

*Bible Study 2 Peter 1*  
*By Fr. John Brown*

The book of 2 Peter has many of the same features as 1 Peter. The writer identifies himself as Peter the Apostle. It is another “general” or “Catholic” epistle - written to all the Christian churches and not just one. It mentions the writings of the Apostle Paul, and assumes the readers know him:

*“...and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you...” (3:15-16).*

This indicates the ongoing cooperation and respect between the two Apostles throughout their lives.

1 Peter was written from Rome while the author was still free. 2 Peter was also written from Rome, but from prison, awaiting execution. The book reflects Peter’s awareness that he will soon die. He writes his parting encouragements and concerns. The book is dated between 63 and 67 AD.

The style of 2 Peter is different from 1 Peter. This led many commentators, even the early Church, to question whether 2 Peter was written by someone else claiming to be Peter. When the early Church fathers were deciding the canon of the New Testament, this questionable authorship made 2 Peter one of the more controversial books. However, the bishops decided to include 2 Peter in the New Testament. They decided that its message was vitally important and inspired by the Holy Spirit, even if Peter did not write it.

The central theme of 1 Peter was warning Christians of coming persecution, and calling for them to spiritually prepare for it. Whereas 1 Peter warned against the imminent external threat of the Roman government, 2 Peter warns against the imminent threats from within the Church – apostasy, false teachers and false doctrines.

*“<sup>1</sup> Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ...”*

The Greek word translated “bondservant” here is *doulos*. This is the most common word for a simple slave - a person owned by another person. There are other New Testament Greek words with similar meanings, like “*διάκονος*” (servant), “*misthotos*” (hired servant) and “*oiketes*” (house servant). Of all the possible related words, Peter chose “*doulos*,” which was the lowest form of servant. This is what he learned from Christ:

*“<sup>27</sup> And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave (doulos) — <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28).*

In the same sentence that Peter calls himself a slave, the lowest of the low, he rightly calls himself an apostle, the highest rank possible. He embraces both, with no sense of contradiction.

There were only 12 original apostles. The Church recognized another group of lesser apostles, called “the Seventy.” Here is more information about them:

[https://orthodoxwiki.org/Seventy\\_Apostles](https://orthodoxwiki.org/Seventy_Apostles)

There are other saints, during and since the Apostolic Age, whose lives were so pivotal that they are called “Equal to the Apostles.” Here is more information about them:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equal-to-apostles>.

*“...for To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord...”*

I have always said that Christianity is not a religion but a relationship. It is our knowledge of God that ultimately defines us as Christians. That knowledge of Him is not knowledge about Him or of Him, but knowing Him personally.

*“...<sup>3</sup> as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, <sup>4</sup> by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”*

This prayer of Peter, that “you may be partakers of the divine nature” is a classic biblical description of “Deification” or “Theosis.” We fallen, broken, finite human beings have the potential to be filled with the presence of God Himself. In deification, the divine dwells in the creature. The infinite fills the finite. Perfection inhabits the imperfect. The Holy occupies the unholy, and eventually expels the unholiness from us.

In the incarnation, the eternal God now assumed humanity. In the one divine Person, the two natures remain separate and unmixed. In deification, we who began as human, now receive divinity. As we become “partakers of the divine nature,” the two natures remain separate and unmixed yet united in our individual personhoods. In deification, we undergo a creaturely form of Incarnation. Describing deification, Paul prays a prayer similar to Peter’s: “..that you might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:19).

It should be noted that Peter says that “becoming partakers of the divine nature” is not accomplished in our past, as in a once-and-for-all conversion experience. Rather, it is a present reality and awaits future completion. As Peter says, it is somewhat contingent as in “*might be*” and is always “*becoming.*”

*“<sup>5</sup> But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, <sup>6</sup> to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, <sup>7</sup> to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.*

Faith is the foundation of our salvation. “*But without faith it is impossible to please God*” (Hebrews 11:6). However, this verse says that all these other Christian virtues must be built upon it faith.

*“<sup>8</sup> For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

The presence of these Christian attributes in our lives is evidence that deification is taking place. Absence of these attributes in a Christian over time is evidence that deification is not taking place:

*“<sup>9</sup> For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness...”*

It is always a tragedy when a person has faith, and is growing in Christ, but they slowly return back to their former way of life.

*“... and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”*

This “cleansing of sins,” which some sadly forget, refers to their baptism. “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord’ (Acts 22:16).* That was the sacrament that began their life in Christ and in His Church. Christ spoke this tendency to lose one’s love for God over time.

*“<sup>3</sup> Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: “Behold, a sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. <sup>7</sup> And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matthew 13).*

*“<sup>10</sup> Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; <sup>11</sup> for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

Diligence in tending to our spiritual life yields eternal blessings.

Peter now provides an insight into his situation at the time of his writing this Epistle. He is describing “an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom” because he himself is about to face it:

*“<sup>13</sup> Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, <sup>14</sup> knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. <sup>15</sup> Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.”*

To Peter, his aging body was merely a tent – a useful but temporary shelter. He was preparing to trade in his “tent” for a permanent heavenly mansion.

In the book of 1 Peter, he warns the faithful of coming earthly persecutions. In 2 Peter, he is about to give his final instructions before leaving this earth. Now he wants to bring his readers “back to basics.” He wants them always keep their original faith strong. Peter knew something about starting over and going back to his starting point. When he first followed Jesus Christ, it was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and he had had a bad night fishing. In Luke’s account:

*“<sup>4</sup> When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” <sup>5</sup> But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.” <sup>6</sup> And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking.... And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.” <sup>11</sup> So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him” (Luke 5).*

Three years later, Peter was a complete failure. After bragging that he would die for Christ, he denied Christ three times, with oaths and profanity under questioning from a little girl. After such a miserable performance, he believed that his relationship with Christ was over. But after the resurrected Christ, brought Peter right back to where his life as a disciple began:

*“<sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’... and that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup> But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Children, have you any food?” They answered Him, “No.”*

*<sup>6</sup> And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.*

*<sup>7</sup> Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” (John 21)*

Christ brought the disgraced Peter right back to the beginning, and repeated Peter’s calling right down to the details. Christ later restored Peter, and made him not only an Apostle, but the leader of the Apostles. Peter had to go back to the beginning in order go much further forward than he would have before.

What are some examples of Christians having to go back to their spiritual beginnings before they can go forward?

This experience going back to square one no doubt influenced his message to Christians: Peter is reminding his readers that the Jesus Christ they had long worshiped was still full of divine glory and power. The glorious Christ is still the source of the faith. He is still well worth following with awe and love. He reminds them that he - Peter - was an eyewitness of that divinity, glory and power of Christ at the Transfiguration.



*“<sup>16</sup> For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. <sup>17</sup> For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” <sup>18</sup> And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.”*

**This last part of chapter one contains an essential teaching on Scripture.**

*“<sup>20</sup> knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation...”*

**This commandment against private interpretation of Scripture is the most violated commandments in the Bible. Since the Protestant Reformation, private interpretation of Scripture has become rampant. Protestants believe in a doctrine they call “Sola Scriptura,” which teaches that the Bible can be correctly interpreted by individuals with no reference to the broader Church or anyone else. The Holy Spirit will lead the individual interpreter to truth directly.**

**The weakness of Sola Scriptura became obvious immediately after it was invented by Martin Luther:**



**Luther privately interpreted the Bible to establish a range of other Protestant doctrines. Soon another Protestant Reformer came along – John Calvin:**



**Calvin also practiced Sola Scriptura, and also privately interpreted the Bible. John Calvin believed that the Holy Spirit revealed to him a new set of beliefs that differed significantly from what the same Holy Spirit had revealed to Martin Luther, such as a different form of church government, the presence of Christ in communion, and predestination. Shortly after, another Reformer named Ulrich Zwingli arose:**



**Also also believed in Sola Scriptura. Zwingli believed that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him another series of doctrines, including another form of church government, another different belief in the presence of Christ in communion, that babies must not be baptized, and that Calvin's doctrine of predestination was wrong.**

**Three Protestant Reformers, all living in the span of one lifetime, all believing in Sola Scriptura, all privately interpreting the Scripture, all believing that the Holy Spirit had led them to the correct interpretation of the Scripture. Yet none of them agreed with each other on essential Christian beliefs. It is obvious that the one Holy Spirit was not communicating three different sets of beliefs to three different men.**

**From the beginning of Protestantism, Sola Scriptura and its inherent private interpretation of Scripture led to interpretational chaos. That chaos has multiplied for the past 500 years. Estimates of the number of Protestant denominations range from 5,000 to 33,000.**



<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/05/12/appendix-b-classification-of-protestant-denominations/>

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Each one of these Protestant denominations began when someone disregarded Peter's statement, *"...no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation."*

God cannot be the author of such chaos. Christ prayed in John 17:

*"Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are ... that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one. I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (11, 21-23).*

The Apostle Paul writes:

*"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).*

In the Creed we Orthodox confess our belief in "One, holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church." That word "Catholic" means "Universal."

Orthodoxy can be criticized for many things, but interpretational chaos is not one of them. In contrast to the chaos of Protestantism and private interpretation, Orthodoxy interprets the Bible according to "group interpretation" and that group is the whole Church. It is based on Holy Tradition, especially the consensus of Fathers. They were much closer to the time of Christ than the 1500's, and were therefore in a much better position to understand what Christ and the Apostles actually taught. Our applications of the Bible change from age to age, but our basic understanding does not change with every passing interpreter.

From the service of the Sunday of Orthodoxy:

*"As the prophets have seen, as the apostles have taught, as the Church has received, as the teachers have set forth in dogmas, as the whole world has understood, as Grace has shone forth, as the truth was demonstrated, as falsehood was banished, as wisdom was emboldened, as Christ has awarded; thus do we believe, thus we speak, thus we preach Christ our true God and His saints... this is the Faith of the apostles, this is the Faith of the fathers, this is the Faith of the Orthodox, this Faith hath established the whole world."*

