

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

2 Peter 1

Introduction

The apostle Peter wrote this book shortly before his death in 67 or 68 AD. It is joyful in tone but also shows concerns about the growth of false teachings. Perseverance in holding to the gospel, cultivating Christian virtues, the return of Jesus and judgment are major themes.

Greeting (1:1-2)

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

1. Peter describes himself as both a servant and apostle. He asserts his authority, not by his choice or effort, but by the calling of Jesus. Also, he admits that he is a bondservant to Jesus by his acceptance of him as his lord and savior. *Why is this a powerful reminder to born-again Christians?* (Jn 1:9-13; 1 Cor 6:19-20)
2. Salvation is totally a gift given by God to those whom he chooses. This righteousness comes through faith in Jesus. It is the most precious thing that a born-again person has. It defines him and gives him purpose and hope in living. (Eph 2:1-10) *Do you have this precious gift?* If you are not sure, examine yourself to see who and what are most important to you. (2 Cor 13:5)
3. Grace is power given by God to believe in him, recognize his will, and to do it. Christians should pray for grace every day. Grace is given to born-again believers who know Jesus as their savior and lord.
4. Peter affirms that God and Jesus are one. If you know Jesus, you know the Father. Jesus said that, if you have seen him, you have seen the Father. (Jn 14:9-11)

Grow into Christ Likeness (1:3-14)

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is near-sighted and blind, and he has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

1. God is the power source for faith, salvation, good works, spiritual growth into a deeper love with Jesus and transformation into his likeness. He gives us everything that we need and so all glory and honor belong to him alone. God does this for those he calls and chooses to save. Humans are purely recipients of his divine energy and we can do nothing that is of eternal value without it. This is why born-again Christians are eternally secure. It is a work of God that does not depend upon human performance or effort. (Eph 2:1-10)
2. Peter says “make every effort” to co-operate with the leading of the Holy Spirit so that you become more like Jesus and do his will for your life. Spiritual development and being effective as a Christian can be slowed when we disobey or are slow to respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The “effort” that is required is a willingness to die to self and live for Jesus. This involves giving up our will and ways. (Lk 9:23-27)
3. *What are some of “the great and precious promises of God” given to born-again Christians? Why are these promises certain and not like human promises? What happens when God fulfills these promises?* (Rom 6:14; 1 Cor 10:13; 2 Cor 12:9-10; Phil 4:13; Jas 4:6-8; 1 Jn 2: 3-11, 3:1-3)
4. Notice the order of growth in Christlikeness: faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. *What are some ways*

that these traits build on each other? Why do you think that love is listed last? What kinds of changes are required for a person to love God and others above all else?

The Transfiguration and Prophecy (1:15-21)

And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

1. Peter recalls the transfiguration of Jesus to impress upon us that the written truths of the Bible are based on what he experienced. *Why do you think Peter chose the transfiguration and not some other miraculous events to impress upon believers the importance of his teachings?* (Mt 17:1-5)
2. The prophets of the Old Testament received knowledge of the coming Messiah and his kingdom. This knowledge was like the light of dawn that gradually makes things clear. Jesus is like the rising sun which is the morning star. When he entered the world, he completed the revelation regarding the Messiah and his coming kingdom. (Jn 1:9-14)
3. *How is the presence of Jesus in your life like a light that changes the way that you view yourself and the world?*
4. God provided knowledge to forty or more people who wrote the books of the Bible. Therefore, the Bible represents the ideas that God wants humans to know about themselves, creation and God. This knowledge came to these people. They did not make it up. The ideas of the Bible flow in a consistent and logical way through thousands of years and many people who wrote the books. History is HIS STORY of God's great love in creating and redeeming mankind and his creation.

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

2 Peter 2

Warnings About False Teachers (2:1-14)

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish. They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood!

1. False teachers are many times masters of deception by mixing truths with errors. They begin by introducing ideas that conflict with the Bible in subtle ways. They may say these ideas are reinterpretations based on modern culture. They deny or undermine the inspiration and authority of the Bible. Some examples include: denying the Divinity of Jesus, the Triune nature of God, the virgin birth of Jesus,

his death as a substitute for sinners, his resurrection, eternal punishment, salvation by faith and grace alone, universal salvation, and many miracles. *Can you name some churches that promote these errors?*

2. False teachers usually are full of pride. They say that they have superior knowledge, and they look down on those who hold to the Bible as simpletons. They many times take advantage of those who follow them by making up “revelations” that give them more power or wealth. (Prov 16:18-19)
3. False teachers may be prosperous, popular and powerful. However, God will judge them severely. Peter gives examples of groups of people who were prosperous, promiscuous and lived for the pleasures of life. God’s judgment fell on them swiftly while they were enjoying themselves. If angels who rebelled against God did not escape his judgment, neither will humans. (Lk 17:22-34)
4. False teachers appeal to the sinful nature of people by telling them that God will forgive everyone and nobody (or just a few very bad people like Hitler) will be punished in hell. They condone all kinds of sexual sins and they even say that such sins are natural and so they are good. *What are some examples of how some Christian denominations have welcomed or even promoted evil ideas that conflict with the Bible? How does a lack of disciplinary action or consistency in applying Biblical truths promote the corruption of Christians?*

More Warnings (2:15-22)

They have left the straightway and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—a beast without speech—who spoke with a man’s voice and restrained the prophet’s madness. These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to it vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”

1. Balaam was a Midianite prophet hired by the king of Moab to curse the Israelites. Peter says that false teachers are like this prophet. They use their knowledge, talents and position for personal gain. They appeal to people and influence them, but they are not born-again. They seek glory, honor and power for themselves and not for God.
2. False teachers are like wells without water. They promise those who follow them health, wealth and wisdom but they can't deliver what they promise.
3. Humans are slaves to whatever holds their devotion. This might be wealth, power, beauty, sports or family. These things command out attention, resources and energy. God commands mankind to love him and be completely in bondage to serving him. (Dt 6:1-5) *What are your priorities in life? How do these priorities determine how you live?*
4. False teachers may appear to be moral people. They may have impressive knowledge about Jesus and the Bible, but they have never been born-again. These people are like the man who was temporarily cleansed of an evil demon. Eventually, the demon returned and brought others. Without the Holy Spirit's presence in born-again believers, humans desire evil due their depraved and rebellious nature. Moral reforms are temporary without the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. (Mt 12:43-45; Rom 7:14-25; Gal 5:16-26)

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Sunday School Lesson

2 Peter 3

The Return of the Lord (3:1-13)

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

5. Those who are enemies of Jesus and the Bible are usually arrogant and full of pride. They scoff at those who believe and think that they are ignorant. Schools and universities teach humanistic theories like evolution as though they were solid facts. They do not believe in miracles or that God will suddenly appear and change the world order. *What happened to the scoffers in Noah's day?*
6. Scientists have evidence that there have been many cataclysms that have suddenly affected the world. They believe that there have been asteroid collisions have caused sudden climate changes that have altered life on earth. They believe that most of these events are separated by millions of years. Humans live less

than one hundred years. Therefore, our perspective is very limited. People have a false sense that the daily routines of life will continue. This false sense of security is suddenly shattered by wars, famine, plagues, earthquakes and other natural disasters.

7. Jesus promised that he would return to the earth after his ascension into heaven. There are many examples of Christians who have sold their possessions and lived in communal communities because they expected the imminent return of Jesus. The Bible teaches that Jesus will return suddenly but there will be signs and warnings of his return. (Mt 24: 3-31; 1 Th 5:1-9; 2 Th 2:1-12)
8. God will judge the world by fire. By fire it will be purified and recreated into a holy place for the dwelling of the Lord Jesus. (Rev 20:11- Rev 21:8)
9. God has always had the same plan for the creation and redemption of mankind and the universe. This plan will not change. It allows for enough time for each human he creates to live according to his calling and to fulfill his will. (Ezek 24:14; Mal 3:6)

Judgment Day (3:14-18)

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

5. *What is the born-again Christian looking forward to? How does this motivate us to live?*
6. Christians are called to live holy lives directed by the Holy Spirit. This will make us more like Jesus. Obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit produces a sense of peace and unity with God. When we obey God, we feel his pleasure and it give us joy. *What are some things that you have done to obey God that have given you peace and joy? How do you feel when you struggle with doing God's will?*
7. God is patient. He has waited thousands of years to fulfill his plan of salvation and

his promises. Imagine him sitting in heaven on his throne watching billions of people commit trillions of sins. He allows this to happen in order that those who will believe in Jesus will be born and reach the point where they receive the gift of faith. (Rom 2:4-11)

8. Peter mentions Paul's writings and confirms that they are also authoritative and inspired by God. He warns about being misled by "ignorant and unstable" people. It is important to test the teachings of our leaders and make sure that they agree with the Bible.
9. Grace is power to do God's will. Knowing Jesus is being born-again. To grow in this knowledge is to deepen our love for Jesus and our obedience to his plans for our lives. We must never forget or stop praising Jesus for our salvation. However, we must press forward in our relationship with Jesus, being transformed by following him as our Lord. *How has the lordship of Jesus changed your life? How is he changing it now?*