

A Growth That Endures...



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

What We Preach Is of God (Part I) 2 Peter 1:16-18 (728)

As has been my habit in this study of II Peter I want to review again the content and flow of Chapter 1 through verse 15.

In these early verses of his letter, Peter, like a man stacking firewood, piles one gospel truth upon another. He tells us that Jesus Christ is God, that faith is a gift (something we *receive*), and that our faith is based upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ (1:1) - *the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith* (Phil. 3:9). He tells us that grace and peace are ours through the gospel alone (1:2). He tells us that through the gospel (*true knowledge*) God has supplied everything we need to live this life to which we have been called (1:3). He tells us that God has given us the promises of the gospel to sustain our faith in the world (1:4). In verses 5-7 he tells us that our effort in the Christian life is to earnestly pursue those virtues that beautify, that commend, that adorn our profession of the gospel of grace (WCF, Chapter 16, 2). He tells us that God uses the presence of these Spirit-produced virtues to assure our souls that we are in possession of gospel grace (1:10-11). Peter stacks up these gospel truths because he is

convinced that **growth in the truth of the gospel fortifies the church against the destabilizing influence of error.** Indeed, that is the overall point of the entire letter.

You see, doctrinal error and reckless living had been introduced within the community of faith and the stability of the church was threatened. II Peter was written to counter this deadly influence. Peter's strategy is to saturate the believers with the truth of the gospel so that the destructive errors (either in doctrine or practice) would be recognized and resisted. Peter's aim, then, is to stabilize Christians.

In **verses 3-4** Peter reviews what God has done to this end. **God has graciously supplied all we need to live the life to which He has called us in Christ.** In **verses 5-7** the focus shifts to our response to the gracious initiatives and provision of God. Peter's point is that **gratitude for grace is expressed by growth in grace.** In **verses 8 and 9** Peter argues that **true, saving faith is confirmed by the reality (*are yours*) and vitality (*increasing*) of the graces that attend it.** Genuine faith is not an empty, hollow, void, isolated thing. Indeed, it is full *of*, it is accompanied *by*, it is adorned *with* those virtues that God has ordained and that the Holy Spirit produces. Indeed, the absence of these virtues can eventually lead to apostasy – the repudiation of one's profession of faith. So in **verses 10 and 11** **"the hazard of falling is presented as a motive to stir up believers to diligence and exercise of grace"** (Nisbet, *1 & 2 Peter*, p. 231).

Beloved, these are basic gospel truths, essential to the stability of individual believers and to the community of believers – the church. Indeed, so important are these that Peter says in **verse 12**, ***Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind***

you of these things. Peter was committed to the principle that **the truth bears repetition.** He wanted his readers to keep the truth of God in their minds all of the time.

This morning we consider **II Peter 1:16-18.** Here's the point: **what we preach is of God.** *For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.¹⁷ For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"--¹⁸ and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.*

Martin Luther wrote, "the apostles had assurance from God that their gospel was God's Word. And here it is also proved that the Gospel is nothing else than the preaching of Christ" (*1 & II Peter*, p. 245). Peter wants his readers (including us) to be certain regarding who Jesus is (**II Pet. 1:1, 2, 17**) and what Jesus has done (**I Pet. 1:18-19; 2:24; 3:18**). One of the essential truths concerning Jesus is that He is coming again to establish his eternal kingdom. The second coming, the Parousia, is part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is this return of Christ to which Peter turns his attention in **verse 16a.** *For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The doctrine of the second coming of Christ is clearly taught in the Bible. "The **Old Testament** looked forward to the day of the 'coming' of God, when he would reveal himself in all his glory, judge the wicked and redeem his people (**Ps. 50:3, 58, 59; Zech. 14:5; Mal. 3:1, 4:5-6**). [**Zechariah 14:5** says, *Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him!*] There was also a strand of

messianic promises, referring to someone who 'comes in the name of the LORD.' [Psalm 118:26 says, *Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.*] Jesus was so close to what was promised that John the Baptist's disciples asked him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else' (Luke 7:19)? [Jesus, of course, fulfilled the expectations of the Old Testament, although it will be at His second advent that the Old Testament promises of judgment will ultimately be fulfilled.] So the early Christians learned to look forward to a second coming of Christ, as glorious Lord who saves and judges" (Lucas/Green, pp. 74-75).

The promise of **Jesus** Himself fueled this expectation. In **John 14:1-3** He assured His disciples, "*Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.*" ² "*In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.*" ³ "*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*" At the ascension of Christ the **angels** assured all who were looking on, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven*" (**Acts 1:11**). John prophesies of this hope in **Revelation 1:7**, *Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen.* In the New Testament epistles Paul fueled the same hope. To the Thessalonian church he wrote of that day when *the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,* ⁸ *dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.* He wrote of that day *when [Jesus] comes to be glorified in His saints ... and to be marveled at among all who have believed* (**II Thess. 1:7-10**). Of course, in his first letter Peter himself pressed this point. **I Peter 1:7** he speaks of

a day when our faith *even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at **the revelation of Jesus Christ*** (see also **1:13; 4:13; 5:1, 4**). So the doctrine of the second coming is clearly taught in the Bible.

This Biblical truth is expressed in the historic creeds of the church. The Apostles' Creed says "**he will come** to judge the living and the dead." The Nicene Creed says "**he shall come again**, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead."

Why does Peter zero in on; why does he lock on to this particular subject of Christ's second coming? Remember, false teachers had infiltrated the church and were sowing error like we sow grass seed. Their intent was to undermine the stability of the church, to discredit the teaching of Peter, and to shipwreck the faith of the saints. To these despicable ends they were calling every element of Christian doctrine into question. Now, I think they were denying the gospel in Toto (**II Peter 2:1**). I don't think they believed a word of it. But we are sure that they seized on this particular thing. In **3:3-4** Peter warns his readers, *Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."* What they are saying is that because of Christ's (perceived) delay the doctrine is to be denied.

Here's the issue. The design of these guys was the same as countless others who have denied the gospel. Theirs was the same old uncreative strategy employed by the enemies of God down through the ages. If there is no return of Christ there will be no judgment by Christ. If there is no judgment we can live as we please. Folks, it is pretty simple and always has been. Jesus explained it clearly

in **John 3**. “*And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed*” (3:19-20). People despise the things of God because they love sin and want to continue in it. It doesn’t get any simpler than that. Beloved, to such men the gospel of Jesus Christ is the one great impediment to sin and must be eradicated at all costs. The Law of Jehovah God points out our sin and condemns us and must be blotted out of existence at any cost. As one commentator perceptively suggested, some folks are willing to wait for Christianity to die when it is no longer needed but others are keener to kill it immediately before it does greater damage (see Lucas/Green, p. 73).

And so the strategy of every false teacher is to disparage, to misrepresent the truth of the gospel; to have it perceived as something other than what it is. That is behind their assertion that what the apostles have taught and preached are nothing more than *cleverly devised tales* (see Ezek. 20:49). Their charge undoubtedly was that the gospel is a myth like that of Bigfoot, a fairy tale like Cinderella or Snow White, or a fable like The Hare and the Tortoise; that the gospel is the product of misguided imagination; that the whole thing was made up; that it was manufactured, embroidered; that the gospel is a fabrication, a demeaning lie concocted to control and restrict those who embrace it.

But Peter is arguing that what they have been taught is true. We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we preached the gospel to you, including the part about Jesus coming again in power. But upon what is Peter’s argument based? Peter is “defending the authenticity of the gospel he and the other apostles have preached. His strategy is to call two sets of witnesses to testify. “He calls the

New Testament apostles (1:16-18) and the Old Testament prophets (19-21), and requires them to give first-hand evidence about what they saw and heard” (Lucas/Green, p. 73). His point is this: **what we preach is of God**.

The testimony of the apostles is based upon the fact that they were *eye-witnesses of Christ’s majesty* (1:16b). Peter says we know about the coming of the Lord. We have a sense of what it will be like. We have been granted a foretaste, a preview of it. Indeed, we were actually present at His transfiguration. We saw it. We were eye-witnesses. We were observes, spectators. We heard it. Peter is establishing the apostolic witness as accurate, authoritative, and reliable.

“The ‘we’ that begins this verse refers to the apostles. In one sense, all of the apostles had been eyewitnesses to Christ’s majesty, especially His miracles, resurrection body, and ascension into heaven. Peter, however, is referring to a more specific event which he will describe in the next verse (1:17). The kingdom splendor of Christ revealed at this second coming. The transfiguration was a glimpse of the glory to be unveiled at the final revelation of Christ (Rev. 1:1)” (MacArthur Study Bible, pp. 1953-54).

Since Peter refers to the Transfiguration we will read the account as recorded in **Matthew 17:1-8**. *And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. ² And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. ³ And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. ⁴ And Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁵ While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out*

of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" ⁶ *And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were much afraid.* ⁷ *And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid."* ⁸ *And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone.*

Why does Peter appeal to the Transfiguration to make his point? Richard Bauckham points out, "The Gospel traditions as we know them appear to connect the [second coming] with the Transfiguration. [For example] Mark saw the Transfiguration as an anticipation of the [second coming] much as 2 Peter does" (*II Peter*, p. 211). **Mark 9:1** *And He was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after **it has come with power.**"* ² *And six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. And He was **transfigured** before them.* Do you see how Mark connects the two events?

What aspect of this transfiguration experience does Peter zero in on? The presence of Moses and Elijah? Christ's dazzling appearance? Peter recalls the voice of God the Father from heaven – "***This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased***" (1:17). "Peter wants to focus on what God said at that precise moment ... Even though Peter and the others were eye-witnesses of [Christ's] majesty, they still did not understand the meaning of what they had seen. What they lacked was the explanation to go with the event. They needed to be ear-witnesses (if there is such a word!) as well as eye-witnesses. They needed God to speak ... God did indeed speak ... Jesus publicly received God's own commissioning honor and glory (Ps. 8:5; Dan. 7:14) for the work which lay ahead of him. Unlike the gospel accounts, Peter uses the word *my* twice, to stress this:

literally, God says, 'This is my Son, my beloved.' To question Peter's explanation of Jesus' life work is to question God's explanation of Jesus life-work" (Lucas/Green, pp. 75-77).

"The authority of the apostles is being defended precisely on the issue of whether they spoke about God accurately and authoritatively. Peter's emphasis is that they both saw and heard ... It is not simply their testimony to a series of encounters with Jesus that is important and decisive. They claim to have the right to give the only true interpretation, the unique meaning, of those events, because they heard that interpretation from the mouth of God Himself. The Bible is not the subjective record of a religious [phenomenon] that we can supplement or challenge with our own experience. God has spoken" (Lucas/Green, p. 79). **What we preach is of God.**

Remember, Peter's aim is to stabilize believers whose faith has been shaken by doctrinal error and reckless living. In verses 16-18 the Spirit of God is bolstering our confidence in the reliability of the revelation of God. He wants us to be assured that the gospel we have heard, the gospel we have believed, and the gospel that governs our very lives is of God. Beloved, you can adhere tenaciously to this gospel.

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Review of II Peter 1:1-15

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(**Zech. 14:5; Ps. 118:26; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; II Thess. 1:7-10; I Pet. 1:7**)

Why does Peter zero in on the particular subject of Christ's second coming?
See **II Pet. 3:3-4.**

Here's the issue:

If there is no _____ of Christ there will be no _____ by Christ.
If there is no judgment we can live as we please. See **John 3:19-20.**

And so the strategy of every false teacher is to disparage, to misrepresent the truth of the gospel; to have it perceived as something other than what it is.

But Peter is arguing that what they have been taught is _____.

Peter is defending the authenticity of the gospel he and the other apostles have preached. His strategy is to call two sets of witnesses to testify.

“He calls the New Testament _____ (1:16-18) and the Old Testament _____ (19-21), and requires them to give first-hand evidence about what they saw and heard” (Lucas/Green, p. 73).

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