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MINISTRIES

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Confirm Your Calling: Introduction to 2 Peter (2 Peter 1:1-2)

The letter of 2 Peter carries an important message for us today. Peter writes to warn his readers of false teachings infiltrating the church. He also writes to admonish his readers to “[confirm \[their\] calling and election](#)” (2 Peter 1:10) by growing in knowledge and living holy lives while they wait for the coming of the Lord. Peter’s wisdom and warnings certainly apply to our current situation, as we’ll see in this study.

In this teaching series, we will be going through 2 Peter verse by verse. This first teaching will serve as an introduction. We’ll talk about authorship, audience, and some of the broader themes. Let’s start with the letter’s greeting in the first two verses:

2 Peter 1:1-2

[Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ \[Yeshua Messiah\], To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ \[Yeshua Messiah\]: May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus \[Yeshua\] our Lord.](#)

As we can see, this letter claims Peter as its author. We’ve talked a lot already about who Peter was. See the first video in our series on 1 Peter, [Life in Exile: Introduction to 1 Peter](#), to learn more.

Before we dig into this letter, let’s talk a bit about authorship. Did Peter write this letter as the letter itself claims? Well, whether he did is actually disputed. The majority of modern scholars, including some conservative ones, doubt Peter is the author of 2 Peter. So, let’s talk about that.

Authorship of 2 Peter

The authenticity of 2 Peter is doubted for three main reasons. First, unlike 1 Peter and other New Testament writings, there is a lack of other early Christian writings attesting to 2 Peter’s authenticity. Many assume that this lack of early evidence indicates that the letter was written too late to have been authored by Peter. Furthermore, the early Christian sources that do explicitly mention 2 Peter seem to express some reservations about whether the letter was genuine.

Second, some internal features of 2 Peter lead one to think that it is a later document. To give one example, there seems to be an obvious literary relationship between 2 Peter and Jude, and it's often assumed that 2 Peter depends upon Jude as a source. Since scholars believe that Jude was written after Peter had already died, it follows that Peter could not have been the author of 2 Peter.

Third, the literary differences between 1 and 2 Peter suggest different authors. 2 Peter differs from 1 Peter in vocabulary and writing style. For instance, some of the favorite terms repeated throughout 2 Peter do not appear in 1 Peter, such as “knowledge” (*epignosis*), “godliness” (*eusebeia*), and “diligence” (*spoudazein*). This is not what we might expect if the same author wrote both letters.

Again, because of these reasons, many doubt the authenticity of 2 Peter.

It's worth noting at the outset that the early church *did* recognize 2 Peter as authentic, and it was fully accepted as canonical by the fourth century. So, do we have good reasons to conclude that Peter did not author this letter? Are the reasons to doubt this letter's authenticity compelling enough to say that the early church got it wrong when they included it in the canon?

When we examine the evidence closely, it becomes apparent that the “problems” with 2 Peter are overstated. Time won't permit us to unpack every relevant data point, but we will make a few observations.

(For a more thorough defense of 2 Peter's authenticity, see Michael Kruger, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” *JETS* 42/4 (December 1999): 645-671)

First, we will address the issue of external attestation—that is, the issue of whether other writings from the same time mention the existence of this letter. While it is not as strong as other New Testament writings, there *is* good evidence that points to an earlier date for this letter, which would allow for Peter's authorship. Also, the popular claim that early Christians distrusted 2 Peter's authenticity needs to be qualified. Here are some things to consider.

First, at the beginning of the third century, the early Christian scholar Origen does say that some of his contemporaries had reservations about 2 Peter (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.25.11). Still, Origen cited 2 Peter in his own writings several times (see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990], 806) and considered it Scripture (Origen, *Numer. Hom.* 2.676). Apparently, Origen was not persuaded by the doubts of some of his contemporaries since he states that Peter wrote two letters (“Even Peter blows on the twin trumpets of his own Epistles” —Origen, *Hom. in Josh.* 7.1). The way Origen handles 2 Peter is not what we would expect if there were widespread doubts about its legitimacy.

Additionally, early Christian theologian, Clement of Alexandria, appears to have written a commentary on 2 Peter, although this commentary has been lost to history. The early church historian Eusebius records that Clement wrote commentaries on...

“...all the canonical Scripture, not even passing over the disputed writings—I speak of the epistle of Jude and the other Catholic Epistles.”

—Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.14.1

Elsewhere, Eusebius explicitly includes 2 Peter in what he defines as “disputed writings” (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.25.3). Thus, it’s entirely reasonable to think that Eusebius had in mind 2 Peter when speaking about the commentaries written by Clement. In Clement’s *Letter to Theodorus*, we also see a parallel to 2 Peter 2:19, indicating that Clement knew of and utilized 2 Peter. According to Michael Kruger:

If Clement did possess, use and comment upon 2 Peter (and the evidence suggests this as probable), then this not only means that he viewed the epistle worthy of a scriptural commentary (showing he gave it some degree of authenticity), but that the date of 2 Peter must be placed at least in the first half of the second century if not sooner. Indeed, not only would someone of Clement’s stature not be duped by a forgery that was only a few years old, but he would hardly write a commentary on a book that most of the church rejected as a recently composed imitation of Peter.

-Michael Kruger, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” *JETS* 42/4 (December 1999), 653

There is additional evidence that pushes the date of 2 Peter all the way back to the first century AD. Irenaeus and Justin Martyr, writing in the second century AD, both quote from and allude to 2 Peter (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1; 5.23.2; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 82.1). There is also a probable allusion to 2 Peter 3:8 in the early second-century Epistle of Barnabas (Barnabas 15:4). Finally, the letter of 1 Clement, dated to the latter part of the first century, shows remarkable evidence that the author depended upon 2 Peter and even thought of it as Scripture. Kruger gives two examples:

(1) 1 Clement 23.3 cites an unidentified “Scripture” as saying: “Wretched are the double-minded, those who doubt in their soul and say, ‘We have heard these things even in our Father’s times, and, see, we have grown old and none of them has happened to us.’” There is a strikingly similar idea in 2 Peter 3:4 which tells us that mockers will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” Although the vocabulary is different, there is a common pattern shared by the context of these two citations. First, there is a reference to false teachers (1 Clem 21.5; 2 Pet 2:1ff); second, there is the discussion of the doubts about the future (1 Clem 23; 2 Pet 3:4); and third, there is mention of the nearness of Christ’s second coming (1 Clem 23.5; 2 Pet 3:10). (2) There are two phrases in 2 Peter that are unique in the Bible, but used by 1 Clement in the exact same manner. The first is found in 2 Pet 1:17 where God is referred to as [“the magnificent glory”]. 1 Clem 9.2 refers to God as [“his magnificent glory”]. The second is found in 2 Pet 2:2 where the Christian life is described as [“the way of truth”]. 1 Clem 35:5 uses the exact same Greek. It is unlikely that phrases so distinctive and rare could appear in both places by coincidence.

-Michael Kruger, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” *JETS* 42/4 (December 1999), 655

This evidence reveals that early Christians knew of and utilized 2 Peter as early as the late first century, when 1 Clement is believed to have been written. So, when scholars say that there is a “lack of early attestation” to 2 Peter, they are not saying that there is *no* early attestation. As we’ve seen, we do have evidence that points to an early date of writing for the letter, and for early acceptance of the letter among the Christian communities. We just don’t have as much early attestation of 2 Peter as we do the other New Testament writings.

Now, some might complain that there *should* be more evidence for 2 Peter’s authenticity. And when we compare it with the *excessive* amount of evidence we have for other New Testament writings, that

complaint might seem reasonable. But let's try to have some perspective. Compared to extrabiblical writings of the time, the external attestation we have for 2 Peter is quite adequate. For instance, nobody doubts the authenticity of the writings of Herodotus, Tacitus, or Thucydides, and yet the external attestation for these writings is significantly less than that of 2 Peter.

Now, some might ask why some early Christians doubted 2 Peter's authenticity if Christians recognized it as legitimate since the first century. It might be that these doubts were *not* because Christians thought there was something wrong with 2 Peter itself, but rather because of a different reason. For instance, a number of Gnostic writings using Peter's name were circulating in the early centuries. These writings—*The Gospel of Peter*, *The Apocalypse of Peter*, etc.—promoted bizarre and heretical doctrines. Because of the existence of these fraudulent books, it would be understandable for some Christians to be suspicious of any writings bearing Peter's name. But the fact that 2 Peter *was* eventually fully accepted by the early Christians, while all these other works were rejected, is evidence *in favor* of 2 Peter's authenticity. It underwent greater scrutiny than most of the other New Testament writings and was still found to be genuine. As Donald Guthrie writes:

If Gnostic groups had used Peter's name to drive home their own particular tenets, this fact would cause the orthodox church to take particular care not to use any spurious Petrine epistles. Some of the more nervous probably regarded 2 Peter suspiciously for this reason, but the fact that it ultimately gained acceptance in spite of the pseudo-Petrine literature is an evidence more favourable to its authenticity than against it, unless the orthodox Church Fathers had by this time become wholly undiscerning, which is not, however, borne out of the firm rejection of other works attributed to Peter.

-Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 809

What about some of the internal features of 2 Peter that might point to it being a later writing? One of the most popular claims is that 2 Peter borrows from Jude, and since Jude was supposedly written after Peter's death, Peter could not have been the author of 2 Peter. There does appear to be a literary relationship between the two writings. But does this fact disprove 2 Peter's authenticity?

Two observations can be made regarding this claim. First, it is not necessarily the case that 2 Peter depends upon Jude as a source. As numerous scholars have argued, it's entirely possible that it's the other way around and that Jude actually borrows from 2 Peter. (See Mark D. Mathews, "The Literary Relationship of 2 Peter and Jude: Does the Synoptic Tradition Resolve this Synoptic Problem?" *Neotestamentica* 44, no. 1 [2010]: 47–66.) If that is true—if Jude actually quotes from 2 Peter—then Jude would be yet another piece of early external attestation to 2 Peter's authenticity!

Second, even if we assume that 2 Peter depends upon Jude, the late date applied to Jude is not set in stone. Examining the evidence for an early date of Jude is beyond the scope of this teaching, but consider this statement from Richard Bauckham. He says this regarding Jude:

Its character is such that it might very plausibly be dated in the 50s, and nothing requires a later date.

-Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 13

This scholar we just quoted, by the way, does not think that 2 Peter is an authentic letter, so he is not arguing for an early date for Jude in order to justify 2 Peter being genuine! He is simply persuaded that Jude was written much earlier than commonly believed.

Since it's just as possible that Jude borrows from 2 Peter rather than the other way around—and also given the possibility that Jude may have been written at an earlier date than is generally believed—the objections to 2 Peter's authenticity on the basis of its literary relationship with Jude are far from conclusive.

But, what about the differences between 1 and 2 Peter that seem to suggest different authors? Well, first, as we discussed in our series on 1 Peter, it is likely that Peter had a scribe write his first epistle for him. If he used a different scribe to write 2 Peter, that might explain some of the differences between the two letters.

Second, the letters address entirely different situations. 1 Peter addresses persecution among the early believers, and 2 Peter responds to false teachers. It's not unreasonable to expect that the letters would have significant differences. As Kruger writes:

At points it seems the critics almost expect Peter's second epistle to be simply a rehash of the same material so that identical vocabulary and themes would reappear. However, this expectation is certainly unreasonable considering the very different circumstances and purposes behind each epistle. 1 Peter deals with the church facing persecution and 2 Peter is battling false teachings. Thus 1 Peter is designed to encourage and foster hope, whereas 2 Peter is designed to warn and inform. One would expect an entirely different tone, attitude, vocabulary and disposition. In fact, considering their substantially different themes, it would be quite strange if the two epistles exhibited too much correlation; indeed this would cause us to suspect that 2 Peter was a deliberate forgery.

-Michael Kruger, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter," *JETS* 42/4 (December 1999), 658

Third, despite the differences between 1 and 2 Peter, many remarkable similarities between the letters give evidence of a common author. For example, both letters have the same salutation, "[May grace and peace be multiplied to you](#)" (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2). This salutation is unique to these two writings and is what we would expect if the same author wrote both letters. It would also seem quite strange for a pseudepigraphic author—that is, an author pretending to be Peter—to copy this phrase word-for-word from 1 Peter and not copy anything else from the introduction. This is just one of the several unique grammatical similarities between the letters. Additionally, the two letters share some common themes: the second coming of Christ, Noah being saved from the flood, and prophecy.

Michael Kruger documents many more of these unique similarities in his paper, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter." (Michael Kruger, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter," *JETS* 42/4 [December 1999], 645-671).

As we've seen, the objections to 2 Peter's authenticity are overstated and not sufficient to cause us to doubt that Peter wrote it. In this series, we will proceed from the standpoint that Peter was the author of 2 Peter.

Peter's Audience

Now let's talk a bit about Peter's audience. Peter addressed his letter to "[those who have obtained a faith](#)

of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ [Yeshua Messiah]:”

Peter’s description of his audience in verse 1 doesn’t give us any specific information regarding who they were. However, in 2 Peter 3:1, he says, “**This is now the second letter that I am writing to you.**” If that is a reference to 1 Peter, this would imply that the recipients are the same for both of Peter’s letters—that is, the Christian communities of “**Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia**” (1 Peter 1:1). As we learned in our series through 1 Peter, these recipients were predominantly Gentile believers who have been adopted into the family of God through their faith and made full members of the community of Israel.

Peter describes these believers as those who have “**obtained a faith of equal standing with ours.**” The word “received” (*lanchousin*) implies that this faith is a gift from God, not something earned (cf. Ephesians 2:8). This faith is of “**equal standing with ours,**” probably referring to that of the apostles. In other words, all believers, from leader to layman, are equal in the faith. This is because this faith is based on “**the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ [Yeshua Messiah].**” Nobody is more important or more special than anyone else. Nobody earns their righteous standing before God by their own righteousness. All believers are equally blessed to have received this gift, which was made possible only by Yeshua’s righteousness.

So, Peter’s audience is likely the same audience he addressed in his first letter. That means they are predominantly Gentile believers in the Christian communities of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Peter describes them as equal recipients of the “faith” received on the basis of Yeshua’s righteousness.

Peter’s Greeting

What else can we learn from Peter’s greeting? Well, Peter identifies himself as “**Simeon Peter.**” Simeon is an older and unique form of Peter’s Jewish name, Simon. Here, Peter transliterates his name into Greek from the Hebrew form *Shimon*. This unique form is used in reference to Peter only one other time in the New Testament (Acts 15:14).

It’s interesting that Peter uses the double name Simeon Peter instead of just Peter as he does in his first epistle. Once again, this feature speaks to the letter’s authenticity since we would expect a pseudonymous author who was trying to pass off his writing as Peter’s to simply copy 1 Peter’s introduction exactly instead of making such a noticeable change. Furthermore, as we mentioned, the form of the name Simeon is quite unique. It doesn’t appear in any other early Christian writings nor in any of the pseudonymous writings attributed to Peter. We would expect a pseudonymous author to use the more popular form of the name—“Simon”—instead of this rare, older form that was no longer in use after the first century.

Peter calls himself a “**servant and apostle of Yeshua Messiah.**” Peter’s use of the word “servant” connotes humble service to his master, Yeshua. His authority is not his own but comes from the one he serves. He is not only Yeshua’s servant, but also his apostle. Basically, an apostle is a person sent on a mission as a representative. Peter speaks to these believers as a representative of the Messiah.

The Knowledge of God and of Yeshua our Lord

This letter was authored toward the end of the apostle Peter’s life. In chapter 1, verses 12-15, Peter speaks about his imminent death and says that the purpose of his writing is so that his readers can be

reminded of his teachings after he is gone. What Peter wanted his readers to remember is no less relevant to us who read his letter today.

Peter hoped that his readers would grow in knowledge of God and Yeshua. He said that grace and peace are multiplied in this knowledge (2 Peter 1:2). Peter ends his letter with this same theme of “knowledge”:

2 Peter 3:17-18

You therefore, beloved, **knowing this beforehand**, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and **knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [Yeshua Messiah]**. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Ancient writers often began and ended sections of their writings with the same theme as a way to highlight significant points they wanted to get across. As Douglas Moo explains:

The biblical writers often draw attention to a particular idea or word by “framing” their argument with it (the technical word is *inclusio*). For Peter, in other words, “growing in knowledge” is a key idea in this letter.

-Douglas J. Moo, 2 Peter, Jude (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 38

Peter’s point is that enjoying true grace and peace multiplied depends on growing in our knowledge of God and Yeshua. Learning about who God is and what he expects of us, and living that out, is what this life is all about. Growing in this knowledge includes embracing biblical doctrine and resisting those who teach false doctrine, which, as we’ll see, is a central theme of Peter’s letter.

Many Christians today downplay the importance of knowledge and having sound doctrine. For instance, one self-proclaimed “progressive” church states this as one of their beliefs:

God is a mystery to be explored, not a doctrine to be espoused.

-GracePointe Church, “About Us,” gracepointe.net

Now, it’s worth pointing out that this statement is self-defeating. They may not realize it, but the statement “God is a mystery, not a doctrine” is itself a doctrine about God.

But putting that aside, the idea that God is a “mystery”—that we can’t *really* be sure about who he is and what he expects of us—is a dangerous idea. It sets us up to just start crafting our own version of God in our mind, which is nothing more than an idol. Now, that doesn’t mean that there isn’t *any* “mystery” about God. Certainly, as finite creatures, there are things about the infinite God that we will never be able to fully comprehend. Nevertheless, God has revealed himself to us in the Scriptures. There are doctrines that the Scriptures teach about who God is and what he expects of us.

Peter instructs his readers to “**confirm your calling and election**” (2 Peter 1:10). That is, we are to demonstrate that our calling and election are genuine by how we live our lives. Growing in our knowledge of God and Yeshua is part of that. If we are true believers, we will want to know more about this great God that we serve, and we’ll never want to stop learning.

As we study 2 Peter, may you grow in your knowledge of God and Yeshua. May you experience God's grace and peace in a deeper and more profound way as you embrace who he is, what he has done, and what he expects of us.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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