

“REMEMBER THESE THINGS”

2 Peter 1-3

The story of the second epistle of Peter is quite fascinating. Likely written to the same collection of Christians and churches in some provinces of Asia Minor as his first letter, Peter sets out to correct some misunderstandings and expose some false teachers. There is urgency to his writing due to his impending death—foretold to him by Christ (1:14). So, he writes asking his readers to “make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things” (1:15).

God Empowers (1:3-11)

Before he addresses the heresy, character and accusations of the false teachers and their destructive work among these churches, he begins the correspondence by reminding them just how incredible is the power of God at work within them (and us). He does so, no doubt, to provide reminding fortification to these Christians that God empowered them to do his will; provided for them to do his will; and invited them to fully participate in his will. To this end they should get after it, adding the tools God provided for them to get it done—knowledge; self-control; perseverance; godliness, brotherly kindness; and love. These virtues would empower them to overcome evil while producing within them the divine nature. These virtues also stood in stark contrast with the character of the false teachers, who were “nearsighted and blind” having “forgotten that he has been cleansed of his past sin.”

These virtues would also enable these Christians to ensure their “calling and election” even as the false teachers attempted to undermine it. It would also ensure that they would not fall into their traps and snares. The end result would be a welcome—not to the kind of folly represented in the false teaching, but into the very eternal kingdom of God. In order for these churches to withstand the false teaching being pushed upon them and to be able to expose the false teachers for who they were, Peter knew they needed to know they could—that God empowered them with everything they needed, not just for that specific challenge, but for all challenges.

Peter’s Purpose (1:12-21)

Here Peter states why he is writing with urgency and begins to address some of the accusations of the false teachers hurting these churches. One of the methods they used to attempt to destroy Peter’s influence was to claim that he and the other apostles simply made up their teachings about Christ. So Peter reaffirms and restates his case as an eye and ear witness to everything he had shared about Jesus. He was there. His message was not some “cleverly invented stories” as the false teachers propagated. Further the prophets also give witness to Christ. They did not make the stories up either, but spoke from God as the Holy Spirit led them. Listen to them, not the false teachers. Peter’s word and the prophet’s word—a much better and reliable witness than these false teachers—whose character and intent Peter would expose and shred to pieces in the next section.

False Teachers Exposed (2:1-22)

As Peter exposes and takes down the false teachers—“springs without water and mists driven by a storm”—it becomes clear how they operated and what their aim was. Their goal was to destroy any and all of the healthy influence and teaching they had received from Peter and the other apostles

and replace it with a self-serving, “freedom” based doctrine that allowed them to exploit these churches in order to achieve their goals—basically stated—money and sex.

These teachers operated smoothly, of course, using familiar terms while twisting them at the same time (it seems likely that one example of such would be the purposeful mishandling of some of Paul’s teaching—perhaps Romans 6 on grace and freedom—since Peter mentions Paul and how some of his teaching is “hard to understand”—3:15-16). The stories of the false teachers were the ones “made up”—not what Peter witnessed to them. He makes it clear that these teachers stand in shameful condemnation.

But these teachers had found a standing in these churches through their secretive agendas and accusations. Another such accusation claimed that there really was no real reckoning coming. After all, nothing much had changed over the generations, so God really was not going to bring about any kind of judgment. This accusation coupled with a false understanding of freedom would open the way for the false teachers to justify their actions—a way to reframe their evil agendas in a way to actually put God’s stamp of approval on them. Peter was having none of this. He mentions three Old Testament examples of God’s reckoning (along with God’s rescue for the righteous) and affirms it is coming for the false teachers.

Next Peter exposes their ungodly character. He does not hold back in describing just how depraved they were—arrogant, blasphemers, carousers, blots, blemishes, adulterers, greedy, and accursed. He compares them to Balaam—something no one would ever welcome. Their teaching was useless and destructive—just a means to get what they really wanted—exploiting and deceiving the church to gain money and sexual favors. They boasted in freedom, but yet were truly slaves to their lusts. In a stark illustration, Peter describes them as pigs returning to the mud and dogs returning to their vomit. Once enlightened perhaps by the knowledge of Christ, these teachers now had returned to the vile filth of the world and were attempting to drag these churches down with them.

The Day of the Lord (3:1-18)

In this last section Peter deals with one more accusation, that is, that the return of Christ is not going to happen. This was the claim of the false teachers—the scoffers—who had infiltrated these churches. Not true is Peter’s response calling them to remember the days of Noah. Jesus will return Peter affirms, but is being held back by the Father, who is patient beyond our understanding and desires to give everyone in every generation the opportunity for salvation. God’s patience is not merely measured in days and years. He is not thusly limited, but even so “the day of the Lord” will come—most certainly and unexpectedly.

When he comes the heavens and earth will undergo a fiery transformation—elements laid bare; stripped clean; evil destroyed. What remains will be “a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness.” No place here for the false teachers and what they are peddling. So Peter asks in light of this information, “what kind of people ought you to be?” He answers his own question, “You ought to live holy and godly lives.” (Both the question and the answer still vitally pertinent and true today.) Don’t listen to the false teachers. Jesus is coming, but God is patient. Embrace his salvation and live it out in purity and peace. Don’t listen to the false teachers. Listen to the apostles—to Paul—not to the distortion of Paul offered by these “ignorant and unstable” teachers. They are out of control and headed for destruction—don’t follow them! Guard against them. This is what Peter wants them to remember.