

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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2 Peter: Theme, a Precious Faith; Protect and Enrich it

SIMON Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:1–4, KJV 1900)

I am thankful for the addition of chapters and verses, added to the Bible around fifteen centuries after the New Testament was first written. No, these divisions are not inspired, and you can find several examples to make the point that chapter divisions were not always inserted at the proper location. One example will suffice. Acts 21:40 ends the chapter with a comma, "...he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying..." and Acts 22:1 begins the quote and continues the sentence. Paragraphs do not end with commas, and chapters do not end in the middle of a sentence or topic. A wise reading of Scripture should ignore these divisions. So why am I thankful for them? They facilitate locating a passage. However, in our reading of Scripture, we should follow the obvious theme and flow of thought across verses and chapters. The "Downside" to these divisions is that many folks who read the Bible chop it up by these devices in a way that ignores contextual flow altogether. The result is that their understanding of the Bible will be equally chopped up, much like the pieces of a puzzle before it is put together.

If we look for major themes as we read the New Testament instead of following this piecemeal view, we shall gain a fuller cohesive view of its teachings. We noted in our study of First Peter that Peter's (The Holy Spirit's, who directed Peter to write) major focus in that letter deals with suffering. As we begin our study of Second Peter, we should take note that Peter introduces his theme at the beginning of the letter. We have obtained a "...precious faith," not in any way inferior to the faith that the Lord gave to His apostles. However, though we possess this faith, our fruitfulness in it is defined—and thereby either enriched or stifled—by our knowledge. The ignorant believer and the wise believer have the same potential in terms of the faith that God has given to them, but their fruitfulness—or lack thereof—is obvious.

The second chapter of Second Peter has been wrested and falsely interpreted as much as any chapter in the New Testament. Quite often, Bible students will read this chapter and chase any number of ideas regarding its teaching, but they

seldom go back to Peter's primary theme for their understanding of its teachings. Peter did not give us a comprehensive litmus test to enable us to decide who is and who is not a child of God. If we read individual verses in the second chapter, we might think that Peter labels some folks as wicked, unregenerate sinners, while other verses are not so clear on the question. Contextually, Peter's point deals with false teachers, not identification of an individual's spiritual status. Perhaps Peter indicates that some false teachers may not be children of God at all, while others may be children of God whom Satan has deceived. Our focus should remain on Peter's stated emphasis, the reality that false teachers exist, and the damage they can do to our "...like precious faith" in the family of God.

As Peter emphasized the theme of a precious faith that we may use wisely to bear much spiritual fruit in the first chapter, he makes the obvious point in the second chapter, that every believer in Christ shall not know this truth; many false prophets exist who teach deplorable things that contradict this precious faith. We should be aware—and wary—of them, not choose to ignore them and hope they don't influence too many naïve sheep. In the second and third chapters of this letter, Peter gives us an in depth analysis of false prophets and of their false teachings. While we cannot know another person's motives in what they choose to do or not do, the Holy Spirit enlightened Peter to make the point in the second chapter. False teachers are typically driven by false motives. The false teacher seeks personal glory through his control over other people. The blatant attitude of supplanting the Holy Spirit as the primary teacher and guide permeates false teachers. Godly, faithful teachers will dedicate their labors to teaching truth from Scripture that the Holy Spirit affirms in the heart of those whom He indwells. False teaching will foster internal tension and conflict in believers who fall under its influence. After the tragic Jim Jones tragedy, a cliché surfaced that sadly makes this point. Sincere believers are liable to "Drink the Kool-Aid" of the false teachers and suffer great loss to their spiritual health, whether the false teacher takes their natural life as

Jones did or not. A major evidence of a false teacher at work appears in his followers appealing to him and his ideas without doubt or question. One might think these followers almost view the man as God. In their eyes, he can teach no wrong, and he can do no wrong. In the first chapter, Peter sets the goal for truth that is anchored in Scripture and affirmed by that precious faith, not in the private opinions—often loudly taught as if infallible truth by the false prophet and his followers—of any man since the close of the inspired Scriptures.

The knowledge that frames this precious faith and enables it to bear abundant fruit is truth established in the writings of Scripture and the affirmation of that truth by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, a word more sure than even human eyewitness observation. (2 Peter 1:19-21) Peter witnessed Jesus' glory in the mount of transfiguration, but he reminds his readers—and us—that we have access to something that is more sure than his own eyewitness observation. An eyewitness observation must flow through the observer's translation. What did you see? What does it mean? Peter strips away these personal, private variables in favor of a truth that has already been translated. The writings of Scripture are not a compilation of individual writers' personal ideas or observations or philosophies. The Holy Spirit directed those men to write under His influence, "...as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The "...private interpretation" of 2 Peter 1:20 refers to the original writers of Scripture, not to present readers of Scripture. These men did not write their own "...private interpretation." However, this point should carry great weight as we read and study the Scriptures. If the Holy Spirit did not permit these men to write their private interpretations, we who read those Scriptures should rely on what they wrote, not translate what we read into our own private interpretations.

Beware the man who gives you an odd or off-the-wall explanation of Scripture or of his faith, defended by "The Lord revealed to me that..." If the man's claimed revelation contradicts Scripture, he may well have experienced a revelation, but it didn't originate with God. The word of prophecy that Peter names, more sure than even his own eyewitness observations on the mountain with Jesus, is public information available to every child of God who reads that record in the Scriptures. It is never a spurious private claimed "Revelation" from the Lord. The most errant of false teachers may be wholly sincere in his beliefs. Sincerity alone is not a valid measure of truth. The blind zeal of the people for whom Paul prays in Romans 10:1 no doubt grew out of sincerity, but they sincerely refused to believe in Jesus. We occasionally answer our doorbell to the ring of young men in clean white shirts who exude sincerity, but their sincerity bears no weight to the truthfulness of their beliefs. We also answer the door to families who quite sincerely want to "Give" us a brief publication for a small donation,

but their sincerity adds no validity to their truth claims. I respect that people so actively engaged in both of these groups are admirably sincere, but I also observe that their beliefs do not harmonize with Scripture. When we seek a solid basis for truth, we must turn from Smith, Young, or Judge Russell to a "...more sure word of prophecy." When we seek truth, we also must put even our own most respected friends to the test of truth that Peter affirms in the first chapter of Second Peter. Long before Peter wrote these words, the Holy Spirit directed Isaiah, the Old Testament prophet, to write similar truth.

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. (Isaiah 8:20 KJVP)

Take note of Peter's emphasis on knowledge in our study passage. The "...like precious truth" of which he writes stands on the basis of "...the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." However, we only bring that precious faith to fruition, to a healthy, fruitful (As measured by God, not by a false teacher) status "...through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord... through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."

...having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. In our dumbed-down Christianette world, people think of lust only in terms of an aberrant sexual idea. However, in this context, Peter broadens the scope of lust significantly. Anything that alters or corrupts our knowledge of this "...like precious faith" and thereby becomes more important to us than it grows out of our own lust, not from the Holy Spirit or a private "Revelation" from the Lord. We need not impute the various corrupt motives that Peter surfaces in the second and third chapters of this letter to these folks, but the motives that Peter describes grow more out of the false teacher's personal ambition for his own glory and benefit than from any other quarter. A skilled false teacher knows how to masque his motives and to convince a naïve sheep that he is noble and spiritual, even as he plants the seeds of blind obedience to his errant ideas. In the end, the misguided sheep will become more loyal to the false teacher than to anyone else, and through that wrong motive, this sad sheep will unwittingly enhance the false teacher in one way or another. That is Peter's inspired observation, nor a private interpretation. Yes, the faithful believer must avoid the carnal form of lust, but he must equally grow in knowledge so as to avoid the ambitious lust for power and control over others that often fosters false teachers and their followers. Never stop or diminish your daily time with Scripture, not just reading it, but in faithful, prayerful study to learn its truth. Your fruitfulness that glorifies the Lord is measured and either grows or diminishes based on your firm knowledge of Scripture.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor