



DIVINE PROMISES FOR ABUNDANT LIVING

P e t e r 1 : 1 - 4

PREAMBLE

You'll notice this morning that we're taking a break from 1 Corinthians. As I was looking at what's covered in the next chapters, I realized it would require some advanced planning. First, we as elders need time to study the various moral and theological issues to ensure that we are on the same page. Second, we'll want the younger kids excused from some of the sermons as they deal quite openly and explicitly with matters of sexuality and sexual morality. So we will return to 1 Cor. in Sept., picking up at chapter 5.

Between today and Sept, we'll spend time in 2 Peter. I started my interim period with CBC with a series on 1 Peter about a year ago, so this will be a nice follow-up and a bookend to that series. The content in 2 Peter complements 1 Cor. quite nicely and shows that there was consistency of thought and teaching among the Apostles.

You may have noticed that we've focused a lot on topics and texts related to leadership and authority in the church. This has coincided with seeking to establish a biblical understanding of Elders and Deacons here at CBC. 2 Peter touches on that topic as well, but it is not a main theme. And then, during the summer, we'll spend some

time in the Psalms. The Psalms are one of my favourite blocks of Scripture, and we'll look at a few. We'll have some guest preachers in as well.

But now, into our study of Peter's second letter.

Introduction

Previously, we made our way through First Peter, which was a letter of encouragement to Christians undergoing persecution. In his second letter, Peter writes to the same group of people but with a different purpose. Now, his main concern is that false teachers are impacting their lives and spiritual health.

The importance of these warnings has become more urgent today, not less. Many centuries later, there are still many dangerous false teachers attempting to infiltrate and negatively impact the church. Therefore, Peter's second letter is immediately relevant to us. The principles about false teachers and how to spot them still apply today. We're going to learn those principles in our study of Second Peter, and we're going to bring them into the present so that we can understand how to spot and deal with false teachers today.

In this first section of the letter, Peter lays out the contrasts between those who serve God with pure hearts and motives and false teachers, who want to appear to serve God but only serve their own sinful appetites and desires.

1. Setting the Context

Whenever we start a series in a new book, it's important to have some understanding of the setting, the author, and the circumstances. So let's do that first...

Who is the author? The author is Peter, who was one of the twelve Apostles.

- He was a fisherman turned disciple (Matt. 4: 18-20)
- But he was somewhat distinct among the twelve. Always named first in lists of disciples
- Usually present for pivotal events. He was an eyewitness to the transfiguration, for example
- First Apostle to declare that Jesus was the Christ
- Answered the call of Jesus to walk on the water
- Called by Jesus to pray in Gethsemane
- Raced to the empty tomb with John
- After denying Jesus 3 times, he received full forgiveness and a commission to ministry
- Preached powerfully on the day of Pentecost
- Became a beloved leader in the early church
- He likely died in the mid-60s (that's the 0060s, not the 1960s), which means that he wrote this letter near the end of his life.

So we know that Peter was very close to Jesus, probably the closest of all the disciples.

As for his audience, he is writing to a group of believers who are a mix of Jews and Gentiles, but they are probably mostly Gentile believers.

What is the time and place? Again, he likely wrote this letter near the end of his life in the mid-60s, probably during the reign of the brutal Roman emperor Nero. He likely writes from Rome to a region in the northwest quadrant of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

And it's important to take into account his age and the stage of life he was in. He writes this letter not as a young upstart pastor with some untested theories and ideas about shepherding and protecting a flock. This is an experienced older man, a pastor who is in prison,

suffering for his faith. And while he's in prison suffering for his faith, he cares so much not about himself, but about the believers to whom he writes.

This is why he spends time writing this letter to them. So think of an aged man, an elderly man. He probably understands that the time of his death is coming soon, and he is most likely martyred shortly after he writes this letter.

Why is Peter writing to them?

There are some key differences between First and Second Peter. First Peter was a letter of encouragement to Christians undergoing persecution. They were suffering discrimination because of their faith, and Peter instructs them to live as Christians in a hostile world, to live lives worthy of their calling. He admonishes them to resist societal pressures as they pursue a godly life by following Jesus. He encourages them to live faithfully in a fallen world. He urges them to continue to trust God, living in obedience to him regardless of their circumstances, and to keep their hopes fixed on God and his promises of salvation and deliverance.

Second Peter was written due to the threat of false teachers. Peter writes to them, confidently asserting that *"There **will be** false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies."* False prophets arose among the people of Israel; they will rise among the people to whom Peter writes, and friends, they will try to infiltrate our church as well.

False Teachers

As we study this letter, we need to keep these points in mind:

- Peter is writing to a group of people, and within this group, false teachers are making inroads, or are about to.

- Every time you read a section, keep in mind that Peter is an imprisoned older man who cares about this group of people.
- He sees that false teachers are impacting them.
- He writes them a letter.
- Here's the letter. We have it in front of us. These are the words he wrote.

And what Peter writes in chapter two about false teachers is extremely direct and potent in its descriptions of false teachers and their impending condemnation.

1 there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 And in their greed they will exploit you with false words.

12 But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, 13 suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. 14 They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!

For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. 18 For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

How do false teachers, spiritual predators who seek to devour sheep, make their way into a church? What we will see is that where the teaching and application of Scripture are neglected or forgotten, you

will have a church that becomes a safe haven for those described in the above verses—predators, wolves and false teachers.

But what we want here at CBC is a church that is taught about and reminded often of the gospel, a church that is deeply rooted in biblical theology. Such a church is a well-protected church. It repels those with evil intent, because they are recognized, unmasked, and quickly expelled.

But when the knowledge of God and the gospel are not well known, when errant theology is preached and tolerated or even praised, then people like this find a vulnerable church. And given time, they worm their way in and cause damage. And they do this damage in a way that is festering unseen for long stretches of time. Everything looks fine on the surface, but underneath, there is a cancer that will someday grow to a point that it can no longer remain hidden.

These types of people are sly and cunning. You can't always tell who or what they are initially. It might be that the people to whom Peter writes don't really understand that there are false teachers among them. Peter writes as a wake-up call: "There are false teachers among you. Here's how they work. This is how you can spot them."

So he's going to start showing them in this letter: "Here's how you identify a false teacher." And interestingly, and VERY importantly, it's not always about what they are teaching. Often, it has a lot more to do with the way they live. And that's what Peter's writing to tell them about: "Don't be fooled by their slippery words. Look at their lives." A man can teach falsely with words, but he can teach falsely with his life as well. Peter and the other apostles exhort us to examine both so that we are not fooled.

Teaching is obviously incredibly important, but false teachers have such a gift for twisting words that you can't always tell. And so you look at their character, their actions, and their behaviour to judge

whether a teacher is true or false. That's what Peter is going to teach us via this letter.

So we need to keep in mind at every step. Peter is writing a letter to Christians who are facing a threat. That threat is impostors and predators making their way into the church, and we will face the same threat.

2. The Identity of the Messenger (v. 1)

Now, into the first few verses of Peter's letter

1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

The word "servant" is a "slave" (*duolas*) in Greek. Saying "servant" offers some wiggle room, thinking in terms of someone who serves someone else but also has a life of their own apart from the one they serve. Think of the servants in a show like *Downton Abbey*. They are subservient, yes, but they have their own dreams and ambitions, a life apart from their servanthood. But we can see from the sense of this word that this is not the case with the expectations of serving Christ. A *doulas*, a servant, a slave is "one who gives himself up wholly to another's will".

This is a complete submission. It is when all personal ambition and desire are set aside to serve God. Here in Second Peter, we are talking about those who willingly submit their wills to God's will. Peter is such a man. He is a *duolos*, a slave of Christ. We see the same in Romans 1:1: "*Paul, a servant* (same word *doulos*, meaning slave) *of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.*"

This is a willing submission, and not a position of dishonour but one of honour. It is an honour to be the servant of God, to serve and be sent by Jesus. It's not a derogatory term at all, like, "Unfortunately,

I've been taken captive by Christ, and now I'm his slave. What can I do?" No, this is an exciting development: "I have found the ultimate purpose! I have submitted myself completely to this purpose! My life is better now that I am a servant of Christ, not worse. It is the mindset with which the hymn "Take My Life and Let It Be" was written. Listen to these lyrics (and we'll sing them together later):

Take my life and let it be
consecrated (sacred, set apart), Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in endless praise,

Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee,

Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee,

Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
every power as thou shalt choose,

Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne,

This is a good picture of the joyful submission of a willing servant of God

This is one of the terms Peter uses to describe himself—as a servant, a slave. He also says he is an apostle. Generally, the term apostle refers to someone sent on a mission. So in this general sense, all Christians are sent on a mission, and so all Christians are apostles. So we have apostles, we ARE apostles in a general sense. Sent ones. Sent by Jesus.

But some among the apostles were given additional authority to make decisions and take action. In Matthew 19:28, we read these words of Jesus to his 12 Apostles: *“Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”* These are the 12 Apostles of Jesus to whom he gives special authority. This term could be applied to Paul as well, who became a Christian after Jesus's death but still met Jesus and was given apostolic authority by Jesus.

You might think of this in terms of small-a and capital-A apostles. All Christians are sent ones, but not all Christians hold the office of Apostle like the men to whom Jesus gave special authority. No one today possesses this apostolic authority, although many today claim that they do.

So, yes, Peter was one of the “Capital-A” Apostles, but listen to what he says next about to whom this letter is addressed... *To those who have **obtained a faith of equal standing with ours** by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:*

First, notice that their faith was obtained or allotted, not earned. We know from Eph. 2:8-10 that faith is a gift - *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

And this is a gift without which it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6) Your faith was not a prize for your efforts. We were born from above, it says in John 1:13, *"not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."* You did not earn your salvation; it was granted to you by God.

This salvation, this faith, belief, trust, and confidence, your conviction of the truth of Jesus Christ, was obtained by you; what does it say, *"by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ."*

And this next part is *really* important. This faith we possess, Peter says, has equal standing with the Apostles. It is equally precious; it gives us the same standing as the one who wrote this letter. That's important in at least two ways:

1. Peter writes as a Jew to Gentile believers, and many Jews still would have struggled that Gentiles could in any way achieve equal standing with Jews. The Jews, after all, were God's chosen people. But here Peter states that in fact, the faith obtained by Gentiles is of equal value and standing to the faith obtained by those who were Jews.
2. Peter writes as one with special apostolic authority—a capital-A Apostle—to those who are small-A apostles. This is important, again, if we are tempted to see the servants of God in Scripture as more valuable to God than we are. That's not the case. Peter writes as an Apostle to other apostles, telling them theirs is a faith of equal standing.

Now, to make the point again that this is all a gift and not earned, he says that this *"faith of equal standing"* comes *"by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ..."* It is by his perfect righteousness, his eternally perfect right standing with God, that we have been granted this faith. It is his righteousness that purchases our salvation, not ours. It is his perfect work on the cross that makes reconciliation with God possible, not our imperfect but good works.

3. Peace Through the Knowledge of God (vv. 2-4)

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

May grace and peace be multiplied, may they be ever-increasing, exponential in their increase! May you experience his grace, his kindness and favour to the max. May it overflow! And may you experience his peace, as defined by one concordance I looked at as: "the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is..."

And how will this grace and peace be multiplied to us? *"In the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."* We will have this grace and this peace by way of the knowledge of God, of his promises, of his faithfulness in the past, and confidence in his future faithfulness. As we recognize and express gratitude for all the blessings he showers on us every moment of every day, we will experience abundant grace and peace.

This word knowledge will occur 16 times in this short letter. This indicates that this knowledge, whatever it is, must be important. The Scriptures consistently indicate that gaining knowledge is an important part of the spiritual life. Gaining knowledge of God will help us discern as we grow in wisdom, and this will help us to identify and call out false teachers, which is Peter's concern in this letter.

The best illustration of that, often used, is how people are trained to spot counterfeit money. How are they trained for that? They examine the real thing. To know the real thing, inside and out, is to be trained to spot what is fake. The same applies to biblical theology: if you know your Bible thoroughly and are growing in your knowledge of it, you're going to know a counterfeit when you see it.

3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,

His divine power, God's own power, has granted to us everything we need for life and godliness. Think about that! By God's will, we have *everything* we need to live our lives and *everything* needed to pursue and obtain godliness.

But look also at this: his divine power is working through something. What is it? Knowledge, again. As we seek God and obtain knowledge of him, we become more like him as we become more like Jesus. We become holy, set apart, godly.

Is this by our own power? No. This is by the power of God. By the power of God who called us and invited us to participate in his glory and his excellence. He then says something else about what we gain by way of knowledge of God.

*4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, **so that** through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*

By way of knowledge, he has granted us his precious and very great promises. These promises are now ours!

The concept of knowledge is prominent in 2 Peter, but here is what we've learned about it so far:

- Grace and peace are multiplied to us in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (v2)
- All things that pertain to life and godliness are granted to us through the knowledge of him. (v3)
- His precious and very great promises are granted to us through knowledge of God. (v4)

All of this means that: Knowledge of God is important!

We live in a time when the emotional experience of God is seen as paramount, and the intellectual experience of God is minimized. But both are important, and throughout church history, there have been periods when one was emphasized too much and the other too little. Right now is a time when the knowledge of God is downplayed as secondary, and the emotional experience of God is sometimes raised so high that it borders on a kind of idolatry. And this, by the way, is one of the main tactics of wolves and other spiritual abusers. They seek to raise emotions so that discernment is impaired.

Now, when we speak of the knowledge of God, when Peter speaks of the knowledge of God, he is talking about far more than just intellectual knowledge. He is talking about knowing God in the same way J.I. Packer wrote about in his book called "Knowing God." Yes, it means knowing information about Him, but far more importantly, it is about knowing *Him*.

We can understand this in terms of human relationships. We might know a lot about someone, and we may have some affinity for them, but if we've never met them, if we've never sat across a table from them, if we've never shared a meal with them, then we have knowledge of them, but we don't really *know* them.

Peter's concern here is not strictly that we would study theology and know the finer points of doctrine. Certainly, that is important, but you could do that for an entire lifetime and never submit your will or spirit to God's will. And so we must always seek to find this balance between knowing about God and actually knowing God, just as in a human relationship.

That relationship is strengthened both by learning more about the other person and by connecting with that person face-to-face. And so it is with our relationship with God, our knowledge of him. Our knowledge of him must be both intellectual and experiential if we are

to flourish in life. But surely, as we can see here, looking at all the benefits that are ours by way of the knowledge of God, we should make a serious effort to pursue knowledge of God. Right?

Why? Well, in this verse, 2 Peter 1:4, the reason is that through knowledge of God, God has granted to us his precious and very great promises. And through these promises, we become "partakers of the divine nature." What does this mean? It means that we share in the innate properties and power of God. He is who he is and will never change, but as we claim his promises by pursuing knowledge of him, we change! Being a partaker of the divine nature changes us; it does not change God. These divine promises result in abundant living.

And one of the benefits of this change is that it frees us from the corruption of sin. These sinful temptations, these lusts, these desires for what God has said is forbidden, once we were enslaved to these sinful desires, but now they no longer rule over us. Do they sometimes present themselves and tempt us to indulge them? Yes. Do we sometimes indulge them? Again, yes. But they no longer rule over us; they no longer have dominion over our wills.

We have been bought with a price, and we now serve a new master. We are his servants, his slaves. We give ourselves up completely to his will and seek to confirm our wills to his.

CONCLUSION

Here's one final point to keep in mind. In this second letter of Peter, although the specific focus is on false teachers, he does not want them, and he would not want us, to become distracted or hyper-focused on these teachers. We are, after all, to be focused on God and His glory, on Jesus and following Him, and on the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Spirit. So, as we study Second Peter together and we see that there's a focus on false teachers, let's not take that as a mandate to be "heresy hunters."

Do you know what I mean by heresy hunter? This is a phenomenon particular to our internet age. There are some fairly popular websites and social media accounts, and YouTube channels that are often called "discernment blogs." The owners of these sites really do very little to promote good doctrine or increase knowledge of God. Their sole purpose is to comb the internet, patrol it for false teaching and then make content (articles, videos, social media posts).

Many people are interested in consuming this content and are then roped into forsaking their mandate to spread the good news of Jesus Christ for another mandate, a mission to expose false teaching wherever they can find it.

This certainly is not what Peter is advocating here. Should we be aware of false teachers? Yes. Should we know how to identify them? Of course. And should we expose them when we encounter them? Yes, absolutely.

But today, it's a little more complicated, isn't it? Because when we go from here today, we will engage with content on the internet, right? Many teachers—good ones and false ones—now utilize the internet to spread their message. And so as a shepherd, as a pastor, I must also be ready to point out false teachings by those who are impacting you electronically. So it does get a little bit more complicated than it might have been several decades or centuries ago, but the point remains the same.

We should know how to identify false teachers, and when we encounter them, we should both avoid them and speak against them. But this should not become an overwhelming obsession to which we devote the majority of our time and effort. We are not to take our eyes off Christ and fix them constantly on those who teach falsely about Christ, whether with their words or by their lives.

It is the knowledge of God, both experiential and theological, that we are after. And remember the benefits of this knowledge:

- Grace and peace are multiplied to us in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (v2)
- All things that pertain to life and godliness are granted to us through the knowledge of him. (v3)
- His precious and very great promises are granted to us through knowledge of God. (v4)

It is that type of multifaceted, comprehensive knowledge of God, knowledge that is both personal and intellectual, through which we will obtain these blessings and benefits.

Those sound like good things, amen? Let's pursue them together.

LET'S PRAY

Questions For Discussion

Introduction

1. How does the metaphor of false teaching as a spiritual "virus" or "cancer" help us understand the urgency of Peter's warnings to the church?

Setting the Context

2. Peter was an eyewitness to Christ's majesty, including the transfiguration. Why is it important to rely on solid, apostolic testimony rather than new or novel ideas when identifying false teaching?
3. False teachers often "creep in unnoticed". What are some ways that a church can maintain a loving, welcoming atmosphere while still being vigilant against spiritual predators?
4. How does a strong foundation in biblical theology and the gospel naturally act as a defence that unmask wolves and false teachers?

The Identity of the Messenger (v. 1)

5. How does understanding ourselves as slaves to Christ actually protect us from becoming enslaved to the "corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire"?
6. How does the doctrine of "equal standing" demolish spiritual pride and elitism within a local church body?

Peace Through the Knowledge of God (vv. 2-4)

7. How does the illustration of spotting counterfeit money by intensely studying the real thing apply to our own spiritual discernment?

8. Why does an overemphasis on emotional experiences of God, without a solid grounding in biblical knowledge, make believers particularly vulnerable to spiritual abuse?

9. God has granted us "precious and very great promises". What are some specific promises of God that you can claim this week to combat sinful desires or worldly anxieties?

Conclusion

10. How can we maintain a healthy, biblical vigilance against false teachers without taking our eyes off the glory and excellence of Jesus Christ?

The content of this booklet was written by Michael Krahn, lead pastor of Community Bible Church in Ilderton, Ontario. We are a gospel-centered church devoted to the faithful teaching of Scripture, the building up of believers, and bearing witness to Christ in our community and beyond. To learn more, join us for a Sunday service, or connect with us directly, scan the QR code or visit: cbcilderton.ca/contact-us

