



BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

2 Peter



2 Peter 1:1-11

Introduction

Peter's second letter (see 3:1) to the same group of Christians has a very serious and urgent purpose. Aware of his imminent death (1:14) he is also concerned that these believers will be vulnerable to false teachers who are scoffing at the apostolic teaching of the return of Christ and living for sensual pleasure. Their heresies are destructive – bringing destruction upon themselves, but also to the many who follow them. Peter is concerned, therefore, that his readers are not carried away with the error of lawless people and so lose their own stability (3:17). Rather, he wants them to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (3:18). His letter, therefore, aims to remind them of what they know and to stir them up into action.

Purpose

To grow in the knowledge of Jesus and in godliness, recognising his abundant provision for us in the past, the present and the future.

Structure

- v1-2 Introduction
- v3-4 Jesus has given all we need for spiritual life, now and in the future
- v5-7 Because of this we must make every effort to grow
- v8-9 For this growth is essential
- v10-11 And it will result in security now and in the future

Detail

V1-2 Even in a fairly conventional opening to his letter, Peter manages to convey the remarkable changes that God has brought about. His own encounter with Jesus has changed him from being Simon to Simon Peter – now his servant and apostle - one commissioned by him. And he writes to people who probably didn't hear the gospel through him (see 3:2 your apostles), but who he's confident have a faith that is of exactly the same kind as his own. Why? Because it's a faith obtained by the righteousness of Jesus, righteousness here, either meaning morally upright and impartial, or being a reference to God's saving righteousness (as in Romans 1:17). Note also that Peter identifies Jesus unambiguously as God, a relatively rare thing for the New Testament (see also Titus 2:13, Romans 9:5, and John 1:1).

Later in the letter we'll see that this same righteousness found in Christ must be reflected in the lives of those who belong to him and is characteristic of the new creation over which Jesus will reign (3:13). As Peter moves on, he expands a standard greeting to identify his aim in writing. Grace and peace are the experience of God's undeserved favour and the results of it – a right relationship with him and with others. The source of the multiplication of them is the personal knowledge of God and our Lord Jesus. Peter's aim, therefore in writing, is to increase that knowledge in his readers so that when grace and peace are multiplied they may abound in all godliness.

V3-4 Peter stresses the certainty and sufficiency of the provision made for believers through Jesus. His power is divine and provides everything we need for new spiritual life and for godliness. It comes ultimately from his call of people to himself and the personal knowledge of his own divine person and moral excellence which that brings. More than that, his character ensures the validity of his promises – precious and very great because they guarantee becoming like him. (Note that sharing in the divine nature does not mean we will become gods in our own right – rather that we will share in his moral purity). Verse 4b summarises their past life and the full deliverance from it, that goes with coming to know Christ. In place of life there was corruption – moral decay. In place of godliness there was sinful desire. The certainty of this provision for believers, provides the basis for the exhortation which follows.

V5-7 Peter calls his readers to make every effort to grow. It's a growth that depends on the complete provision of the Lord Jesus, but also involves their strenuous activity. It begins with the seedbed of faith

out of which grow seven traits of character. Commentators disagree about the connections between them, but it's likely that they were qualities which the false teachers around them were lacking. What is clear, though, is that Peter expects real Christians to possess and be growing in these qualities. So that faith on its own, without some outworking in character, is useless. Knowledge that doesn't lead to self control is fruitless. However, if these virtues are not developed within a framework of seeking to be more like the Lord and to love other people, they will quickly become mere dead works.

V8-9 Note that these qualities are not just to be in embryo form, but increasing and that their effect is to keep believers from being unfruitful and ineffective. Knowledge of Jesus Christ has to result in a growth in godliness. Verse 9 supplies the alternative. It's a picture of an almost blind amnesiac, who is so focused on the present he has forgotten he was ever cleansed from sin and so is failing to live out the implications of it.

V10-11 In view of what he has already said, Peter again urges these believers to be diligent (same word group as 'make every effort' v5). He doesn't mean that their calling and election are uncertain, but that the evidence of them will be worked out in their genuine growth and their commitment to costly life changes in pursuit of that growth. The assurance is twofold – in the present they will never fall into the kind of error the false teachers had fallen into – and in the future a triumphant entry into the kingdom of Jesus. The increasing growth of v8 is matched by the richness of God's provision in v11. Abundant sowing will be followed by abundant reaping.

Application

Be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure.

Growth in knowledge of the Lord Jesus and in godliness can never be an optional extra for us as Christians. Trusting in the abundant provision of the Lord Jesus for our life and godliness, we must be those who make every effort to be growing more like him. We must be careful not to separate our effort to live like him, from our desire to know more of him personally, or we become moralisers. We must be equally careful not to rest in our assurance of his call and promises without acting to make them sure, or we will become like the false teachers (and in fact will be false teachers ourselves).

2 Peter 1:12-21

Context

Peter has been urging his readers to make every effort to grow in knowledge of the Lord Jesus and in godliness, as an assurance of their own election and a safeguard against falling into the error of the false teachers. The abundant provision of everything necessary for life and godliness now and the firm promises of becoming like Jesus in the future, will then be matched by the richness of the entrance provided into his kingdom.

Main point and purpose

Remember the certainty of the power and coming of the Lord Jesus and be stirred to action by it.

Structure

V12-15 The necessary reminder of the truth

V16-21 The certainty of the truth

a) the apostolic evidence for the return of Jesus v16-18

b) the prophetic word pointing to the return of Jesus v19-21

Detail

V12-15 Peter's encouraged his readers to be diligent to grow (v5, v10). In return he is now diligent himself (v15). His immediate motivation is the overwhelming necessity for real Christians to be growing, which he has just spelt out (note the 'therefore' with which v12 begins). This is also sharpened by the knowledge of his own imminent death (v14) which Jesus had told him about (see John 21:18-19). His desire is to remind his readers (v12, v13), so that they can recall what he tells them (v15). And the content of the reminder is the gospel they have received. The phrase translated 'these qualities' in v12 is translated 'these things' in v15 and probably refers more generally to all that Peter has said in the first eleven verses. These things are not something new – his readers know them and are established in the truth. Yet Peter knows that unless they are reminded they will forget, like those of v9 and will not be stirred up to make every effort to grow (see this concern repeated in 3:1-3). It's likely that the permanent reminder which will enable them to recall these truths is this letter itself. Peter's diligence as he prepares to leave behind his earthly body and as he confidently awaits his entrance into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus is therefore the means for them, too to be diligent in growth and ready for the kingdom themselves.

V16-21

If the 'these things' of v12 looks back to what has been said before, the 'these things' of v15 looks forward to what Peter will say in v16-21. And the particular truth that he wishes his readers to remember is 'the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' No doubt it was because it was this particular doctrine, above all, that was under threat from the false teachers (see 3:4). And so Peter sets out two sets of convincing evidence for the return of Jesus.

The first is the eye-witness evidence of the apostles v16b-18 who were at what is known as the transfiguration ("on the holy mountain" v18). The transfiguration accounts in all three synoptic gospels are linked specifically with the coming of Jesus in glory (see for example Mark 8:38-9:2) and are intended to be seen as a foretaste for a few, of what Jesus' return will be like. Peter, James, and John are reliable eyewitnesses, therefore, of the certainty of Jesus' return because they saw his glory. More than that, they heard God's voice from heaven identifying Jesus as his Son – a reference, many believe, to the Son of Psalm 2, set as God's king over the nations who will judge those who fail to take refuge in him. Both the experience of the apostles and the voice of God, point to the power of Jesus and the certainty of his return in glory.

Peter's second piece of evidence is equally convincing. For he now cites the prophetic word.(This is a reference to the whole of the Old Testament, which points to God's purposes in Christ). There are translational difficulties over which piece of evidence Peter intends to indicate as being more sure (see a commentary for details) but certainly from the readers' point of view it would have been possible to

investigate for themselves the way that the scriptures pointed to the second coming of Jesus and Peter in fact urges them to do so. At this point he doesn't point to any particular piece of scripture, but chapters two and three give several examples.

Together, then, these pieces of evidence add up to the evidence of the Old and New Testaments, which will shine out the purposes of God in Christ until the day when Jesus returns. They're both guaranteed by the voice of God. In the transfiguration it was his voice from heaven which identified Jesus as his Son; and it was his Spirit which carried men along as they wrote the prophecy of Scripture. These Christians will do well to pay attention to it, because it is the voice of God himself. It's a far cry from the false teachers that Peter is alluding to as he writes. They, no doubt, alleged that the doctrine of the return of Jesus was a cleverly devised myth. Instead Peter has shown Jesus' power to be objectively witnessed to by the apostles, and backed by God himself. The false teachers, however, spoke from their own interpretation of events and produced prophecies by their own will (see Jer 23:16-26 for a description of those God identifies as false prophets).

Application

Peter knows he has to be diligent in reminding his readers of these great truths. Unless they grasp the power and coming of Jesus, they won't seek to be diligent in growing in knowledge of him, motivated to live in the light of the coming kingdom, or believe in the coming judgement and so there'll be no growth in godliness.

We must therefore be diligent in remembering the truths of the gospel, and in particular of the power and coming of Jesus. We need to search the scriptures ourselves. In a world which lives for the present and for pleasure and which discounts future judgement as a possibility, we seek to find ways to stir each other up to growth in the light of a certain future.

2 Peter 2

Context

Peter has assured his readers they have everything they need to grow in knowledge of the Lord Jesus and in godliness. His concern is that they are diligent in doing this, and to this end his purpose in writing is to remind them of what will keep them growing – the certainty of the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is no cleverly devised myth, as the false teachers are suggesting, but is backed by the eyewitness evidence of the apostles, and the prophecy of Scripture – a revelation assured by God himself.

Main point and purpose

Beware of false teachers, who will deny God's authority and entice others into licentious living. Though they seem free now, their judgement is certain

Structure

v1-3	False teachers their teaching, their motives, their methods, their judgement.
v4-10a	The OT shows God will judge the ungodly (and preserve the righteous)
v10b – 13a	False teachers – their teaching
v13b – 16	False teachers – their motives
v17-19	False teachers – their methods
v20-22	False teachers – destined for judgement

Detail

V1-3 Having reminded his readers of the characteristics of true prophecy in scripture, Peter now goes on to remind them of what the scriptures also recorded – that false prophets found their way in amongst God's people. False prophets will be not outside the church, but within it. Though their methods are secretive and they might sound like genuine Christians, they will be marked by a denial of the truth of Jesus' claims to lordship over them and a focus on sensual rather than godly living. It's attractive, but it comes ultimately from greed and will lead to destruction – for them and those who follow them. It's the precise opposite of what Peter has urged his readers to do in chapter 1. It's denial of Jesus instead of knowledge of him, and a way of sensuality rather than a growth in godliness.. And just as one leads to entrance into the eternal kingdom (1:11), so this false teaching leads to destruction.

V4-10a These verses set out to prove Peter's assertion of v3 (note the 'for' of v4) – that God's future judgement will happen. The verdict is already decided. He does it by means of examples from Genesis, demonstrating that God will judge the ungodly and rescue the righteous. Note that rank does not preserve the angels of Gen 6:1-4, and neither do the numbers of the ungodly in the ancient world or the strength of Sodom and Gomorrah. Peter's readers may have felt as isolated as righteous Noah and Lot did amongst ungodly people. But these examples also show that God can rescue them too. Note that the two hallmarks of the ungodly in these examples are despising authority and indulging in the lust of defiling passion – the same characteristics seen in v1-3.

V10b – 13a Peter returns to the present now with an amplification of what he said in v1. Although the detail is difficult, the main point seems to be that even angels do not presume to judge because they recognise God's authority to do so. These false teachers, on the other hand, don't know God (see in contrast 1:3) and won't recognise his authority.

V13b-16 focus on the sensual conduct of the false teachers (see v2). Though their teaching is secretive (v1) their action is brazen – they revel in the *daytime*. Again it's clear that they are in amongst God's people, but while God's people are to be diligent to be found without spot or blemish (3:14) these teachers are described as blots and blemishes themselves (v13). Their motive is greed, both financial and sexual, and their target is unsteady Christians. If in verse 12 they are described as animals (see also verse 22), they are also worse than animals – even a donkey knew better than Balaam!

V17-19 focus more on the exploitation of the weak, possibly new Christians barely just saved (v18). These false teachers may look good, but they lack substance - like a mirage. They promise freedom, but are enslaved themselves and call into slavery those who have just escaped from it. They claim to be teachers, but in denying Jesus their claims are empty boasts and their teaching folly.

V20-22 It becomes clear that the people Peter is talking about are those who appear to have been genuine Christian believers. They have seemingly escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of Jesus as Lord and Saviour (compare with 1:3-4). Their state is worse because they have deliberately turned their backs on what they know to be true. This section focuses on their present condition and Peter's animal analogies put them outside God's people – dogs who are identified with Gentiles and pigs which are unclean. Their present state indicates their certain future judgement.

Application

It seems clear that Peter expects false teachers to be an ever present reality. They will look and sound like Christians and they will live among us. Their characteristics are constant – a denial of the Lordship of Christ and his truth, and a focus on licentious living. Peter uses strong and shocking language to describe them, and seems to indicate that they have had some level of Christian experience.

It must be right, then, for us to examine our own lives and doctrine, and to pray for those who teach us. This false teaching is seductive for those who practise it, for it brings power; and for those who follow it – it brings apparent freedom. Having said that, although this chapter must bring some warning for the complacent, it's in the context of Peter's assurances that we have everything we need to stand and to grow as Christians. The Lord Jesus has called us to himself and given us power and promises which will enable us never to fall, even if we are tempted.

2 Peter 3:1-7

Context

Peter has argued that the power and coming of Jesus is true because it's based on revelation by God himself through the apostles and prophets. Christians therefore must be diligent in growing in knowledge of the Lord and in godliness so that they will be ready to enter his kingdom when he returns. False teachers, on the other hand, deny God, bring their own words, and as well as facing destruction themselves, lead others there too. In chapter 3 Peter returns to themes he has explored in chapter 1, with a slightly different focus. If in 1:16-21 the theme is true revelation, here it is certain judgement – both pointing to the certainty of the power and coming of the Lord Jesus.

Main point and purpose

Remember that Jesus will come to judge, despite appearances to the contrary. The apostles and prophets point to it and the flood models it.

Structure

V1-2 Remember Jesus is returning...

V3-4 ...despite those who doubt it...

V5-7 ...because the flood proves that God will judge and recreate

Detail

V1-2 Peter again sets out his aim in writing (see 1:14-15) – one which also inspired a letter he wrote to them before (see commentaries if you want details of theories of what the first letter he wrote was).

Again Peter directs his readers to scripture. Note the strength of his description – the prophets are described as holy (because their message is from God) and the apostles have passed on the commandment of Jesus. Peter also stresses his confidence in his readers. He calls them beloved, and also talks of their sincere mind. Sincere has the sense of pure. He expects that, as opposed to the false teachers, their mind has the disposition to accept what the scriptures say and is willing to be stirred up. It's unclear exactly what predictions and commandment Peter is referring to, but it must be linked to the heart of the false teachers' opposition in v4 – the promise of Jesus' coming.

V3-4 Peter explains why they must remember and be stirred up now. It's because scoffers will come and deny Jesus' return. Though it's put in the future, it seems to be something Peter expects to be a reality for his readers and for those who follow them. These false teachers are described as scoffers – they are opposed to God, won't listen to his word, and mock it. These are not sincere but misguided, though. No matter how intellectual they sound the reality is that their motivation is their sinful desires. It is those, which will lead them to teaching untruth. The heart of their message is the denial of Jesus' return.

They are suggesting his promise won't be fulfilled and basing their conclusion on their experience of creation. They may use the language of orthodox faith, but deny both God's power and his promises. Because the world seems unchanging they assume that God will never intervene in it and will not keep his promises. In many ways this bears a striking resemblance to liberalism today which also denies future judgement and other forms of "supernatural" intervention in the world.

V5-7 Again Peter stresses that their misunderstanding is wilful. They are selective in their use of scripture. They talk of the fathers (the patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) but forget the flood. Their premise that judgement will not happen is based on a reading of scripture that starts after Genesis 9! Peter's argument is fairly simple: God created the world in the beginning by his word, and judged and destroyed that world order by his word through the flood. That second world order (the heavens and earth that now exists) is also awaiting judgement by God's word – this time by fire (see the rest of chapter 3). God has intervened in the created world to judge and recreate. It is reasonable to assume he will keep his promises (in OT and NT) to judge the world and the ungodly who live in it again. The continuation of things as they have been is not a sign that God will never judge, but simply that judgement is being stored up. The next section explains why this is.

Application

1. Remember that Jesus will come in judgement.

Don't be deceived by a world that seems to continue just the same for ever. It won't. The scriptures say so and the example of the flood should convince us of that. It's worth asking ourselves therefore whether the return of the Lord Jesus to judge is at the forefront of our minds or whether we find ourselves sucked into a mindset which assumes we live for today because tomorrow will never come.

2. Beware of the errors of the false teachers.

Their false teaching springs ultimately from their own sinful desires. Peter suggests that it is inevitable that they will seek to justify their desires in their teaching. Their hearts will be shown in their words. The sin of a teacher is never private – even if it is unknown to others. They deliberately overlook what doesn't suit them – discounting God's power to intervene in the world and denying his promises to judge it. Their view of the world is man-centred and their view of God is very small. They rely on their own views rather than submitting to the revelation of God in the scriptures. Peter says even if they sound sophisticated and convincing the reality is that they, along with the present heavens and earth, are facing destruction.

2 Peter 3:8-13

Context

The heart of the message of the false teachers is summed up in 3:4 – ‘where is the promise of his coming?’ Peter has shown that their argument, though it looks good, is based on a false premise. God is not a creator who made the world and since then has declined to intervene in it. The promises of scripture and the example of the flood show him to be a God who has intervened in judgement and re-creation and will do so again. The heavens and earth are being ‘kept until the day of judgement’ (3:7) and the condemnation of false teachers, though delayed, is not asleep (2:3). The question that remains, therefore, is why this judgement is delayed, which is what Peter seeks to answer now, as well as drawing out its implications.

Main point and purpose

The day of the Lord will come, bringing judgement and a new creation. The delay is a sign of God’s patience, not his impotence, and an opportunity for believers to live for the new creation until it comes.

Structure

8-10 The day of the Lord and God

8 His nature - eternal

9 His character – patient in delaying it

10 His future action – he will dissolve the world and destroy its works

11-13 The day of the Lord and us

11 our character – godliness

12 our action – hastening it

13 our hope – a new creation, home of righteousness

Detail

The promise of the Lord and the day of the Lord run right through this section and tie it together. Both determine how we understand him, and how we respond rightly to what we understand.

V8 Again Peter describes his readers as beloved. The ‘but’ at the start of v8 links what he is saying with what has gone before. The false teachers deny his coming because they overlook both the creation and the flood (v5), and therefore distort God’s nature and character. Equally, Peter’s readers mustn’t fall into the same trap. They are to grasp first of all God’s relationship to time. V8 is an expansion of Psalm 90:4 which focuses on God’s eternity. The false teachers assume that because the world continues, God’s promise has failed. Peter says that God doesn’t work to our time schedules. He existed before the world did, and our lives are like nothing, compared to his eternity.

V9 This seems a clear reference to the challenge of the false teachers in v4 – God hasn’t kept his promise. If v8 focuses on God’s nature, v9 focuses on his character. In spite of provocation he is patient, delaying judgement because he longs for people to turn to him in repentance, rather than perish. (This verse has sometimes been used as an argument against God’s sovereignty in salvation. ie although he wants everyone to be saved, some choose not to be and therefore overrule God in the matter. It’s also been used to suggest universal salvation – that no one will face judgement because God will give everyone a chance to repent. Both arguments, however, fail to grasp the distinction the Bible makes between God’s disposition – he doesn’t want anyone to perish – and his sovereign will – that only some will be saved.)

V10 The ‘but’ links v10 with the two previous verses. Though the Lord is delaying his judgement, it will come suddenly. The sentence also links back to the whole of v3-8 – a clear refutation of the argument the false teachers have advanced. All things will not continue as they have from the beginning of creation. Instead there will be a sudden and unexpected change and creation will be dissolved. More than that, the works associated with it will be exposed. Chapter 2 identified the methods of the false teachers as secretive and taking place among believers (v1). Their words spring from their own sinful desires, which may not be apparent to those who hear them. They feel safe, for they are confident that God has no power or authority. The day of the Lord will change all that. Instead of being hidden their works will be exposed for what they are and they will face his judgement.

V11-13 The day of the Lord has implications not just for how we understand God, but how we live our own lives. The sentence in v11 and 12 is less a question than an exclamation. The first implication is for our character, which is to be marked by holiness and godliness, the second for our action, which is to hasten the coming of the day and the third is for our hope, which is of a new creation. And it's this third element which explains the other two. The false teachers had denied the promise of Jesus' return. Judgement will happen, Peter says in v8-10, but in this paragraph he goes further - so will a new creation. True believers wait for a new heaven and earth, which are the home of righteousness. The experience of the believer in this world is like Noah and Lot in chapter 2- godly people among a world of ungodliness. Righteousness seems a wanderer and an alien. Yet if our hope is of a different world which is characterised by righteousness, we will seek to be holy (separate from sin) and growing in godliness now, (see 1:3 and 6-7) because we will be confident that God will rescue us from the trials of living in a world of ungodliness (2:9). And if God's patience has led him to delay the day, because of his compassion for sinful people, our experience of waiting seems to do the opposite - it hastens it. Peter has already made clear that our actions have no control over when the day will come. It will come like a thief at a time known only to God. Yet in seeking to live in obedience to his rule, in seeking to grow in godliness, we are furthering his purpose. The day when righteousness will reign in the new creation is drawing closer as we make ourselves ready for it. And in that sense we are hastening it.

Application

1. Believe God's promise - the day of judgment will come. Though we live in a world where nothing seems to change and where we can get sucked in to assuming that it never will, the day will come suddenly and the earth and all its works will be destroyed. His delay is in compassion for sinners, but we mustn't presume on it.
2. Believe God's promise - and get ready for the new creation. We're waiting not just for the day of judgement, but for the new creation in which righteousness will dwell. Although it can't be wrong to use these verses as an encouragement to evangelism - because God's only reason for delaying judgement is that more people may turn to him in repentance and faith - the primary application has to be of seeking to grow in godliness. The home of righteousness is the natural home of believers in a way that this present world isn't. If we believe in it we'll be longing for it, and seeking to grow in readiness for it.

2 Peter 3:14-18

Introduction

This section gathers together all that Peter has said so far. Verses 14-16 refer back to the rest of chapter three, verse 17 to the thoughts of chapter two, and v18 to chapter one. Themes from the whole letter are interspersed throughout, though. The section is governed by four exhortations in two pairs, the first set governed by the future hope of the new creation, the second by the knowledge that false teachers will deny it.

Main point and purpose

In view of our hope of the future, don't get carried away by the errors of false teachers, but grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

Structure

14-16 Get ready for Jesus' return

14 Our action – be holy

15a Our attitude – understand the delay

15b -16 All agreed to by Paul

17-18 Don't fall into error, but grow in grace

Detail

V14 Peter ends his letter with a personal appeal to his readers. The 'therefore' here links v14-16 with what he has said in the preceding section. The false teachers have severed any link between what you believe and how you live. Peter reasserts it. Because they are waiting for a new heaven and earth, the home of righteousness, they are to act appropriately. Again he calls them to be diligent (see 1:10) because their action now, will lead to the verdict of Christ the Judge then. Their diligence is in relation to their moral character – without spot or blemish – a phrase used of the Lord Jesus himself in 1Peter 1:19. In 2:13 false teachers are described as blots and blemishes feasting with the real believers. It's as if Peter sees them as spoiling the church. Here, these beloved readers are to be diligent, to be like their Lord – the promise of 1:4, partaking of the divine nature. It also implies that being without spot and blemish will involve being without the false teachers too. At peace, is a fairly general term that describes a right relationship with God and with other people. It is characteristic, therefore, of the new creation, but being diligent to be found by the Lord Jesus at peace on that day, must surely involve seeking to grow in knowledge of him now and also to be working that out in the sort of growth Peter has highlighted in chapter 1 verses 5-8 which is worked out in our relationships with others.

V15a The second exhortation is to do with their attitude. They are to count the patience of our Lord as salvation (compare with 3:9 – the counting of the false teachers). The 'and' links it closely with what Peter has just said. It's this right understanding of the delay that will encourage them to keep going in personal holiness. The false teachers understood the delay in Jesus' return as an opportunity for licence. True believers will understand it as an opportunity to work out our own salvation (see 1:10 for a similar idea), being confident that the Lord knows how to rescue the godly (2:9). This must be linked to the personal relationship with our Lord Jesus that is the experience of believers. It stands opposed to the rejection of the Lord who bought them (2:1) by the false teachers.

V15b-16 It's at this point that Peter enlists the help of the apostle Paul. He's been at pains in the letter to show that the focus on the power and coming of the Lord Jesus is pointed to by the Old Testament and the apostles. Now he says that Paul says exactly the same in his letters. It's likely that the reason Peter talks of Paul at length here is because the false teachers were using him to back up their own views, driving a wedge between him and Peter. So Peter reminds his readers that Paul has written to them personally (see commentaries for suggestions about which letter might be meant) and that he has God-given wisdom in these matters. The 'these matters' are likely to be everything concerning the second coming of Jesus and what it means to live in the light of it. The God-given wisdom must surely be a reminder that Paul is a true prophet (see 1:20-21). Peter acknowledges that parts of Paul's letters can be tricky (but not impossible). It's clear from what he goes on to say, however, that these people who are failing to understand them, are doing so wilfully rather than innocently. They refuse instruction and twist the truth which is made clear by the way that they treat other parts of scripture. It leaves them unstable now and facing destruction in the future. (Note that Peter makes clear that he regards Paul's letters as

scripture here. Though an important theological point, the more important point in 2 Peter is that false teachers distort everything that points to the second coming of the Lord Jesus).

V17 The second pair of exhortations is in the context of the second thing Peter's readers are not to forget –the inevitability of those who will deny the power and coming of the Lord Jesus. Now that they know this they must take care that they don't get carried away and fall themselves. These false teachers are characterised by lawlessness – they promise freedom, 2:19, they despise authority, 2:10, and it all comes from denying the Master who bought them, 2:1. More than being lawless themselves, their aim has been to carry others with them (2:2-3,1418-19). They are unstable themselves (v16) and following them will lead to falling from stability. In many ways this stands as a pair with the first exhortation of v14. Unless they are diligent to rid themselves of the spots and blemishes in the church that the false teachers represent, they are likely to get carried away with what they say and lose their own stability.

V18 The encouragement with which Peter concludes, though, takes us back to the themes of chapter one. They are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They're to see the delay in the return of Jesus as an opportunity to work out their salvation, v15, and therefore they're to seek to grow. It's this growth that will safeguard them against falling. It seems to involve a growing understanding of Jesus and a growing obedience to his rule worked out in our lives. They're to be diligent, according to v14, not resting on their laurels, but that diligence is worked out through the grace of Jesus. And the focus of that diligence is a growing knowledge of Jesus as it's worked out through all the trials of life.

And in seeking to live like this Peter knows that Jesus will be glorified – now as they seek to know him more and grow in godliness and on the day when the eternal kingdom will be entered (1:10) and they will be like him in his own nature –without spot or blemish and at home in the dwelling place of righteousness.

Application

1. Respond rightly to the delay in Jesus' return. Use it as an opportunity for growing to know more of the Lord Jesus. It's only this that will provide real security as we wait for the eternal kingdom. Peter doesn't promise that this growth will be measurable necessarily, but expects that it will be the focus of real Christians and that it will happen even in the trials of living in a world hostile to Jesus and his rule.
2. Beware of being carried away by teaching which discounts the power and coming of Jesus. It creeps into the vacuum created by failing to remember Jesus will return. It leads to selfish self sufficiency and immorality and ultimately destruction.

Questions relating to 2 Peter as a whole

Read all of 2 Peter through at least once (it's only 3 chapters!).

1. What is the general thrust of the whole book?
2. Which bits make you go "hmmmm?"
3. Which bits make you go "What on earth is that about?"
4. List recurring words, phrases, and themes.

Questions relating to 2 Peter 1:1-11

1. What has God done for us in Christ? v1-4
2. How should this affect the way we live now? V5-7
3. What incentives does Peter give for living like this for the present and the future? v8-11
4. How can we seek to grow in knowledge of Jesus and in godliness? What will be the obstacles? Where might we go wrong?

Questions relating to 2 Peter 1:12-21

1. Why is Peter writing this letter? v12-15
2. What in particular does he want his readers to be able to recall? v16
3. What evidence does he give for the certainty of Jesus' return? v16-21
4. Why is it more certain that the teachings of the false teachers?
5. How can we ensure that we are stirred up as we remember these truths?

Questions relating to 2 Peter 2

1. Describe the false teachers of verses 1-3 in your own words, their methods, sins, attitudes etc.
2. Why does Peter bring up the Old Testament examples of verses 4-10? i.e. what point is he making?
3. Describe the false teachers of verses 10-16 in your own words, their motives, methods, sins, etc.
4. What is the effect of the false teachers on other people in verses 17-22?
5. How is what Peter said in chapter 1 related to this exposé of the false teachers in chapter 2?
6. How would we know if there were people like this at St. Helen's, or if we ourselves were heading down this route? And what would we do about it?

Questions for 2 Peter 3:1-7

1. How does this section compare with what Peter wrote in 1:12-21? What links it with chapter two?
2. How does he describe those he is warning them about?
3. What is the nature of their argument?
4. How does Peter show it's flawed?
5. How can we avoid falling into the false teachers' way of thinking?

Questions for 2 Peter 3:8-13

1. Peter is continuing to reply to the challenge of verse 4 in this section. What does he add to what he's already said?
2. How does he explain the reason for the delay in judgment, in verses 8-9?
3. What is still certain about it, in verse 10?
4. What must the response of real believers be to the prospect of the day of judgement? How does it compare to how the false teachers have responded?
5. What will encourage us as we wait?

Questions for 2 Peter 3:14-18

1. As Peter concludes his letter, what does he want his readers:
 - a) to remember?
 - b) to do?
2. How does what he says here relate to the rest of the letter?
3. What are the warnings and encouragements for us?
4. How can we ensure that we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?