

No.28, 2 Peter

Some points about this epistle are easily discerned. For example, it verifies that Peter wrote this letter, ch 1: 1. It also confirms that he, Peter, wrote two epistles, ch 3: 1. It was written to the same people as were addressed in Peter's first epistle, see the same verse. Also, it was written when Peter was very close to the end of his life, ch 1: 14. Note that Peter makes this reference to his death in the light of what Christ Himself had told him, John 13: 36; 21: 18 & 19. Other points of interest are that the writer had been a witness of the transfiguration of Christ, ch 1: 17 & 18; and he was well acquainted with Paul, was in close bonds of love & fellowship with Paul, and that Paul had written to the same people as Peter now addresses, ch 3: 15.

Ch 1: 14 also makes it very clear that Peter, as he approached death, certainly had no fear for himself. However, he was concerned about the well-being of the Lord's people; their spiritual protection and safety. The reason for his concern was that those to whom he wrote were obviously subject to the most wicked and devious assaults by the most unscrupulous men – men who were apostates from Christ and the Gospel. The epistle is replete with references to the particular errors and practices of these men who had abandoned the Gospel in those very times.

1. Ch 2: 1 – they were deniers of the person and work of Christ. They denied the *Lord*, the title signifying His true deity; and they denied His work – note the reference to Christ's purchase of sinners. The sense of the words "*that bought them...*" could be twofold. First, these apostates had professed and then denied Christ, which means that they denied the one they had claimed had bought them. Or in the second place, the pronoun "them" is a reference to the Lord's people in view in the first part of the verse, including the recipients of this letter. The Lord had bought them but now these apostates denied their Redeemer.

2. Ch 2: 13, 14, & 19-22 – they were openly & flagrantly immoral in their lifestyle, even to the extent of practising such sin in connection with the gatherings of the saints.

3. Ch 2: 18 & 3: 16 – they were adept at using words, even God's word, in order to justify & excuse this wickedness.

4. Ch 3: 16 again – they pretended to give respect to the Scriptures but perverted them to gain support for their empty theories.

Again I must remind you that these wicked men presenting their evil doctrines were present among the people to whom Peter wrote & were imposing great danger on God's work. Therefore, Peter was moved by the Spirit to write this epistle which contains a devastating exposure and condemnation of apostasy and all for the purpose of alerting and instructing God's people in the face of such apostasy. Peter's method of enabling these Christians to stand fast is that of setting before them again the basic truths of the Gospel. Note that five times he stresses the necessity of reminding the Church of foundational truths – ch 1: 12, 13, 15 & 3: 1, 2. Note in ch 3: 17 & 18 Peter's final exhortation. It stresses that the only way to withstand error & persevere in the Christian life is by growing in the knowledge of Christ.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST IS DERIVED FROM THE SCRIPTURES

But growth in the knowledge of Christ is only possible on a certain foundation, namely the authority of the Scriptures, both of the Old & New Testaments. This is one of Peter's major points in this epistle. In fact one of the first matters to which he gives attention – after his introductory remarks – is the authority of Scripture.

See ch 1: 16-21. In this passage Peter sets forth an amazing thing in order to emphasize Scriptural authority – he shows that the authority of Scripture is paramount to anything else, even the genuine subjective spiritual experience. Note vs. 16-18 – Peter focuses on one of the fundamentals of the Christian religion, namely the second advent of Christ. He then relates to the experience on the mount of Transfiguration, essentially showing that it was a preview of Christ's return. He stresses the authenticity of that event by stating clearly that he and his colleagues were on the mount and heard the voice of God. Thus, he appeals to the old maxim of an issue being established by a plurality of reliable witnesses, and thereby shows that his readers could be sure that the event of Christ's transfiguration took place.

But Peter then goes a step farther in vs.19-21 by showing that the God's Word is of greater authority than the eyewitness of even an apostle. Note v.19 – literally reads "*the prophetic word...*" referring to the Scriptures, which Peter declares to be "more sure" than even the apostolic witness of eye and ear. He then shows that the authority of Scripture rests on the truth of its divine origin, v.20; a point amplified in v.21. In fact, the words "in old time" could also be read *at any time*, thus taking in Peter and the other Apostles as writers of Scripture. Thus, these verses stress that the Old & New Testaments are inspired of the Spirit of God and are of equal authority; ch 3: 2. In placing such a prominent emphasis on the divine origin & authority of Scripture, Peter is essentially showing that the knowledge of Christ can only be derived from God's word & believers can only grow in the knowledge of Christ by searching the Scriptures daily.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST IS COMPRISED OF THE FUNDAMENTALS OF HIS PERSON & WORK

See ch. 1: 12 & note the final words "*established in the present truth.*" The words "the present truth" signify the truth that the believer already possesses; which is the truth of the Gospel already received and by which one is saved. This is a vital verse because it teaches that this knowledge of Christ that is essential to being safeguarded against error is comprised of the fundamentals of Christ's person & work by which we have been saved. In many circles there is the thinking that spiritual maturity only comes as a result of growing beyond the basics of the Gospel. But this is a great mistake – spiritual growth is based on the essential & foundational truths that pertain to Christ. Yes – as time goes by we should enter into a deeper & fuller understanding of these foundational truths. But that does not mean that these basic truths do not contribute to spiritual growth: they do; and they alone do. That is the meaning of ch 1: 12.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST IS WHO HE IS & WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR HIS PEOPLE

See the opening verse of the epistle, ch 1: 1 & note its closing words – "*the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*" In these words there are not two divine persons but one according to the original construction of the verse; and that one divine person is Christ. So, Christ is both God & Saviour – and this is His person, this is who He is. Then there is His work in view in the words "the righteousness of God and our Saviour." This is the righteousness of Christ for His people; that righteousness that flows out of His perfect obedience in life and death. On that basis, as this very opening verse shows, sinners "*have obtained like precious faith.*" In other words, God's people receive faith and salvation on the basis of the work of Christ their God and Saviour. On the basis of that knowledge we are to grow; and in growing we will be enabled to resist apostasy.