

TRUE WORDS DEVELOP BELIEVERS

Summary and Historical Background

In the first epistle, Peter's concern in writing was to prepare the believers to handle the suffering and persecution believers could reasonably expect. His objective was to comfort them and strengthen them with the example of Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter, Satan attacks the churches **from without** as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour and accomplishing this through 'fiery trials.' In 2 Peter, Satan attacks the churches through the error of false teachers. As the father of lies, Satan is a master at orchestrating clever heresies based on the world, the flesh and the pride of life to make his assault on the churches **from within**. That is why believers are told not to love the world or the things in the world (1 Jn 2:15-17). Unfortunately, Christian leaders, churches and movements historically have been all too susceptible to his tactics and have apostatized on major doctrines. As a result believers who try to live by the Bible have had to rebuke and separate from believers that have been deceived by Satan and his false teachers. This is a letter of warning and rebuke.

This first chapter introduces the letter with usual salutations and then proceeds to lay the groundwork for the exhortation in the rest of the book: all the advantages of eternal life and godliness in this life are received by virtue of God's power (1:3); He has extended "great and precious promises" to all who believe (1:4), and now they must be diligent to cultivate the great virtues of the Christian life (1:5-7) and this gives them an unshakable assurance of their salvation (1:10). The means for genuine Christian development is based on those facts that are now recorded in the Word of God (1:12-21).

The recipients of this letter were probably the same as those of 1 Peter, those Christians who were scattered because of persecution - 1 Peter 1:1; 3:1. The purpose of the book is three-fold: to exhort believers to develop their lives by obeying God's Word; to warn believers not to be deceived by the heresy of false teachers and to encourage believers to discern the future by the prophetic Word of God.

General outline of the book of 2 Peter:

1. True Words that Develop Believers - 2 Peter 1
2. False Words that Deceive Unbelievers - 2 Peter 2
3. Prophetic Words to Declare the Future - 2 Peter 3

Study Notes

I. Faith for Developing the Christian Life — 1:1-4

1:1 — "Servant" - Peter was a bond slave of Jesus Christ because he was purchased by His blood - 1 Pet 1:18-19.

"Apostle" — He was commissioned and sent by Jesus Christ with an authoritative message to proclaim to believers and unbelievers.

"Like precious faith" — "Like precious" was a political word used of foreigners who had become citizens of equal standing in a country. Christians have become citizens of Christ's Kingdom with equal standing. "Faith" could refer to the body of doctrine which is received by the believer at salvation, but more likely it refers to the believer's personal faith which he receives by hearing and reading the Word of God and by obeying it so he has personal experiences with God.

"Through the righteousness" — Christians are made righteous judicially by faith in Christ, but Peter's use of "righteousness" is better translated "justice." God is just and fair in providing equal salvation to all believers, whether Jew or Gentile.

"Of God and our Savior Jesus Christ" — The grammar shows Jesus Christ is both God and Savior, because only one article is used for the two substantives (cf 1:11 and Titus 2:13 for the same grammatical construction).

1:2 — "Grace and peace" - This was a combination of the New Testament and Old Testament greetings. Believers must receive God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ before they can have His peace.

"Through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" — "Knowledge" introduces the theme of the letter. This Greek word for "knowledge" and its cognates appear eleven times in this short letter. "Grace and peace" come to the sinner when he fully embraces Jesus Christ with sincere faith in His death to save him from his sins and in His resurrection to give him eternal life. This knowledge of Jesus Christ is a complete knowledge for salvation. Knowledge received from the false teachers does not provide a complete knowledge of Jesus Christ and His finished work to save sinners, so it cannot provide salvation. Therefore, it is very dangerous for immature Christians to talk to false teachers in an attempt to witness to them. Remember what happened to Eve when she talked to Satan. It is better to be with a mature believer who knows the Scriptures and understands the errors of the false teachers.

1:3 — "His divine power" - God's power is sufficient to perform the miracle of the new birth for sinners that believe in Him. It also enables believers to live a holy life that honors God.

"Has given" — It is best to understand these words as the connecting link between the "knowledge of God" (1:2) and the result of this knowledge (1:3, 4). Notice what God has given to believers:

"Life" — He has given believers eternal life - cf. Jn 17:3.

"Godliness" — He has given believers a God-likeness that should characterize their new life in Christ. The believer no longer should have the look or the sound of the world.

"Through the knowledge of Him" —

"Called us to glory and virtue" — The Greek word for "to" is *dia*, which is translated "by" in most places. Either way is correct, but it changes the meaning as to which word is used in the translation. Either Christ has called believers "to" glory and virtue, or Christ has called us "by" His glory and virtue. "Glory and virtue" speak of the moral excellence of a person. It can be said of God and His Son and it can be said of us when we are in Christ.

1:4 — "Whereby" - Refers to the "glory and virtue."

"Are given" — Believers are given more blessings after they have received eternal life and godliness.

"Exceeding great and precious promises" — God has given believers extraordinary promises.

"Partakers of the divine nature" — Believers are recipients of the divine nature. The divine nature is a marvelous gift from God that makes them a child of God.

"Having escaped the corruption" — The divine nature provides believers with divine power to break all the sins of the world in their lives. Without the divine nature believers would be controlled by the lust of the flesh and could not live a godly life. However, all believers have the divine nature so they are able to conquer every sin produced by the lust of the flesh and now can live a life that pleases God.

II. Fruit from a Developed Christian Life — 1:5-11

A. The Fruit — 1:5-7

1:5 — "And beside this" - It could be translated, "For this reason" the Christian has been given divine power (1:3), precious promises (1:4), and the divine nature (1:4). He must grow in his Christian life. He must not sit back and wait for the trumpet call to go to Heaven. He must grow and give expression to his new life. Faith without works is dead (James 2:20).

"Giving all diligence" — God's grace enables the believer to work, but he must exercise his will and diligently determine to do it. He must develop a work ethic in his Christian life by God's grace. Growth is not automatic. God and the believer must work together to produce these fruits.

"Add" — The background of this word in the Greek language suggests a rich and lavish provision. The believer is to develop lavish fruit in his faith. Seven levels of fruit are listed.

"Virtue" — Refers to moral excellence, i.e., purity, courage and other good qualities of character - Phil 4:8.

"Knowledge" — This fruit comes from a study of God's Word to know His will and to obey it - Rom 12:2; Col 1:9; Eph 5:17; 1 Jn 2:3-4.

1:6 — "Temperance" - This is self-control. The Greek philosophers emphasized self-control, but theirs was a self-effort. Peter had in mind a self-control by the power of the Holy Spirit - cf. Galatians 5:23. Self-control done in the power of the flesh is bound to fail. This was the experience of the false teachers - 2:18-19.

"Patience" — This word means endurance, steadfastness, or perseverance - Heb 12:2. The believer who has arrived at this level in his Christian life is able to resist the pressures of the world that lure him into sin.

"Godliness" — This is purity in practice; it is to be holy as God is holy - 1 Pet 1:15. It is the result of a great respect for God.

1:7 — "Brotherly kindness" - The believer, who has a great love for God, will love the children of God - 1 John 4:7-21. The false teachers had no such love - 2 Peter 2:14.

"Charity" — This is *agape* love, the strongest word for love in the Bible. This love flows from God. It is a self-sacrificing love. It is not a love that arises from the emotions, but one that arises from the will. It is a matter of choice, not feelings. It is a love that embraces one's enemies as well as one's friends - Rom 5:6-8.

B. The Promise — 1:8

1:8 — "If these things be in you" - Believers must allow their knowledge of God to change the way they think so that the seven fruits listed above are developed in their lives (1:5-7).

"Abound" — These fruits must fill their lives so that they change the whole demeanor of their lives. It is not a resolution made on January 1st and forgotten before January 31st.

"Barren" - This word refers to spiritual inactivity or ineffectiveness of the believers.

"Unfruitful" — Unproductive. True spiritual vitality is measured by visible productivity.

C. The Warning — 1:9

1:9 — "Blind" - Used in a metaphorical sense. He who lacks these fruits has no spiritual discernment. He does not realize he is at war with the devil - 2 Cor 4:4.

"Cannot see afar off" — He is near-sighted. He cannot see eternal values. This person is blind to his spiritual warfare because he is spiritually near-sighted and only looks at things in terms of earthly values.

"Has forgotten" — He deliberately forgets that he was purged from his sins by the blood of Christ. He is going back on his decision to follow Christ wholeheartedly.

D. The Exhortation — 1:10-11

1:10 — "Give diligence" - This is a repetition of the same exhortation in verse 5. It is a call for zeal in Christian growth.

"Make" — This verb is in the middle voice and can be translated, "Make for yourself." The calling and election are from God, but the certainty of that divine work is seen in man's work.

"Sure" — This is a legal term for validating a will.

"You shall never fall" — This is not a suggestion that one can lose his salvation, but rather that he can suffer a great loss. He will fall from a place of blessing - 1 Cor 3:12-15; Col 1:22-23.

1:11 — "An entrance" This expression probably refers to the rich and honorable welcome that was given to an Olympic winner by his home town. Such a welcome into Christ's Kingdom is prepared for the one who develops the seven fruits in his life. The rewards of the believer will be in proportion to his deeds.

"Everlasting kingdom" — Three things are said about this Kingdom (1) it is future; (2) it is eternal; and (3) it belongs to Jesus Christ. Only those who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will be able to enter into it.

III. Facts for the Development of a Christian Life — 1:12-21

A. Reminders from Peter — 1:12-15

1:12 — "I will not be negligent" - Peter took care of his duty to "strengthen the brethren" - Luke 22:32. He was faithful to his calling.

"Remembrance" — Peter strengthened his brethren by reminding them of important facts that they were never to forget - cf. 1:13, 15; 3:1. He wanted to keep these things fresh in their minds.

"Established" — These believers were established in the truth when they received it for salvation, but they still needed to be warned, exhorted, and prayed for, so they would develop properly in their Christian lives.

1:13 — "Tabernacle" - Peter was referring to his body as a tent. As long as he was in his earthly body, he would use it to stir up the memories of the believers concerning their need to be fruitful.

1:14 — "Put off this my tabernacle" - This was a reference to Peter's death. To him death was like taking down his tent and putting it away. Death held no fear for him.

1:15 — "I will endeavor" - Peter made every effort to help his brethren remember their duties before he departed from this life. He was a faithful apostle.

B. Reports from Peter — 1:16-18

1:16 — "Cunningly devised fables" - The false teachers apparently were presenting the facts about Christ's incarnation, perfect life, death and resurrection as mere stories. Peter wanted

his readers to know that these were actual facts and not fables. Jesus Christ was God in the flesh and he actually saw the power and glory of Christ with his own eyes.

"Eyewitnesses" — This word is only used here in the New Testament. Peter, James and John were the three eyewitnesses of Jesus when He was transfigured in all of His glory and majesty.

1:17 — "Honor and glory" - Jesus Christ was honored and glorified by His Father when He spoke and told the three disciples that this was His beloved Son with Whom He was well pleased.

1:18 — "Holy mount" - This was probably Mount Hermon, a mountain in the northern part of Israel.

C. Revelations from God — 1:19-21

1:19 — "A more sure word of prophecy" - It is better to translate this, "A word of prophecy more sure." The word of prophecy by the prophets in the Old Testament was made more sure by the experience of the transfiguration of Christ on the mountain. Christ was prophesied in the Old Testament, but now this experience made those prophecies absolutely certain with the verification of three witnesses.

"Take heed" — Peter exhorts his readers to take heed to those prophecies about Christ.

"Light that shines in a dark place" — These prophecies are a light in a dark and superstitious world that has turned from God.

"Until the day dawn" — This refers to the coming of Christ when He sets up His Kingdom. That event will usher in a new day. Once again God will be glorified on earth.

"Day star" — This is a reference to Christ - cf. Num 24:17; Luke 1:78; Rev 22:16. When Christ comes, He will be glorified in the eyes of the believers and they will be transformed into His image.

1:20 — "Knowing this first" - The most important thing they were to know about Scripture was given next.

"Any private interpretation" — We are not to interpret the Scripture according to the way we think it should be read, but by the light of other Scriptures under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The false teachers twisted the Scriptures to fit their doctrines and thoughts, but we must let the Scriptures throw light on the Scripture we are studying - 2 Tim 2:15.

1:21 — "Prophecy came not . . . by the will of man" - God initiated the writing of Scripture, not man. Holy men were chosen by God to write what God wanted.

"Moved by the Holy Ghost" — The Holy Spirit was active in writing the Scripture - 2 Tim 3:16. He carried the writer along so that he wrote according to his own style, but every word was carefully checked by the Holy Spirit so that no error crept into the original text.