

Week 1 - Salutation and Foundation - 2Peter 1:1-2

Scripture Reading: Romans 3:21-26

Introduction

This morning, we are beginning a new sermon series

Having wrapped up our six-month look at 1Peter last week we are now going to dive into a roughly three-month look at 2Peter that I expect will take us into early October

I've titled this series; "Guarding-Growing-Glorifying - Perseverance through the Waiting" because I believe it sums up the reason Peter gives for writing the letter - the "big idea" of the letter

The big idea of 1Peter was to remind Peter's original audience of their place in God's family and kingdom to encourage them as they sojourned on this earth

In 1Peter the opponents they were dealing with were from outside the church - their neighbors, former friends, and possibly even family members who didn't understand the choices they were making as followers of Christ

But in 2Peter the opponents are going to come from inside the church and instead of hostility and antagonism the recipients of the letter are warned against heresy and apostasy

And Peter will be giving the prescription that will act as a prophylactic against the doctrinal errors being propagated by the false teachers among them

The overall big idea of the letter then is that:

Diligent growth in the true knowledge of Christ protects us against destructive false teaching and prepares us to persevere in godliness while we wait for his promised return

Peter probably wrote this letter from a Roman prison shortly before his death as we see in 1:14 [2Peter 1:14] that Peter was anticipating that his death would be "soon"

So we can view this letter as a kind of testamentary letter on a subject of great importance to Peter because facing the end of life tends to cause one to focus on what is truly vital to communicate

Peter was both a concerned pastor and a champion of theological orthodoxy and he writes this epistle as a final, impassioned plea to grow in spiritual maturity and to guard against false teachers and thereby glorify God as they looked forward to the Lord's return

We will be considering the first two verses of the letter this morning and we could easily breeze past what appears to be the usual greeting we find at the beginning of apostolic letters

But to do so would cause us to miss a great deal of truth that is foundational to the remainder of the letter and to our faith itself

Please join me in your Bible and follow along as I read our text for this morning [2Peter 1:1-2]:

Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

*To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:
May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*

If you are taking notes, we will first be looking at the salutation or greeting portion and what we can learn from it

Then we will turn our focus to the foundation of our faith that Peter reveals as he opens his letter

I. The Salutation

The letter begins in the style of the period by naming the author and, in this case it is “Simeon Peter”

As one begins to study 2Peter, they are immediately hit with the question as to the true authorship of the letter

However, there really is no sufficient reason not to take the letter at face value and we can rest assured that the apostle Peter was the author as stated

However, the particular name, or better still, the combination of names, Peter uses here is unique

Peter is known by several different names in the New Testament

Matthew refers to him in **Matthew 4:18** as *Simon (who is called Peter)* and as *Simon Peter* in **Matthew 16:16**

Then Jesus called him *Simon Bar-Jonah* and simply *Peter* in verses 17 and 18 [**Matthew 16:17-18**]

John introduces the Greek rendition of his name, *Cephas*, in **John 1:42**

And Paul calls him *Simeon* when speaking before the Jerusalem council in **Acts 15:14** and that is only sensible because Simeon is the Hebrew form of Simon

And he is called *Simon Peter* on many occasions but the name Simeon Peter is unique to our passage

But Simon was his name before Jesus called him to be his disciple and called him Peter and the letter clearly states that he is its author of the letter before us and we will consider that sufficient

Then Peter goes on to describe himself as a “*servant and apostle of Jesus Christ*”

The word translated as “servant” is the Greek *doulos* which can also be translated as “slave” or even “bondservant”

Unfortunately, the word “slave” is tainted for us by our understanding of 19th Century slavery in this country giving us a false understanding of slavery in Peter’s culture because slavery in his day didn’t have a racial basis

And “servant” really doesn’t fully convey what is meant here because we tend to associate a servant with someone like a butler who is voluntarily in the employ of someone

Of course, even in Peter’s day, a slave was considered to be a possession - a “human tool” if you would that is possessed and used by a master and the fundamental social division in that era was between slave and free

But a slave was also considered to be a kind of extension of their master and they often served as an agent of their master and therefore carried something of their master’s status

A servant or slave of Caesar for instance represented Caesar and needed to be treated with appropriate respect - not because of who he was as a slave but because of whose slave he was and because what was done to him was done to Caesar’s property

And a *doulos* of Christ is someone who is the completely owned by and devoted property of Christ

But Peter also calls himself an “apostle of Jesus Christ” which introduces another odd but insightful pairing

In fact, it is only found in two other places where Paul refers to himself in this way **Romans 1:1** and **Titus 1:1**

An apostle is a messenger who is sent forth to speak on the authority of another - an ambassador who possesses the right credentials and speaks with the authority of their master who sent them

So Peter’s combination of the two terms - servant and apostle - serves to highlight Peter’s role as one who is commissioned by God rather than underscoring a contrast between his humility as a slave and authority as an apostle

Given the nature and purpose of the letter we should see in his description of himself that Peter is stressing his derived authority as one whom Christ has sent and who is completely devoted to carrying out his mission

And we should therefore understand that this letter is meant to be received as an official letter rather than a friendly one

The next thing that letters of Peter's day did after listing the sender was list the recipient - who the letter was written to
 In his first letter we saw Peter indicate the location of his readers [1Peter 1:1] and Paul tended to do the same in his letters

But here Peter doesn't do that and instead he simply identifies his readers as *"those who have attained a faith of equal standing"* - as people of the faith

But he does indicate something further about them later on in the letter as he reveals that these are likely the same people to whom he wrote his first letter in 3:1 [**2Peter 3:1**]

Therefore, they are most likely the believers who were located in the provinces of Asia Minor

We cannot say with absolute certainty that the letter Peter mentions in 3:1 is the letter of 1Peter and not some other letter that is unknown to us but it is generally accepted among Bible scholars that 1Peter is the letter in view here

Those are the main points we want to take from the salutation so let's turn our attention to the foundation of our faith

II. The Foundation of our Faith

I want to show you three foundational or fundamental truths that Peter reveals that we could easily miss with a casual reading of his opening lines

The first thing we want to notice is:

A. The quality of our faith

In verse 1 [**2Peter 1:1**] Peter writes - *To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours*

And his statement should cause us to question who the "ours" refers to

Since he is writing to churches that were likely primarily made up of Gentiles we might consider whether he is saying their faith is equal to that of Jewish Christians

And when he says "a faith" we could take his meaning to be "the faith" or the body of truth that every person must believe to be saved

But what Peter is more likely referring to is clarified when we consider that he is writing this letter in light of his impending death

Most commentators agree that the faith Peter is referring to is the demonstration of faith - the reliance on the blood of Christ for salvation as demonstrated by the apostles

It seems that Peter is comparing the dying apostolic generation with the postapostolic generation and putting them on the same level

The term he uses for "equal standing" is found only here in the Bible but it was commonly used in secular literature to refer to foreigners who had been granted the same privileges of citizenship as natural-born citizens

We read in **Jude 1:3** how the apostles handed down or "delivered" the faith to the church

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

And Peter is saying that the faith of his readers was equal to his faith as an apostle - it's a continuation of the same faith

This would have stood in stark contrast to the gnostic doctrines of some false teachers of his day who spoke of an inner circle of special knowledge that was only available and attainable by a privileged few of the most faithful

I want to take a moment to talk also about how we come to this faith because the ESV unfortunately obscures Peter's meaning a bit

The word translated as “obtained” actually means to receive by lot, with the implication that the process is related somehow to divine will or favor - it is according to God’s sovereign choice and rather than being earned

Whereas to obtain can easily mean to acquire by effort and saving faith is actually according to the process of divine choice and thus might better be translated as “received” or “were chosen to have”

Our saving faith is a grace gift from God that is founded on the apostolic witness and is therefore of the same quality or kind of faith as the apostles received and demonstrated

Also, the action of giving the succeeding spiritual generation a faith of equal honor to that of the apostles was an act of divine righteousness and justice

God has granted each succeeding generation faith equal to that of the apostles who personally witnessed Christ without favoritism or partiality

Next, we want to see:

B. The object and source of our faith

Peter writes in the last portion of verse 1 [**2Peter 1:1**] *by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ*

To refer to Jesus by the title “God” doesn’t seem at all odd to us and it was not at all uncommon to refer to Jesus as God by the second century

But the New Testament rarely refers to Jesus as God

Of course see it done in **John 1:1**–

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And we see Thomas’ confession after viewing the risen Christ in **John 20:28** where he exclaimed “*My Lord and my God!*”

And again in **Hebrews 1:8-9** quoting from Psalm 45 –

But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”

Lastly, we see the identical grammatical construction in **Titus 2:13**

We can’t be certain what exactly Peter means by calling Jesus God but he almost certainly wasn’t indicating a fully developed Trinitarian theology as that came later but surely he did so intentionally and not casually

And Peter leaves no doubt that he considers Jesus Christ coequal in nature with God the Father

Likewise, his calling Jesus Savior was a relatively new phenomenon when Peter wrote this letter as most of the references to Jesus as Savior are found in the later books of the Bible

But “Savior” is also a divine title

We see God the Father called “Savior” in **Psalm 106:21** and again in **Isaiah 43:3**

So what we have in Peter’s words is one of the clearest declarations in the New Testament of the early church’s conviction of the deity of Christ whose very name means “Yahweh saves”

Remember back when the angel came to Joseph and instructed him about Jesus’ birth saying [**Matthew 1:21**]

She [Mary] will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Jesus is the source of our salvation by his sacrificial death and resurrection on our behalf

And Jesus is also the object of our faith as we know we cannot rely on ourselves but must look to him for our salvation

When we talk about faith what is important is not the quality or quantity of the faith we have

Matthew 17:20 relates Jesus speaking of having faith the size of a mustard seed being able to do mighty things

And that tells us that what is important is the object of our faith

And when we put our faith - that is to say our complete trust and reliance - in Christ as our God and Savior, even if our faith is meager and small, we have saving faith through Christ

Having considered the quality and the object and source of our faith, we want to now turn our attention to:

C. The blessings of our faith

The introduction of the letter concludes with a blessing in the form of a wish-prayer

And the first half of verse 2 [**2Peter 1:2**] corresponds exactly with 1Peter 1:2b with grace and peace being the characteristic Greek and Hebrew greetings

Peter writes:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

To show grace means to show kindness or favor toward someone

In the Old Testament finding favor before God, or before a notable or a ruler, was often critical to survival

And we can readily see how the term can be applied to finding the favor of the divine King as we see in the New Testament

Peter's original audience had already received favor or grace from God in that they have received a faith equal to that of the apostles

And grace is the means by which we come to know God in the first place and then it's by grace that we receive reconciliation, or peace, with God

Now Peter wishes them even further favor from God - in fact he wishes them multiplied grace and peace

This grace and peace comes to us through the "*knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*"

There are a couple of things we need to note in that phrase

First, whereas Peter called Jesus "*our God and Savior*" in verse 1, here he makes a distinction between God the Father and Jesus the Son

So in these two opening verses we find the raw material for Trinitarian theology even though it would not have been fully formed yet

Second, the word Peter uses for "*knowledge*" is a less usual term that has more to do with 'coming to know' and therefore likely points to the knowledge that was gained through their conversion

It's used in that sense in **Hebrews 10:26** and it fits our context here as well

What I believe Peter has in mind here is knowing someone for who they really are and Peter is focusing on what his original audience came to know God and Jesus through their conversion rather than knowledge they developed later

It's knowledge that can only be known by the converted

But what is truly important is that the knowledge is more than intellectual - knowing things about God and Jesus

It's even more than the personal knowledge one gains in the sense of having met someone

Peter is speaking of knowledge that results in committed living and that will become clearer as we proceed through the letter

But for now, in verse 2, Peter's focus is on the conversion aspect whereby these Gentile Christians came to know both God and Jesus in an intimate, personal, transforming relationship

And because they have come to know the Father and Son for who they really are, that they are in a position to receive multiplied favor and well-being

It would not be too much of a stretch to say that the rest of Peter's letter assumes this foundation for its readers as knowledge and growing in knowledge is going to play a major part in refuting the false teachers among them

Christ-followers must understand their salvation if they are going to withstand the attacks when they come

Conclusion

False teachers, by definition, attack the gospel from within the ranks of the church itself

The apostle Paul warned of them and the need to be prepared when he spoke to the Ephesian elders in **Acts 20:29-31** saying:

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

We must be on guard against false teachers and, just like when detecting counterfeit money, the best way to recognize what is false is familiarity with that which is genuine

When one becomes intimately aware of the look and the feel of genuine currency a fake bill stands out like a neon light

So Peter begins this second letter that deals with false teachers with a reminder of what our salvation entails

And he informs his readers straight away that there is one gospel - the gospel and faith of the apostles that has been handed down

There is no new gospel no matter how convincingly one may be portrayed by hucksters and con-men in the church

The cure for ignorance is knowledge and the cure for falsehood is truth so we must endeavor to know the truth as we find it in Scripture

But, Peter isn't concerned that his readers possess intellectual knowledge and we cannot stop there either

It's one thing to know a thing theoretically and another to know a thing experientially and every person must be trusting in Christ alone for the gospel to be effective in their life

That's the only way to experience the grace and peace from Peter's blessing and the only way to experience eternal life

So there are questions each and every person must answer for themselves:

- Have you truly "obtained" the faith of the apostles by trusting Christ as your only hope for salvation or are you still outside the faith?
- Are you truly a *duolos* of Christ who is committed to him and submitting to him in all things as his prized possession?
- Have you experienced the knowledge of God that comes from becoming one of his children and are you growing in grace and peace through the knowledge of God and Jesus?

Those are the foundational questions of the faith

Let's pray

Romans 3:21-26 (page 941)

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.