

A Study of Second Peter

How to Live a Life with Certainty (2 Peter 1:12-21)

"It does not require great learning to be a Christian and be convinced of the truth of the Bible. It requires only an honest heart and a willingness to obey God." ~ Albert Barnes

I. Introduction

Prior to launching into his critique of the false teachers, Peter first addresses the importance of the apostolic message (vv. 12-15). In light of the conflicting rhetoric of the false teachers, Peter warns his audience not to forget what they were taught. Secondly, Peter defends the veracity of the apostolic message (vv. 16-21). Through both apostolic experience and the prophetic word, Peter reminds his audience that their message is ultimately from the Lord.

II. The Importance of the Teachings of the Church (1:3-11)

A. Recalling the Message (vv. 12-15)

v. 12 - Though Peter's death is imminent, his use of the future tense indicates his expectation that there will be an ongoing admonition through his writings. The Greco-Roman world understood how letters "stand in for living speech, and for the living presence of the speakers, each representing its writer to its recipient in his or her inevitable absence" (Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, 39).

vv. 13-14 - The reference to "tent" speaks of his body (see 2 Cor 5:14).

"Reminders are part of the fabric of moral instruction (1 Thess 2:9; 3:4; 4:1; 5:1-2; 2 Thess 3:5, 10)" (Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 211).

Peter recognized that he was about to die. While the apostle does not elaborate *when* the Lord revealed his untimely death, the apostle is most likely referring to a scene recorded in John 21:18-19.

v. 15 - Through his preaching (e.g., Acts 3:19-21) and writings (e.g., 1 Peter), Peter's message would continue to remind believers well after his death (see Schreiner, *1, 2, Peter, Jude*, 311).

B. Validating the Message (vv. 16-21)

1. Rooted in Apostolic Testimony (vv. 16-18)

v. 16a - "cleverly conceited fables" - It appears that Peter's defense of his message stems from a charge leveled by the false teachers. Peter and the other apostles were

accused of telling myths—stories with no basis of reality. The term was highly pejorative and synonymous with “dupery, illusion, [and] the unreal” (*TLNT*, 2:530). Specifically, the false teachers accused Peter of proclaiming an erroneous message that Christ would return and judge.

Observe the use of the plural pronoun “we”. Peter affirms that he joins a group of individuals who have proclaimed this revelation concerning Christ’s second coming (also, see 1 Cor 15:23-24).

vv. 16b-18 - Peter appeals to the Transfiguration of Christ which he, James, and John were privy to witness (see Matt 17:1-5; Mk 9:2-7; Lk 9:28-35).

This event in the life of Christ is crucial for Peter’s argument based upon the following:

- *The Transfiguration depicts the coming Kingdom.* This anticipation guarantees a future event—Peter had personally experienced a foretaste of this Kingdom!
- *The Transfiguration confirms Christ’s deity.* The glory that only belongs to God also belongs to Jesus. Through the use of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, Jesus fulfills the promises given to David.
- *The Transfiguration dispels any doubts about Christ.* One commentator writes, “The one whom God declared to be King will be enthroned. His coming is sure, whatever the pallid objections for the heretics might be (3:4). They raise their doubts, but God the Father, the Majestic Glory, has spoken!” (Green, *2 Peter*, 224).

2. Rooted in Prophetic Witness (vv. 19-21)

v. 19 - “prophetic word” - The specific context (vv. 20-21) suggests that this is a particular reference to Old Testament prophecies related to the day of judgment and salvation.

“made more certain” - Rather than see this as an indication that Peter’s encounter on the Holy Mountain was inferior to Scripture, it is best to see Peter “suggesting that his testimony about the Transfiguration gives to the prophetic word an even greater certainty than it had before” (Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 76).

“light shining in a murky place” - Comparing Scripture with light is a common theme throughout the Old and New Testaments (e.g., Psalm 119:105: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”).

The reference to “day” speaks of the Day of the Lord—a time of judgment of God’s enemies and a time of salvation for His people (see Joel 1:15; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:7, 14). In conjunction with this event is the return of Christ—the morning star. No longer will Scripture need to shine in a dark place. The radiance of the Lord will vanquish all realms of darkness.

v. 20 - There are two ways to interpret this passage:

- “No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own imagination.” (NIV, NET). This translation indicates that prophets interpreted correctly that which the Lord revealed. In this view, Peter is not criticizing his opponents, but defending himself against some of their accusations.

- “No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation.” (ESV, NKJV). An individual cannot make Scripture state whatever he or she desires. The proper interpretation given by the apostles must be heeded. In this view, Peter is criticizing his opponents.

Either view is plausible; although the immediate context (vv. 19 and 21) seems to support the first view.

v. 21 - This verse provides strong support for inspiration (“breathed in”)—the process in which God breathed His Word through the biblical writers (see Matt 4:4; 2 Tim 3:16). Just as the Lord spoke on the Mount of Transfiguration, He has also spoken to the prophets.

Note that the origin of prophecy and its subsequent interpretation stems from God Himself (see Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 324).

As aptly noted by Charles Ryrie, “God sometimes revealed things supernaturally and directly; sometimes He allowed the human writers to compose His message using their freedom of expression. But He breathed out the total product, carrying along the authors in various ways, to give us His message in the words of the Bible” (*Basic Theology*, 81).

III. The Intersect

- A. If God does not lie, then He cannot utter falsehood. If the Scriptures are God’s words, then the words of Scripture must be without error. If there are mistakes in the Bible, even in matters related to history, geography, or dating, then we have no way of limiting those errors. What a praise to know our Scriptures are without error!

Matthew 5:17-18 -

- B. The truthfulness and authority of Scripture cannot be diminished or eliminated by our personal preferences or cultural beliefs/practices.

Matthew 22:29 -

- C. The Lord superintending the very words of Scripture indicates its sufficiency. “The Bible contains all the words of God we need for trusting and obeying him perfectly” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 132).

Deuteronomy 29:29 -

“Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely. Let us not only neglect as doubtful, but boldly set aside as deadly corruptions those pretended expositions which lead us away from the natural meaning.” ~ John Calvin

For further thought . . .

Based upon our study this morning, I invite you to spend some additional time this week reflecting on the following:

Peter highlights in 1:19-21 the importance of God's Word. Examine the following verses and note specifically how the Scriptures relate to your own life:

Psalm 19:7-8 -

Pslam 119:98-100 -

Matthew 7:24-25 -

John 8:31-32 -

Romans 10:17 -

2 Timothy 3:15-17 -