infecting orthodox teaching with *destructive heresies* (2:1). Error destabilizes the church by casting doubt on the foundational truths of the faith (2:2). Error destabilizes the church by dividing it, by destroying the unity of the fellowship (2:2, 18). Indeed, error fosters an atmosphere of rebellion and defiance (2:10). It wrecks havoc on church order. Error destabilizes the church by the exploitation of new and/or weak brethren (2:3, 18). Error is always attended by financial disruption, sinful living, spiritual declension, actual apostasy, and if left unchecked, the discipline and judgment of God. Error is not some innocuous, benign, harmless nuisance. Error is a deadly, destructive thing.

They had been fifteen of the wettest days ever recorded for Southern California. For the last five of them there had been continuous drenching rains. Destabilized by all the water suddenly with little warning on Monday, January 10 an entire rain-saturated hillside gave way. An avalanche of tons of mud, rock, debris, and brush crashed over some 20 homes in the seaside community of La Conchita near Santa Barbara killing at least 10 and injuring 10 others. Similarly deception and error if allowed to go unchecked will eventually destabilize the church resulting in terrible tragedy. Without fortification this is what will happen.

Peter wrote his letter to counter this deadly influence. He exposed these false guides for what they were. Peter also instructs the church of the Lord Jesus on how to survive when doctrinal and moral perversions infiltrate our fellowships (see Lucas and Green, *The Message of 2 Peter and Jude*, p. 17). Peter's strategy is simply this: to establish believers so firmly in the gospel; that we would be so familiar with the truth that error – either in doctrine or in practice – would be immediately detected and rooted out.

I want you to read **3:17-18** out loud with me. *You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own **stability**.* ¹⁸ *But **grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.* These two verses are the shell in which the meat of the big idea for the book is found. Here's the big idea: **Growth in the truth of the gospel fortifies the church against the destabilizing influence of error.** Repeat.

Growth implies increase, development, and progress in spiritual things. And in 2 Peter our growth is in *the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (**3:18**). In **1:2** Peter speaks of *the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*. In **1:3** he refers to *the true knowledge of Him*; in **1:8** to *the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*. This knowledge is, of course, that knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ that is granted to us as the initial gift of free grace at conversion. In **John 17:3** Jesus said, *“And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”* But Peter also has in mind that knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus that can be built up by our own application and endeavor only over a long period. That's why Peter speaks of our *diligence* in growth (**1:5-7, 10**), of *making certain* (**1:10**), of *being established* (**1:12**), of *calling these*

things to mind (1:12, 13, 15; 3:1, 2), and of being on guard (3:17). All of these suggest development, progress, and advancement in the faith.

It is this growth and stability in the gospel that is the preventative; the antidote to the disease of error in doctrine and Christian living. Indeed, such growth fortifies the church. It strengthens it. It builds it up. Growth checks the advance of error. Growth neutralizes the influence of error. Growth is God's answer to such error as was being propagated in the churches to which Peter was writing.

Now let's look at verses 1-2. Remember, Peter's aim is to stabilize Christians. He wants to know that regardless of the amount of rain the hillside of faith will hold. To this end Peter's strategy is to establish the apostolic message of the cross so decisively that a perverted gospel simply cannot create havoc or wreck the faith of the saints. In **1:12** he says, *I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you.*

His first step in this stabilization process is a giant one. In verses 1-2 Peter affirms in no uncertain terms that the gospel we have received, believed, lived, and share with others is the genuine article and not a substitute (see Lucas/Green, p. 29). Peter fortifies these believers by assuring them in verse 1 that *you have received the same kind of faith as ours*. In other words, your faith, beloved, is the original. It is not some new and improved variety. It is not some new formula. It has no new ingredients. It is no new perspective. It is not a new model. Here's the point he is going to press in these first two verses: **the apostolic gospel is a Christ-centered gospel**. And it has come to you just like it did to us. We have received the pure offer of the gospel as a grace gift from God

(**Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9**). Beloved of the Lord, we stand in the same relation to God as did the apostles and all the generations of believers in the past (see Lucas/Green, p. 35).

The apostolic gospel is Christ-centered in three essential respects. **First**, the apostolic gospel must have originated with and be approved by Christ. The true gospel must be communicated by Christ's authorized and commissioned representatives, in other words, by His apostles. This is why Peter, without hesitation and without pride, declares himself to be *an apostle of Jesus Christ*. "From its first word, this letter claims to be the authentic writing of an apostolic eye-witness of Jesus' life, teaching, death and resurrection" (Lucas/Green, p. 29). Apostles were an exclusive group. There was a fixed number of these men. They could not be replaced. Along with the prophets, constituted the foundation upon which the church is built (Eph. 2:20). They were messengers commissioned by Christ. They were Christ's representatives. What they taught was and is authoritative for the church for all ages. Peter is also the *servant* of Christ. As a servant Peter, like Israel's prophets, did God's will and therefore was to be obeyed (L/G, p. 31). So Peter places himself on the same level as a prophet of old suggesting that we must pay attention to his message.

Second, the apostolic gospel is based upon the righteousness of Christ alone. *Righteousness* normally refers to the act by which God puts sinners in a right relationship to him. We call this justification. God, who is eternally, infinitely and unchangeably just, pardons all our sin when He justifies us. But how did God do this? God decided to punish our sins by placing our guilt and sin on Christ. He *imputed* our sin to Christ. In other words, God took the cumulative penalty of our sin, placed it on Christ and punished Him in our place. Peter

explains it like this: **1 Peter 2:24**, *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. I Peter 3:18*, *For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous.*

The *righteous for the unrighteous* is the phrase that really expresses the heart of what Christ did. He died in our place. Our sin was put on His account and He endured God's just punishment. But the sin that Christ bore was imputed. He never became sinful; He could not have. Christ is God and if He were to have actually become sinful He would have ceased to be God.

So, our sin was put on Christ's account. He was punished as our substitute. But that is only half the story. It would not have been enough for us to have the penalty of our sin put on Christ. We still needed a righteousness to clothe us before God. Another aspect of being saved is that we are *accepted as righteous in His sight* and that this righteousness is also the result of imputation.

Our sin was put on Christ's account and Christ's righteousness was put on our account. You see, after the penalty of our sin was paid, we still needed a righteousness to cover us before God. Christ's righteousness was imputed by God to be that covering. God chose to declare Christ's righteousness to be ours. All the cumulative merit of Christ's obedience is credited to us. God doesn't just view us as if we had never sinned; He views us as if we had always kept all of His commands just as Christ did. It seems to be what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote: *and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ -- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith (Phil. 3:9).*

So we are declared righteous before God based on Christ's obedience. He was obedient to the death of the cross. He satisfied God's justice by paying the penalty for our sins. Our sin was put on His account. But He was also obedient to the law so Christ offered a perfect righteousness to God. It is that righteousness that God puts on our account. Think of it as a clean, white robe of Christ righteousness that covers up our sin and sinfulness. But remember this is a **declarative act**; it is God crediting us with the righteousness of Christ. Our actual growing in righteousness is a process that takes the rest of our lives. But justification is a moment in time declaration of God concerning our standing before Him (Browning, *Program Lesson #3*). Anyone who obscures or maligns this is setting a distorted gospel before you.

Third, it is through the apostolic gospel alone that the benefits won by Christ flow to believers. In this case grace and peace are named (1:2). We know the real gospel by the fruits it produces in its adherents. Let's say we buy a small tree and are assured by the nursery that it is a peach tree. If after a few years apples appear hanging on its branches then we know we got the wrong kind of tree. Paul explains the character of the kingdom of God in **Romans 14:17**, *for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

So we leave verse 2 having given ourselves to the considerations of two big ideas in the introductory sermon. First that **growth in the truth of the gospel fortifies the church against the destabilizing influence of error**. And second that **the apostolic gospel is a Christ-centered gospel**. This we will see once again as we approach the Lord's Table after we sing.

Benediction

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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The Gospel of the Apostles 2 Peter 1:1-2 (715)

The reading of 2 Peter by Max McLean

The sermon proper

The situation:

Ignorant and arrogant men who obscured, maligned, and twisted the _____
of the gospel had gained a _____ in the churches.

Forgers and forgeries

Such men had, in fact, _____ the community of faith (2:1, 2, 14, 18).

What were these men like?

What were these guys teaching?

They erred in their doctrine of the _____ of _____ (1:16; 3:3-4).

Now whenever a central essential doctrine of the faith is denied it opens the door to all manner of theological error and sinful living.

What's the danger? What effect does this sort of thing have on the church?

Error introduced into the mainstream of Christian teaching (2:1) will have a
_____ impact upon the church.

Error destabilizes the church by _____ orthodox teaching with
destructive heresies (2:1).

Error destabilizes the church by _____ on the
foundational truths of the faith (2:2).

Error destabilizes the church by _____ it, by destroying the unity
of the fellowship (2:2, 18).

Error destabilizes the church by the _____ of new and/or weak
brethren (2:3, 18).

Error is a deadly, destructive thing.

La Conchita

Peter wrote his letter to counter this deadly influence.

Peter's strategy is simply this: to establish believers so firmly in the _____
that we would be so familiar with the _____ that error – either in
doctrine or in practice – would be immediately detected and rooted out.

3:17-18 ... *You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not
carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own **stability**.¹⁸ But **grow** in
the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both
now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

Here's the big idea of the book:

_____ in the truth of the gospel _____ the church against the destabilizing influence of error.
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KNOWLEDGE

... that knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ that is granted to us as the initial
_____ of free _____ at conversion (**John 17:3**).

... that knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus that can be _____
by our own application and _____ only over a long period.

Verses 1-2

Remember, Peter's aim is to _____ Christians.

To this end Peter's strategy is to establish the _____ message of
the cross so decisively that a _____ gospel simply cannot create
havoc or wreck the faith of the saints (**1:12**).

Here's the point Peter is going to press in these first two verses:

the _____ gospel is a _____ gospel.

the apostolic gospel must have originated with and be _____ by Christ.
the apostolic gospel is based upon the _____ of Christ alone.

*Righteousness normally refers to the act by which God puts sinners in a right
relationship to him. We call this **justification**.*

it is through the apostolic gospel alone that the _____ won by
Christ flow to believers (**Rom. 14:17**).