

Dear Friends,

How often Scripture sets its own objectives for various letters or messages. And how sadly often sincere believers ignore Scripture's signposts and strive to force Scripture to teach what they want it to teach. Perhaps the chief of such passages is Paul's description of the Lord's intent in giving us the "Inspired" of God Scriptures. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 KJV) God gave the Bible to His people for their needs, instruction, and comfort. The Bible is not God's roadmap for lost sinners to earn their own salvation. Likewise, when Peter started to write 2 Peter 2, he set our expectations. Be aware of false teachers and their devious and deceptive ways. If we keep this inspired objective in mind as we study 2 Peter 2, we shall learn so much more from it, and we shall avoid some of the major difficulties we would face with any other objective.

The chief objective that Peter had in 2 Peter is simply stated early in the letter. Take great care and diligence to work to grow your faith into a fruitful faith, a faith anchored in the inspired writings of

Scripture, not in private opinions or interpretations, and especially not based on wrested ideas from false teachers. Peter begins the letter with fruitful faith that builds on a sound and right knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus, and he ends the letter with a companion admonition that we ever work to grow deeper and stronger in grace and in our knowledge of the Lord. Everything between these two verses should be framed to contribute to this stated objective.

I have repeated the point so many times that my friends occasionally tease me. My top three rules for a right interpretation and understanding of Scripture are 1) context, 2) context, and 3) context. Building on that foundation of contextual study of Scripture, I would add a fourth goal. Whatever the topic or theme we study in Scripture, always ponder as part of your study; how does this lesson, rightly divided/interpreted, impact my life today? What can I gain from it to help me live my life today as a follower of Jesus all for His glory and for the edifying service of His people? 2 Peter provides us with a rich resource to frame that kind of study for

our daily Christian life. ***How much time do we spend daily in our study of that amazing Book?***

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

2 Peter

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:2-4 KJV)

Those opening greetings and blessings in New Testament letters are not mere literary form. Each greeting reminds the first recipients of the letter—and us—of unique blessings which

they needed to remember. Some commentaries explain our study verses from 2 Peter as a refutation of early gnostic teaching which attempted to invade Christianity. Possible, but, if that were the need of the moment, we'd expect to see continuing teaching in the body of the letter against those gnostic errors, as we see in John's epistles.

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. Our gospel knowledge of Jesus gives us grace and personal peace and joy, not eternal salvation. Children of God who lack a thorough knowledge of Jesus also lack a full measure of both grace and peace. As Peter opens this letter with a reference to the blessings of the knowledge of God and Jesus, he also closes the letter with a similar thought.

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18 KJV)

Knowledge is a function of natural life, not its cause. We are not born naturally because we learn enough to be born. We are first born; then we grow and learn. Scripture teaches the same principle for our spiritual life. We are first born again; then we should begin the process of growing in grace and our knowledge of God and of Jesus. In Jesus' teaching Nicodemus about new birth, He emphasized new birth **prior** to either seeing or entering the kingdom of God.

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises. We have an open window into heaven's storehouse by the Lord's gracious provision, enabled and enjoyed by our knowledge of the Lord.

As we begin this letter, the question logically arrives. If we gain grace and peace by our knowledge of the Lord, how do we gain that knowledge? Peter will fully answer this question in the letter. In fact, the answer to this question

frames much of the content of 2 Peter. Study the unique theme of each chapter in this letter.

Chapter 1. The “more sure word of prophecy”

After the brief introduction, Peter takes us directly into a foundational truth regarding the character of godly Biblical faith. (2 Peter 1:5-12 KJV) Authentic Biblical faith is not about mere knowledge, how much we know, though sound knowledge of our God forms the firm foundation for our faith. ***You can't have faith in anyone whom you do not know.*** Your faith cannot be any stronger in that person than your knowledge of them. We honor the Lord in our lives by using our knowledge of the Lord to grow a fruitful faith. In verses 5-7, Peter teaches us to use our confident knowledge (Faith built on our knowledge of our Lord) to grow seven specific principles of spiritual maturity and stability. The extent to which we add—and live our lives by—these principles measures our personal maturity in our faith, as well as predicting our fruitfulness of faith in the service of others, not in personal enrichment for ourselves. In the process of this

teaching, Peter warns that failure to grow these seven principles, and living by them, can render us so out of touch with the Lord and with our own spirituality that we are liable to forget that we were saved, (2 Peter 1:9 KJV) Our Biblical goal should be fruitful knowledge that guides us to serve our Lord and others, not gain for self. Why this conclusion? Simple. Peter frames our conduct in either growing or failing in these seven qualities as “*fruitful*,” as bearing fruit. No “Fruit tree” grows its fruit for its own benefit or consumption, but for its owner who grows it, cares for it, and harvests it for his and his household’s use. A mature and fruitful faith will avoid self-focused gain in favor of doing our faith for the service and help of others. The extent to which we do our Christian life with gain for self, or for others, reveals how we either succeed or fail in adding these qualities to our faith. Add them, and you invest your labors of life to the ministry and service of others. Neglect them, and you invest in gaining for self and working to manipulate others for your own gain.

In verses 10-11, we are admonished to apply full diligence to make our calling and election

sure. Nothing we do can make our inheritance in heaven surer than the death and resurrection of Jesus. I suggest that Peter is not teaching salvation by our works in these verses. The man who spoke these words, cannot—and would not—contradict them.

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. (Acts 15:11 KJV; words of Peter)

I suggest that Peter's focus on a fruitful faith continues in these verses. Only as we add those behaviors to our faith do we find the welcomed admission to the blessings of our eternal inheritance in the here and now. In Ephesians 1:14, Paul refers to "*the earnest of our inheritance*," the blessings that belong to our eternal inheritance, but made available now for the child of grace who lives life by the way of faith.

Peter concludes Chapter 1 by reminding us of something far surer and more enlightening than any personal experience, even his personal

experience with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, the writings of Scripture.

Chapter 2. False teachers

In the first two verses of Chapter 2, Peter reminds us that all who profess the faith of Jesus do not live by that “*more sure word of prophecy*” in Scripture. The Old Testament, especially the books that contain the history of the people of God in the Old Testament, is riddled with accounts of false prophets, of men who claimed to be from God and to speak the words of God, but they taught error. He warns us that our age is no different. We shall also be exposed to false prophets.

As the false prophets in the Old Testament claimed to speak words from God, so also do false prophets or teachers in the New Testament age. Few indeed who claim the faith of Jesus will reject the Bible. However, as Peter warns in the closing of this letter, false prophets in this age will “*wrest* (Twist out of their true meaning, like the bones in a joint are twisted out of their socket) *the scriptures to their own destruction.*” (2 Peter 3:16-17 KJV) In that final warning, Peter

rehearses the same truth he affirmed in the first two chapters. Believers constantly face a grave choice, follow the Scriptures, rightly joined together and understood, or follow false teachers and their wrested ideas. Beware the wresting teachers and their wrested ideas, remain steadfast and stable in your faith.

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18 KJV)

One word of caution. 2 Peter 2 is a difficult passage to read and understand, doubly so if we ignore Peter's focus in the first two verses. There is a tendency across various theological traditions to ignore his intent and to "Wrest" the chapter to delve into a probe of who is born again and who is not in the various descriptions in the chapter. When Peter introduced the chapter, he didn't write a word about our reading the chapter to learn who is and who isn't born again. His purpose in the chapter is to expose the ungodly motives and consequences of false teachers and

their ideas. Some false teachers may not be born again; some may be deceived children of God. But Peter's stated purpose ignores this fruitless diversion and warns us against any false teacher and his wrested misinterpretation and misuse of Scripture. If we read 2 Peter apart from Peter's thematic introduction to the chapter, and if we conclude, for example, that all false teachers are not born again, what benefit—what edification value—have we gained? None! However, if we follow Peter's inspired theme, we equip ourselves to know and to prepare our minds against false prophets by immersing our thoughts in God's pure and "***more sure word of prophecy***," Scripture "rightly divided" and not wrested out of joint and the Holy Spirit's intended meaning.

Chapter 3. One major example of false teaching and rejection of the gospel

After leading us through the two contrasting mindsets of the first two chapters, Peter devotes most of the third chapter to a specific example of false teachers and their ideas.

This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.
(2 Peter 3:1-4 KJV)

A pure mind, righteously “stirred up,” awakened and energized rightly by the words of Scripture, rightly taught and harmoniously linked together, is a believer’s only effective defense against false teachers and their wrested ideas.

If ever a lesson exemplifies the grave truth that ideas have consequences, 2 Peter 3 stands near the head of the list.

Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.
Jesus’ first “coming” was prior to when Peter

wrote these words. Peter and faithful believers had some sense of the coming judgment against Jerusalem and the temple because of their rejection of Jesus. But they did not obsess about that event. As this letter demonstrates, their faith was on Jesus and the good news of the gospel.

Where is the promise of his coming? As we learn from both letters to the Thessalonians, as well as 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Timothy 2, as just a few reminders, the victory of Jesus in His first coming assures us that He shall come again in regal victory to bring His glorious and eternal purpose of redemption of His chosen people to a conclusion. When those who claim to believe in Jesus compromise their faith, one of the first truths they deny is the Biblical teaching on the Second Coming. How old is this world? How long have people lived and died? How full are cemeteries? Unbelieving skeptics who claim to believe in Jesus, but who wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction and to the shipwrecked faith of those who believe their wrested message, will point to the status quo. Everything has been the same from the beginning. Why do

you “Traditional” Christians think anything will change?

Peter answers the unbelieving false teachers’ question. God is not a creature of time. With Him, one day or a thousand years makes no difference. After a thousand years, He is no older than He was at the dawn of creation. Therefore, the date of His coming is immaterial. The truth of the gospel, affirmed by Jesus’ personal literal, bodily resurrection guarantees our own resurrection to be with Him in eternal glory, as well as the literal resurrection of the wicked to face His certain, but delayed judgment and their righteous condemnation.

Forget date setting. Ignore the false teachers’ wrested ideas. Build your faith—and your life—on the certain truth of His glorious return.

If we believe this truth of the Lord’s return, how then should we live our lives today? Peter teaches us.

*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, **what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,***

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? (2 Peter 3:11-12 KJV; emphasis added)

In the skeptical and unbelieving world in which we find ourselves, we need—oh, how we need—Peter’s message. The world around us is dark—and growing darker. So? ***Jesus is coming!*** In His time and in His way! Do we obsess about the darkness and fight it by beating the air? Or do we keep our hearts, minds, and our daily lives on Jesus, His resurrection, His “Resurrection gospel,” and His certain return? Our answer to these questions will either manifest our compromise because of the darkness around us—or it will transform our lives to truly be His light, His city faithfully and permanently situated on a hill. What shall it be? How then shall we live?

Elder Joe Holder