

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

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LESSON TWENTY-TWO

II PETER

The second Epistle of Peter is the first of the New Testament books as to the canonicity or inspired authority of which there is any reasonable doubt. It was not mentioned by the earliest Christian writers, but this may be accounted for by the lateness of its appearance, and the further fact that it was not addressed to any local church with an interest in and facility for making its existence known. Its canonicity however, is doubted, on the further ground that there is a marked difference of style between it and Peter's first Epistle; but may it not be replied that there is a marked difference in the theme?

The first was written to exhort and to testify, but this to warn and to caution (3:1, 2, 17, 18), a circumstance quite sufficient for whatever difference in style could be pointed out. And then, too, Peter was not a stereotyped man. James might be supposed to keep to one style, but Peter hardly.

On the other hand there are certain points of genuineness which others have pointed out, such as similar and peculiar expressions in the two Epistles, similar views of prophecy which will be noted, the writer's testimony to his presence at the transfiguration, etc., all of which substantiate the Petrine authorship.

It is not a subject we can consider here at any great length - enough for us to know that the book has been regarded as canonical by the whole church, with isolated exceptions here and there, for sixteen or seventeen centuries at least.

Outline

The Epistle might be regarded as consisting of but two parts, the salutation, covering verses 1-11 of chapter 1, and the motive or object in writing which occupies the remainder of the book.

However, for convenience, let us limit the salutation to the first two verses.

- to whom does Peter address himself?

Note that the verse reads, "**to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,**" and that thus reading, it harmonizes perfectly with the teaching of Paul in Romans, concerning the way in which a man becomes just with GOD. His righteousness is a righteousness of GOD, and one that he obtains from GOD, receives through the exercises of his faith in CHRIST. Precious faith!

Object

Before analyzing the Epistle further, let us recur again to its object which, as we have seen, was to warn and to caution. And this warning, as a study of the indicated verses will show, was against falling from grace, while the exhortation was in the direction of growing in grace.

Now a working outline of the Epistle will be found in considering:

1. The enforcement of this warning and exhortation (1:2-11).
2. The ground of it (1:12-21).
3. The occasion of it (chaps. 2, 3).

This last division may be wisely divided again when we come to it.

1. As to the enforcement of the warning against falling from grace notice three points:

(1) *The source of growth in grace* (vv. 2-4).

This source is GOD Himself. Grace and peace are multiplied in us through the knowledge of Him (v. 2), but that is not all.

- His divine power grants unto us how many other things that pertain to the same end (v. 3)?
- and through what channel do they come (same verse)?
- by this knowledge of GOD we become possessed of certain things, what are they (v. 4)?
- and through the possession of these promises of what do we come to partake?
- but what antecedently has become true of us?
- how does "**the corruption that is in the world**" control men so that they cannot partake of the divine nature (same verse)?

(2) *The lines of growth* (vv. 5-7).

- if we are to be preserved from falling from grace in what general directions should we be careful to grow in grace?
- we have obtained faith from GOD, in other words, and by this we have been declared righteous in a judicial sense, but what now, are we to add to this faith. or supply in, in order to perfect assurance?

The list of the virtues follows, of which one or two require a word of explanation. That word "virtue," for example, is not to be taken in the sense of chastity as commonly employed by us, but in the sense of "courage," perhaps moral courage to confess our faith before men. And, in like manner, "temperance" is not to be restricted to moderation in the use of intoxicated drinks merely, but moderation in every line of conduct, self-restraint, in other words. Moreover, the word "charity" is to be interpreted by "love" as in I Corinthians 13.

(3) *The need of growth* (vv. 8-11).

The necessity for circumspection and "diligence" on our part in these matters is seen in what follows. It is the presence of these things in our lives, and this only, that makes us fruitful in CHRIST, and bears testimony to the power of His cleansing blood (vv. 8, 9). Moreover, they alone can produce the strength of assurance of our salvation (v. 10), and secure that that salvation shall not be a bare salvation merely, but a triumphant and glorious one (v. 11).

Ground of the Warning

2. Passing now from the apostle's enforcement of his warning and exhortation to the ground of it (vv. 12-21), we find it built upon the foundation of the truth of the Gospel.

And this truth is set before us along two lines of evidence:

(1) *The testimony of Peter himself* (vv. 12-18).

In introducing this testimony he speaks in a most interesting manner of his object (to stir them up), his motive (his approaching decease), and his purpose (to prepare a record of these things, which record, by the way, is supposed to be contained in the Gospel of Mark).

- but now, what is his testimony? That is, to what particular fact of Gospel history does he bear witness (v. 16)?
- what kind of witness is it (same verse)?
- what did he see and hear?
- do you remember who were with him on this occasion?
- how does he thus interpret the event of the Transfiguration, that is, of what greater event does he speak of it as a foregleam?

(2) *The testimony of the Old Testament prophets* (vv. 19-21).

Verse 19 reads thus: "**We have also a more sure word of prophecy.**" It does not mean that the words of the Old Testament prophets are more sure than those of the New, like himself, but that such words as his, such testimony as he is able to bear, corroborates and strengthens the

prediction spoken before.

- how, then, should we regard the Old Testament prophecies (v. 19)?
- what does he say of their origin (for so should the word "interpretation" be understood in v. 20)?
- and when he says those prophecies were not of any "private" origination, what does he mean, as gathered from verse 21?
- does not this strongly corroborate the declaration of Paul in II Timothy 3:16, that "**all scripture is given by inspiration of God**"?

Occasion for the Warning

3. We are now prepared to consider the third and last division of the book, which treats of the occasion for this warning and exhortation (chaps. 2, 3).

In brief, this occasion was the incoming of false teachers in the church (2:1), whose eminent success is predicted in verse 2; whose punishment is certain and dreadful (vv. 3-9); and whose description follows in verses 10-22.

We shall not be able to enter upon this description in detail, and, indeed, it presents many difficulties of interpretation.

The presence of such persons, and especially teachers, in the visible church, is almost inconceivable, awful to contemplate; but we should remember their declared falseness, and recall what CHRIST said about wolves in sheep's clothing.

Their leading characteristics are:

- carnality (v. 10),
- presumption (vv. 10-12),
- reveling (vv.13), and
- covetousness (vv. 14-16),

but it is clear that the first named played the largest part in the unholy power exercised over their followers.

Just what the features of this uncleanness were, and just how it is to be adjudged in the philosophy or phenomena of Christianity to-day, are themes that may come before us again when we reach Jude, whose Epistle contains the same picture of false teachers in about the same words.

Character of the False Teaching

Perhaps no portion of this Epistle is more interesting or important from the point of view of the present, than the last portion on which we now enter, and which, in connection with the description of the false teachers themselves, describes the character of their teaching. It will be seen that the latter focuses upon the second coming of CHRIST, emphasizing thus, from a

negative point of view, the primary importance of that doctrine (chap. 3).

In the first place, in passing, notice the teaching of the second verse concerning the authority of the New Testament as compared with the Old, and how the apostle places his own writings on a par with those of the prophets.

- what period of time is being referred to (v. 3)?

Remember that "**the last days**" here means, as uniformly, the last days of the present age, not the end of the world.

- what is the subject of the scoffing marking the period spoken of (v. 4)?
- of what dreadful fact do the scoffers seem to be in practical ignorance (vv. 5, 6)?
- how will the next cosmic catastrophe differ from the last (v. 7)?

The reference in verse 7, of course, is to the end of the world, but this will not be reached, according to other Scriptures, Revelation for example, till a thousand years after the coming of the Lord.

- how does this fact seem to be alluded to in verse 8?
- for what merciful reason is the coming of the Lord delayed (v. 9)?
- to what notable period does verse 10 refer?

We have already seen (II Thessalonians), the distinction between the coming of CHRIST for His church, and the introduction of "**The Day of the Lord**" which follows. This "day" begins and ends with judgment as Revelation more fully reveals, although between the two series of judgments the millennium intervenes.

We have already been taught that the prophets see events in space rather than in time, often overlooking intervening occurrences between the great objective points.

In this way the church period is not alluded to at all in the Old Testament, while in the present instance Peter says nothing about the millennium.

- what solemn application does he make of these words (vv. 11-12)?
- what hope is set before the believer (v. 13)?
- with what warning and exhortation does he close (vv. 17, 18)?

~ end of Lesson 22 ~
