

2 Peter 1:1-11 ~ Discussion Questions

1. Who wrote 2 Peter?
2. To whom was 2 Peter written? As used here, what does “faith” mean? (1:1)
3. Why does Peter emphasize Christian knowledge in this letter? (1:2, 3, 8, 2:20, 3:18)
4. What did Peter say has been given to his readers? Has this been given to us too? (1:3)
5. How do you benefit from the promises God has given you? (1:4, John 14:16-17)
6. What did Peter urge his readers to add to their faith? Which of these character qualities do you find it most difficult to practice? Which ones do you consider the most important to add to your faith? Why? (1:5-7)
7. What will be the result of possessing these seven qualities? (1:8, Colossians 1:9-12)
8. What happens to the person who does not possess these Godly qualities? (1:9, 1 John 2:11)
9. What did Peter want his audience to be eager to do? Why? What happens when we pursue these qualities? (1:10-11, Matthew 7:20, James 2:18b)
10. Why is it easy to forget what God has done for you?

This section, verses 3-15, state the theme of the letter and the reason for listening to it. God has given the readers the knowledge of God necessary for them to escape from the immorality of a corrupt world and enter the eternal kingdom of God and Christ. Two paths are open to those with this knowledge: 1) live a righteous life and the divine calling will be confirmed or 2) do not live this way and you will become forgetful, your knowledge will be ineffectual, and when the time comes you will not enter the kingdom of God. To fully understanding this, it is necessary to maintain the distinctions between the past, present and future.

11. Which verses speak of the past? _____
The present? _____ The future? _____
Summarize this first section of 2 Peter in your own words.

2 Peter 1:1-11 ~ Leader's Guide

1. Who wrote 2 Peter?

The obvious and easy answer, of course, is Peter. After all, that's what it says right in the opening. But many, perhaps the majority of Biblical scholars take issue with this answer and propose two alternatives: (1) it was written under Peter's authority during his lifetime or (2) someone else wrote it after Peter's death (the majority view). Why the alternatives?

First, the language and style of the two Peter books are very different. 1 Peter is elegantly simple while 2 Peter is grandiose and elaborate. The letters differ in terminology: For example, Jesus' return is described as *revelation* (or *revealing*) in 1 Peter (1:7, 13, 4:13) but as *coming* in 2 Peter (1:16, 3:4, 3:12). 2 Peter appears more Hellenistic with its stress on knowledge (1:2, 3, 8, 2:20) than 1 Peter. Verse 3:1 declares this to be a second letter but there is no conscious attempt to imitate 1 Peter.

Second, dating. Several events and references cited in 2 Peter point to it being written in the period 80-90 CE and possibly as late as 130. Earlier than 80 seems unlikely. Since Peter died sometime between 64 and 68 CE his authorship of the book seems questionable.

Third, the content of the text seems somewhat implausible coming from Peter. Citing his firsthand account of the transfiguration (1:16-18) seems designed to bolster his authority, which is certainly unnecessary and at odds with his humility in 1 Peter positioning himself late in the letter as a fellow elder (5:1), not an apostle as he did in the opening (1:1).

Fourth, the book did not seem to be widely known and recognized in the early church. And in fact, it was not even ascribed to Peter until Origen's time (185-253) and even he seems to have some doubt concerning it. So did Eusebius (265-340) although after his time it was generally accepted as canonical.

So where does this leave us? The two most widely used modern study Bibles in the world, the NIV and REB, discuss the problems and then essentially say, "oh, well, let's sidestep the question and simply accept the text on its own terms, i.e., a letter by Peter with full status in the canon." If that's okay with the top Bible scholars, it's okay with me and that's how we'll look at it too. [If you want to pick nits, the NIV (mostly American) scholars try to answer the objections of authorship while the REB (Oxford, UK) commentators sidestep them.]

2. To whom was 2 Peter written? As used here, what does "faith" mean? (1:1)

No controversy here. Although as noted above the phraseology is grandiose and elaborate compared with 1 Peter, which is simply addressed to "God's elect . . . who have been chosen to the foreknowledge of God." 2 Peter is actually addressed to the same people as 1 Peter although it is stated differently. The addressees are not actually specified but seem to be assured that their standing is equal to that of Peter's.

The phrase, “have received a faith...” means that God in his righteousness (“morally right” or “with justice”) imparts to people the ability to believe. As used here, a *faith* does not mean a body of truth but is actually the God-given act or capacity of believing and trusting in Christ for salvation.

3. Why does Peter emphasize Christian knowledge in this letter? (1:2, 3, 8, 2:20, 3:18)

Apparently, Peter was combating heretical (contrary to orthodox, accepted doctrine) teaching and one of the best antidotes for heresy is true knowledge. He enlarges on this knowledge that God has given us in the verses that follow.

4. What did Peter say has been given to his readers? Has this been given to us too? (1:3)

Verse 1:3 says, “everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us...” So God has given us all that we need spiritually to escape from the immoral world surrounding us and enter the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ. In contrast to gnostic teaching, no secret, esoteric knowledge is necessary for salvation. In the verse, *godliness* means a genuine reverence toward God that governs every aspect of life.

The end of the phrase notes God’s glory and goodness. *Glory* expresses the excellence of God, his being, his attributes, and essence. *Goodness* depicts God’s excellence in deeds, his virtue in action. God uses both to bring about our salvation.

Peter was writing to a broad audience here and there is no question that his observations and admonishments apply to us today just as much as to his readers.

5. How do you benefit from the promises God has given you? (1:4, John 14:16-17)

Bible scholars differ in their interpretation of 1:4, some saying the promises and their benefits accrue to us as humans here on earth. Others say these are promises that will be realized in the future, that the time will come when we enter the eternal kingdom of God. Personally, I think one could make the case for part or all of the first benefit being here and now and the second benefit coming later on.

(1) *participate in the divine nature*. This does *not* mean that Christians become divine in any sense but rather that God dwells in us through his Holy Spirit. Note from this passage in John that the Spirit will always stand by Christ’s people.

John 14:16-17 – ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor [meaning “helper” or “advocate”] to be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

Let me emphasize that *our humanity* and *God’s deity* remain distinct and separate. We may become more godlike in our actions, but in no way do we become God

The second benefit is (2) *escape the corruption of the world*. As long as we're living as humans on this earth, it's hard, if not impossible to escape the corruption caused by evil desires. Yes, God helps us resist temptation but we won't truly escape the world's corruption until we're totally out of the world and in God's kingdom. Fortunately, he has given believers this promise. And make no mistake about it: much as God loves every human he has created, he has given the promise of salvation *only* to believers, to those who have faith in Jesus as their savior.

6. What did Peter urge his readers to add to their faith? Which of these character qualities do you find it most difficult to practice? Which ones do you consider the most important to add to your faith? Why? (1:5-7)

Peter said to add to your faith:

(1) Goodness (behavior that is morally right, virtuous, well-behaved, and beneficial)

(2) Knowledge

(3) Self-control. Proverbs 29:11 – A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.

(4) Perseverance. Mark 13:13b – he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 – ¹⁶Be joyful always; ¹⁷pray continually; ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

(5) Godliness (practical piety by virtue of being a godly or devout person) 1 Timothy 4:8 – For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

(6) Brotherly kindness. Ephesians 4:32 – Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Matthew 25:34-36 – ³⁴“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

(7) Love (of God and of others. How do we actually show this?)

Consider the other questions: which qualities are most difficult to practice? Which ones do you consider most important to add to your faith? And why? Do you feel you have to add some for better balance? Or because people criticize you (to your face or behind your back) for not displaying them? Or because you feel guilty? Or because you want to set a better example? Or because you want to be more like other people that you admire? Or because God is judging you?

Note: Peter does not imply that you should cultivate each quality in turn, one after the other until they all have been perfected. Instead, they are to be cultivated simultaneously.

7. What will be the result of possessing these seven qualities? (1:8, Colossians 1:9-12)

By saying, “in increasing measure,” Peter is saying that he has continuing spiritual growth in mind. Why? To “keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In other words, a Christian’s knowledge should affect the way you live. It doesn’t set you free of moral restraints as the heretics taught, but it produces holiness and the values listed above.

Colossians 1:9-12 – ⁹For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. ¹⁰And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

8. What happens to the person who does not possess these Godly qualities? (1:9, 1 John 2:11)

Peter says that such a person is “nearsighted and blind.” Think about that: you can’t be both at the same time. He may mean by “nearsighted” that your eyes are shut and so you are actually blind because you have closed your eyes to the truth. Or he may be saying that your behavior has first made you nearsighted (seeing only what is close to you) and ultimately blind.

1 John 2:11 – But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

A person without these qualities who does not live a Godly life will become forgetful that his sins have been forgiven, his knowledge will be ineffectual, and when the time comes he will not enter the kingdom of God.

9. What did Peter want his audience to be eager to do? Why? (1:10-11)

You can “make your calling and election sure” by cultivating the qualities listed in verses 5-7. By doing so, you can be sure that God has chosen you and called you. And when God elects and calls, it is to obedience and holiness and these fruits confirm their divine source.

Matthew 7:20 – Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

James 2:18b – I will show you my faith by what I do.

Peter says at the end of 1:10 “you will never fail” meaning that those who give evidence of their faith by their deeds will never cease to persevere and, moreover, “you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom” (1:11).

10. Why is it easy to forget what God has done for you?

This section, verses 3-15, state the theme of the letter and the reason for listening to it. God has given the readers the knowledge of God necessary for them to escape from the immorality of a corrupt world and enter the eternal kingdom of God and Christ. Two paths are open to those with this knowledge: 1) live a righteous life and the divine calling will be confirmed or 2) do not live this way and you will become forgetful, your knowledge will be ineffectual, and when the time comes you will not enter the kingdom of God. To fully understanding this, it is necessary to maintain the distinctions between the past, present and future.

11. Which verses speak of the past? Vv. 3, 4 ...has given ...

The present? Vv. 5-7 you must make, v. 8 keep you, v. 9 is nearsighted, v. 10 be eager **The future?** V. 4 may participate...may escape, v.10 will never fall, v. 11 will receive

Some people then and some people today doubt that there is any future after this earthly life or that it is some bizarre reincarnation as an animal or another person. Are these non-Biblical views around us today? Absolutely.

For example, a popular New Age book, *The Peaceful Warrior*, by Dan Millman has this to say: “Stay in the present. you can do nothing to change the past, and the future will never come exactly as you plan or hope for. Just keep your attention in the present moment and you’ll be free of thought. When thoughts touch the present, they dissolve.”

Describing a dream about death: “I realized that the Grim Reaper, the death Dan Millman had so feared, had been his great illusion, a problem, nothing more than a humorous incident when consciousness had forgotten itself.”

His conclusion: “...the only laws [of the world] are paradox, humor, and change. There is no problem, never was, and never will be. Release your struggle, let go of your mind, throw away your concerns, and relax into the world. It’s all the marvelous Play of God. Don’t worry, just be happy.”

The view of a Christian is quite different: We start with a faith given to us by God, and then begin adding qualities that help make God’s calling and choosing of us secure. To which Peter adds, if you incorporate these into your life, you will never ‘fall away’.

Wow. What a confident way to live! Knowing that if I make a conscious effort to gain these qualities, they will secure my walk with God, my ability to live in a Godly way, and, ultimately, eternal life.