

2 Peter

Bible Study Outline

Focus

One of the primary objectives in studying 2 Peter is to embrace the intent of Peter's intent in writing this letter, which was to remind (highlight/emphasize) the believers of the central issues that they will face as they live holy lives before the watching world.

In short, Peter summarizes the foremost challenges to believers who are upholding the authority of the Bible/Christ in faith and action in two key areas: false teaching and the eternal perspective. Although they are addressed separately in the letter, we can easily see how they are related.

Outline

Lesson 1

Passage: 2 Peter 1:1-11
Topic: Holy living based on our new identity in Christ
Worldview: Authority, Identity

Lesson 2

Passage: 2 Peter 1:12-21
Topic: Holy living based on the authority of God's word
Worldview: Authority

Lesson 3

Passage: 2 Peter 2:1-22
Topic: Holy living in the face of false teaching
Worldview: Authority, Opposition

Lesson 4

Passage: 2 Peter 3:1-18
Topic: Holy living in view of the return of Jesus
Worldview: Authority, Hope

Theology

The letter of 2 Peter has the same unique challenges of style and content contained in Peter's first letter. One of the key differences in this particular letter is the brevity with which Peter addresses the central issues that believers will face on mission. We know that this letter was at the tail end of Peter's life, so, with that framework of understanding, we can see why Peter "cut to the chase" and wanted to remind/encourage the exiled believers of these key areas. Some of these key areas contain a couple of challenging theological topics that we want to address below.

Election (2 Peter 1:10)

One of the more controversial doctrines of the Bible is that of "election." Other terms referring to this are "predestination" and "chosen"; and it is contained in theological systems such as Calvinism and Reformed Theology. The basic definition of election, as represented in these systems, is the notion that God sovereignly chose before creation all those who would be saved and now, in his timing, gives them the necessary faith in order to exercise it in believing the gospel.

As a leadership team of elders, we do not espouse the Calvinistic interpretation of "election." We do believe that God elects and exerts his authority and will over mankind, but never in a way that is inconsistent with His character or creation of us in His image. We believe that biblical election is an act of God's will in choosing, but it's never about choosing who will be saved. It's about choosing the results for those who are already saved. God chose before creation the results of those who would freely choose to believe in His Son. For those who exercise their own free will in believing His gospel, God chose before creation that they would be identified with Christ, collectively blessed in Christ, presented missional opportunities in Christ, and that they would ultimately find final restoration to wholeness as image bearers of God.

In this letter, Peter gives no specific teaching on the doctrine of election per sé, but he does reference it. He mentions that we are to "confirm our calling and election." It is crucial that we interpret this "election" properly as the following: God's plan to provide opportunities for each believer to be transformed into the image of His Son. Although each has opportunities, transformation will only occur in those who choose to live for eternal things over and above earthly things. Consequently, only these faithful believers will be richly rewarded in eternity.

Lordship Theology (2 Peter 1:10-11)

Lordship Theology (LT) is another important theological topic that broadens the scope and impact of the Calvinistic interpretation of the word "election." The basic premise of LT is that an unsaved person must not only believe the gospel for salvation, but they must also embrace Jesus as Lord of their life and demonstrate faithfulness in Him to prove that their salvation is genuine. Those who support LT conclude that Peter supports their view when he says that we must, "be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election."

This is particularly confusing when considering the central passages in the Bible about salvation. If we understand the nature of salvation where the grace of God offers free salvation to lost mankind by faith alone on the merits of Christ alone, then we should see this reference of Peter as a clear affirmation that this election can not refer to salvation. Under grace, we do not earn, validate, maintain, or confirm our salvation. All of that has been, is and will be accomplished in and through Christ alone. Rather than speaking to salvation, we see Peter referring to the opportunity afforded to us in Christ to live and pursue lives that bring eternal reward before Him.

Imminent Return (2 Peter 3:8-10)

In this letter, Peter also speaks about the return of Jesus when he comments on the “Day of the Lord.” He makes it clear that the arrival of Jesus will come as a thief in the night, meaning that we will be surprised by its arrival and would not have been able to plan for it.

This is a central theology to the Bible, although there are some who challenge this notion. Many people point to Jesus’ imminent and unknowing return as a Biblical inconsistency because the Bible also states that there will be a representative from every people group in the world in Heaven at the end. In addition, Jesus himself states that “this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14). This would seem to make the “imminent” return of Christ dependent on the gospel going out to all nations first; thus, we could know and predict His return. So, is His return imminent or predictable?

A broader understanding of the order of events of the end times from the Rapture through the Tribulation and into the Millennium helps us to better rectify this seeming contradiction. Consider:

- Jesus returns in the clouds, raises up to Himself, and gives new bodies to both the living and the dead who are believers in Him before the earth comes under God’s judgment. He then returns to Heaven with all His people.
- The Earth then experiences seven years of God’s judgment during the Tribulation.
- Jesus and His army return at the conclusion of the seven years defeating the armies of Satan and establishing the Millennial Kingdom.
- At the conclusion of the Millennial Kingdom, the final White Throne Judgment of all the peoples who rejected Jesus takes place.

In this timeline, the Imminent Return of Jesus is the point in time when He appears in the sky at the Rapture and calls all believers, up to that point in time, to Himself and into Heaven as He prepares to judge the world. When the Rapture occurs, the gospel will not yet have reached all the nations.

In conclusion, Christ’s return at the Rapture is imminent and will be a surprise. We also conclude that the gospel will continue to go out to the nations during the Tribulation. It will reach all the nations by the end of the seven years and then Christ will return to the earth to set up His Millennial Kingdom. This would easily rectify the apparent contradiction stated earlier.

Application

As you prepare to lead others into exchanging the lies they are believing against this truth, it is important that you take some time to reflect and consider the practical challenges that you face as you consider these two key areas. Reflect on the challenge of false teaching; critically consider the voices that you let speak into your life and how they compare with the Bible. Consider your life in reference to eternity and how you are working through the challenges of living for the eternal over the temporary.

Once you have prayed over and reflected on these things, begin to formulate your thoughts on how this might impact the individuals in your MC. What might be some practical areas of their lives that need to be affected by this truth? This prayerful preparation will position you to more effectively help others exchange their lies for truth and live in the new reality that God desires for them.