

LESSON 11

PART I: SPECIAL INTRODUCTION TO 2 PETER

Questions Regarding 2 Peter

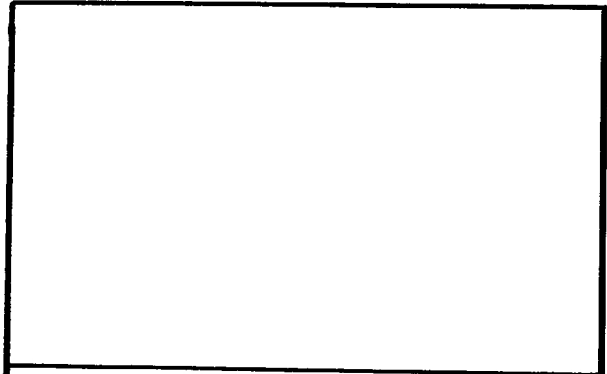
The authorship and integrity of the epistle have been questioned in both the ancient and contemporary churches. Although 2 Peter claims to have been written by "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ," the majority of contemporary scholars consider the name to be a pseudograph (a writing falsely ascribed to Peter). Arguments for this position are based on both external and internal evidences.

Whether or not 2 Peter should be included with the Jewish Christian writings is disputed. Actually, there is little evidence in the epistle to indicate whether the recipients were Jewish or Gentile Christians. If 2 Peter 3:1 refers to 1 Peter ("this second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you"), the recipients would be the same as those indicated at the beginning of 1 Peter. However, it is not certain that "this second epistle" refers to 1 Peter. The statement could refer to a lost epistle.

The dating of 2 Peter is also problematic. Since the authorship, the recipients, and the historical circumstances of the epistle are unknown, it is difficult to come to a definite conclusion concerning its date. Some scholars have placed it in the second century. Donald Guthrie has concluded that crediting the work to Peter has no greater difficulties than attributing it to someone else; therefore, it could be placed within the lifetime of Peter—before A. D. 68.¹

Questions Concerning Authorship

The authenticity of the second epistle's being attributed to Peter has been widely denied. There is little evidence that the contents of this epistle were known before the third century. Origen (A. D. 215-254) stated that Peter had left one acknowledged letter and that there was a disputed second one which bore his name. The fact that Origen made the first definite reference to 2 Peter does not mean that the epistle was unknown until the time of Origen. It



Underline the correct word.
There is (little, much) evidence in the epistle to indicate whether the recipients were Jewish or Gentile Christians.

(Compare your answer with text.)
There is uncertainty concerning a _____, r _____, h _____ circumstances, and d _____ of 2 Peter.

(authorship, recipients, historical, date)

External and internal evidences which have caused the authenticity of 2 Peter to be questioned are discussed on this page and the next.

The first is that there is little evidence that the contents of 2 Peter were known before the _____ century.

(third)

¹New Testament Introduction (3rd ed.; London: Tyndale Press, 1970), pp. 845 ff.

could have been used in the churches without having been quoted in the Patristic writings which have come down to us. Although Origen mentioned that it was disputed by some Christians, his use of it indicates that he regarded it as canonical. His position possibly was held by the majority of Christians.

Allusions to the statement that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years" (2 Pet. 3:8) appear in writings earlier than Origen's, but it is uncertain whether they referred to 2 Peter or to Psalm 90:4. Second Peter is not listed in the Muratorian Canon (a fragment listing the books recognized as canonical in about A.D. 170). Neither was it included in the earliest Syrian and Latin canons. Perhaps the indefiniteness of its message tended to retard its use. Since there is little positive evidence to support the recognized authenticity of 2 Peter in the early Church and since doubts were expressed in the third and fourth centuries concerning its integrity, external evidence for Petrine authorship is weak.

The author claimed to be Simon Peter to whom the Lord revealed the approach of His death (1:14). He claimed also to have been an eyewitness of the transfiguration (1:16-18). He referred to the Apostle Paul as "our beloved brother Paul," and he appears to have considered Paul's letters as Scripture (3:15).

Scholars give the following arguments against Petrine authorship:

1. The collecting and recognizing of Paul's letters as Scripture was much later than Peter's death in A.D. 68 or before.
2. The personal allusions in the epistle are no more than literary devices to give the appearance of authenticity.
3. The epistle appears to combat Gnostic activity which must be dated in the sub-apostolic period.
4. "Since the fathers fell asleep," in 3:4, implies that the first generation of Christians had passed.
5. The identity of 2 Peter 2:1-19 with Jude 5-16 indicates the dependency of one of the epistles. The majority of scholars have concluded that Jude preceded 2 Peter.

Second Peter is not listed in the _____ Canon.

Doubts were expressed in the _____ and _____ centuries concerning this epistle's integrity.

(Muratorian, third, fourth)

Internal evidence against the authenticity of 2 Peter includes:

1. Mention of Paul's letters as Scripture implies a date later than the lifetime of _____.
2. Personal allusions appear to be _____ devices.
3. The writing appears to combat _____ century Gnosticism.
4. The epistle implies that _____ generation Christians had passed.
5. Second Peter seems dependent on _____.
6. Stylistic differences in 1 and 2 Peter indicate _____ authors.

(1. Peter, 2. literary, 3. second, 4. first, 5. Jude, 6. distinct)

6. Since the time of Jerome, stylistic differences which suggest different authors have been noted between 1 and 2 Peter.

Jerome concluded that Peter used different amanuenses. The good Greek of 1 Peter has been attributed to Silvanus while the broken Greek of 2 Peter has been attributed to a less qualified scribe.

Donald Guthrie challenges the argument that the personal allusions are merely literary devices. He concludes that the comparative study of pseud-epigraphic works cannot lead to a definite conclusion that 2 Peter should be so classified.² He reverses the arguments and shows how the use of the double name, Simon Peter, gives evidence of its genuineness. Also, he points out that 2 Peter 1:14, which alludes to Christ's saying in John 21:18f., was not necessarily dependent upon John's late writings since Peter was present himself with the Lord. He concludes that Peter's words need not imply the existence of an authorized corpus of Paul's letters. "All" in 3:16 could mean no more than Paul's letters which were known to Peter. The word translated "Scriptures" could also refer to writings in general. But even if Peter considered Paul's writings as inspired, he seems to have considered his own to have been in the same category. Paul himself implied that his writings were invested with special authority (cf. 2 Thess. 3:14; 1 Cor. 2:16).

The historical situation reflected in 2 Peter is not clear enough to identify it with a second century Gnostic movement. It can be argued just as strongly that 2 Peter reflects a mental and moral atmosphere which was conducive to the development of syncretistic Gnosticism.

Although stylistic differences predominate between 1 and 2 Peter, there are also similarities. The two epistles use about 100 of the same words; however, they employ more than 500 different words. Second Peter uses purer particles than the first. Perhaps the differences in style can be accounted for by dissimilar subject matter, by a different mood at the time of writing, and by different scribes used in the writing of the epistles.

It must be admitted that the authorship of 2 Peter is problematical. Many of the arguments which are used to deny Petrine authorship could be reversed and used to support it since these arguments are highly subjective. At the present time, no theory of authorship has gained unanimous support. There is justification for holding to the claims of the epistle itself until stronger evidence than is now available disproves it.

²Ibid, p. 828.

Guthrie's four arguments supporting Peter as author are:

1. It cannot be _____ that the personal allusions are merely literary devices.
2. Second Peter does not parallel _____ works.
3. The allusion to Christ in John 21:18f. is not dependent upon John's late writings since Peter was _____.
4. The reference to Paul's letters does not imply a corpus of Scripture, but means the _____ Peter knew.

(proved, pseudepigraphic, present with the Lord, letters)

Differences in style of 1 and 2 Peter might be accounted for by:

1. dissimilar s _____ m _____
2. distinct m _____ at time of writing
3. not the same s _____.

(subject matter, mood, scribe)

The Recipients

The epistle is addressed to "those who ... share our faith and enjoy equal privileges with ourselves" (1:1—NEB). This statement affirms that the readers were Christians, but it does not indicate whether they were Jewish or Gentile. If the writer had a particular community in mind, it is not indicated. If 2 Peter 3:1 refers to 1 Peter, it appears that the letter was addressed to the same provinces as mentioned in 1 Peter. Some scholars have concluded that the readers were more Jewish than Gentile. Others say the readers were probably Gentiles who would have been affected more by the practices of false teachers who are mentioned in the epistle. It is possible that the readers included both Jews and Gentiles. The identity and location of the readers cannot be determined any more definitely than the authorship.

Second Peter 1:1 affirms that the recipients were _____ but not whether they were _____ or _____.

(Christians, Jews, Gentiles)

The Purpose

The epistle was written to combat heresy. As previously mentioned, some scholars have concluded that Gnostic teachers threatened the doctrines of the Church. The fact that 'knowledge' (*gnosis*) is prominent in the epistle has led to this conclusion. It is questionable whether the use of the word is frequent enough to justify such a conclusion. Jewish teachers were predisposed to refute the teachings of the Church. Although the word 'knowledge' came to be closely associated with Gnosticism, which holds to abstract principles, it was used by the Hebrews to refer to knowledge gained through experience. 'Knowledge of the truth' was almost a synonym for 'becoming a Christian'. "The knowledge of God" (v. 2) is probably a reference to the recipients' Christian experience or conversion.

Rearrange the following words to show the purpose of 2 Peter:

written epistle heresy was combat
The to

(Compare your answer with the text.)

PART II: GUARDING AGAINST HERESY

2 Peter 1:1-2:22

Salutation

2 Peter 1:1-2

The author introduced himself as "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ" (v. 1). He used the correct Hebrew and Aramaic form of the name Simeon (*Symeon*). Simon Peter's Jewish friends called him by that name. According to Acts 15:14, James of Jerusalem used Simeon also. The Christian name 'Peter' was joined to the Hebrew name. Although

some scholars have argued that 2 Peter was written to Gentiles by a Jewish Christian, it is more logical to conclude that the Hebrew form of Simon points to Jewish readers.

The double name seems to point to a Jewish Christian writer who introduced himself as a servant (a voluntary slave) and an apostle. The recipients are identified only as those who had obtained the faith "of equal standing" (v. 1—RSV) in honour and privilege with that of Peter or any of the Apostles.

Double names are also used to refer to Jesus Christ. Jesus means Saviour and Christ means Messiah (Anointed One). Since only one article (the) appears with God and "our Saviour Jesus Christ," the construction indicates that Christ is both God and Saviour. Since both Jews and Gnostics denied the deity of Jesus Christ, the phrase does not indicate which heretical group had challenged the belief of the Christians. The Jews professed only one God; therefore, they had to acknowledge that Jesus is God or deny His divinity: there could not be two gods. The Gnostics denied that God could come in the flesh because of the evil nature of matter.

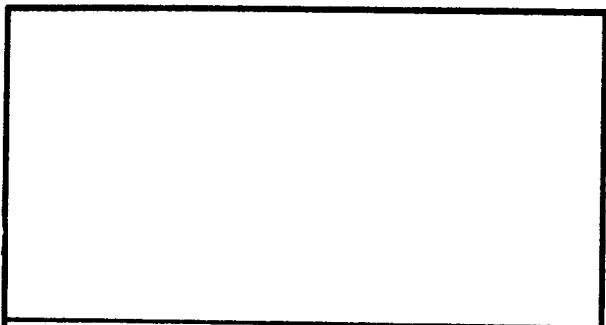
The writer wished for grace and peace to be multiplied to his recipients (v. 2). Grace and peace are linked to a 'full knowledge' of God and of Jesus our Lord. The phrase referring to the knowledge of God could be translated "but full knowledge of God even Jesus our Lord." Grace and peace can be multiplied to the recipients because a full knowledge of God has come through Jesus Christ.

Be Established in Truth

2 Peter 1:3-21

The transforming effects of truth (1:3-11)

The divine power of Christ has provided everything concerning life and true worship (v. 3). The former state of the readers was sin and death, but through a full knowledge of Christ, who calls sinners to share in His glory and virtue, man has received true life and correct worship. True life means to share in the glory of the life of Christ. Godliness or the right way of worship means to live a righteous life which is pleasing to God. To share in the glorious life of Christ involves "great and precious promises" (v. 4). The life which he has provided for man in the Kingdom is not yet realized but will be manifested in the future; therefore, the fullness of man's true life is received by promise. Through an experienced knowledge of Christ through faith, man enters the Kingdom of God and becomes a partaker of it with Christ. Because the Kingdom is heavenly and is ruled by the



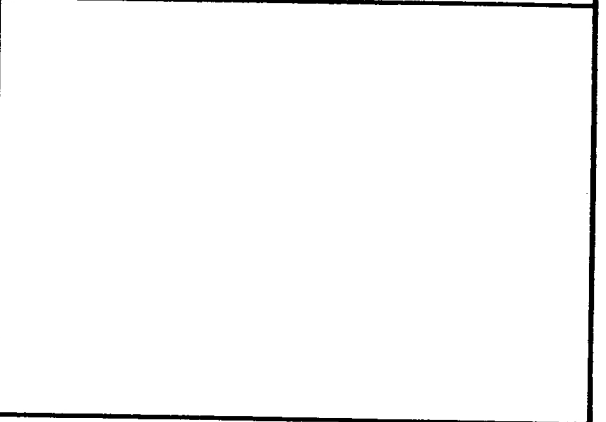
Match names and meanings according to the author of 2 Peter.

- | | |
|-------------|---------------------------|
| — 1. Jesus | a. Messiah (Anointed One) |
| — 2. Christ | b. Saviour |

Is this statement true or false?

Both Jews and Gnostics denied the deity of Jesus Christ. _____

(b-1, a-2, true)



To share in the glorious life of Christ involves "_____ and _____."

Unscramble the letters to make the word to fill in each blank.

The _____ of life in the _____
senlufel *mindokg*
 is experienced by man through _____
weldegokri
 of Christ through _____
fhait

(Compare your answers with the text.)

divine Son of God, those who enter it by faith participate in the divine nature, that is, in the glorious life with Christ which God provides. Man remains human—he does not become divine—but enters into fellowship (participates as partners) with God.

Second Peter does not mention the new birth nor does it emphasize the Kingdom; however, the first section closes with a reference to entering the eternal Kingdom (v. 11). John's Gospel uses the concept of new birth to explain man's new life in a redemptive relationship to God. Paul's writings emphasize a similar concept of "Christ in us." The concept in 2 Peter is "divine power," which is identified in the Old Testament as the Spirit of God. This divine power is not distinguished from Christ as a personal being. The author identified Christ and God, and the power which works in man is related to them; however, the Third Person of the Trinity is not defined. Perhaps he meant by becoming "partakers of the divine nature" that the divine power resides in man and enables him to escape the corruption of the world which works in him because of lust (v. 4).

Since the divine power working in Christians enables them to escape the corruption of the world, they become responsible to live upright lives (v. 5). Man is to be diligent in attaining moral excellence. Christ has given great promises and divine power. By faith, man is to supply virtue or moral powers; that is, his faith lays hold of the divine power which gives him moral energy. This energy is exhibited in vigorous moral actions as a result of the divine power working in the Christian by faith. Peter's concept of 'new morality' was the opposite of the so-called 'new morality' of today which advocates that a person follow his desires. He saw the latter as "the lusts of the world" which needed to be replaced by a new moral energy derived from the divine power within the believer. The new energy, which replaces the lust of the world, brings a true knowledge of God by experience. True knowledge is insight or understanding and is the basis of self-control or temperance (v. 6). Self-control is the mastering of passions and desires and the using of them for their intended purposes rather than being ruled by them. Man's ultimate purpose is not to enjoy the pleasures which come through his passions and desires; they are not to become his god. Man's true knowledge of the meaning of life enables him to put his passions and desires in their proper place. Keeping passions under control requires patience, but the result is godliness (v. 6).

Godliness means to have kind affection for the brethren, which enables one to express Christian love (v. 7). Brotherly kindness (*philadelphia*) is a feeling of affection, while Christian love (*agape*) is a charitable sharing of possessions or abilities in meeting the needs of others.

The divine power which works in man appears to be the _____ of the _____.

(Third Person, Trinity)

Christ supplies _____ power;
Man is to supply _____ power.

The result of the divine power working in the Christian by faith is _____ and _____.

(divine, moral, self-control, godliness)

Match terms and meanings.

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| — 1. Christian love | a. Charitable sharing to meet needs of others |
| — 2. Brotherly kindness | b. Feeling of affection for the brethren |
- (Compare with the text.)

All of these virtues are made possible by faith's appropriating divine power, which replaces worldly lust with moral energy in a person. If moral qualities abound in man, he will be fruitful and effective (v. 8). The fruitfulness of a moral life reveals man's true knowledge of Jesus Christ. True knowledge is not only intellectual but experiential. Jesus Christ is the source of divine power which produces moral energy and makes virtues possible. Whoever is lacking in the virtues of the Christian faith is blind or short-sighted (v. 9). He can only see what is near at hand, having forgotten the purpose of his cleansing from sin (v. 9). Man is cleansed from sin in order to be prepared for receiving God's promises. God has promised righteous man his Kingdom; therefore, He has cleansed those who believe in His Son and has given them divine power to live righteously as Kingdom citizens. If man is negligent in living by God's power, he is short-sighted.

Although God has chosen man to regeneration and called him into His Kingdom, he must live the righteous life through faith to secure God's promises for himself (v. 10). Under the Old Covenant, God made great promises to Israel, but she was required to be obedient and to live righteously as set forth by the commandments. Israel failed to do so; therefore, she failed to secure God's promises. Her turning to idolatry and immorality caused God's promises to be forfeited. Peter warned his readers that if they neglected the righteous life, which was made possible by the divine power, they would not receive God's promises but would stumble like Israel (v. 10). On the other hand, for them to be diligent in using the indwelling divine power would result in their entrance into the eternal Kingdom "of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (v. 11). A knowledge of the truth, which is an experience with Christ who supplies moral energy, results in a transformation of life and a securing of God's promises concerning His Kingdom.

The glorious essence of truth (1:12-21)

Although Christians know about the divine power residing within them and the necessity of appropriating that power in righteous living, they need to be reminded occasionally of their heritage (v. 12). Satan is skilful in using the lusts of the flesh to blind spiritual insight. The author was ready to do his part in promoting godliness by reminding them of their resources and responsibilities (v. 13). He realized that his death was near at hand (v. 14), and he desired to leave as an inheritance a reminder and a challenge for them to live righteously (v. 15). He felt that his most significant departing contribution would be to admonish them to be diligent in Christian living. The reference in verse 14 to putting off "this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me" is usually related to John 21:18f. It may be that the

Neglecting the righteous life made possible through the divine power results in stumbling as _____ did under the _____.

Being righteous through faith makes one's _____ and _____ sure.

(Israel, Old Covenant, calling, election)

The author felt that his part in promoting righteousness was to challenge man to live _____.

(righteously)

reference is to 1 Peter 4:16-5:1 in which the author understood 'witness' to have been used in the sense of 'martyr'. The supreme witness of the Christians' faith in Christ came through their martyrdom. Perhaps the author had already received the sentence to death because he refused to renounce his faith in Christ. Christ had warned His disciples that they would be hated for His name's sake (Matt. 10:22), and "it is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord" (Matt. 10:25). The disciples were not to fear those who could kill the body but were unable to destroy the soul. They were to fear God who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. When they faced death, they were to trust in the Father whose care extended even to sparrows which fall to the ground (Matt. 10:29). The disciples would find true life by losing their physical lives (Matt. 10:39).

The author faced death with confidence in the certainty of God's promises. He did not devise a fictitious story concerning the promise of Christ's power and His coming (v. 16). Christ's power in the coming of the Holy Spirit and His own return were promised at the time of His ascension (Acts 1:8-11). The author was confident of these promises of the Lord Jesus Christ because he had witnessed His majesty (v. 16). Peter was not present at the baptism of Jesus to hear the voice from heaven proclaim Jesus as God's beloved Son, but he was present on the holy mountain at the transfiguration when the voice stated, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (v. 17; cf. Matt. 17:5). The proclaiming of Jesus as God's Son identified Him with the promised descendant of David, the Messiah. The power and coming of the Messiah (Christ) would mean the establishment and consummation of the glorious Kingdom. The voice from heaven testified to the majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 17-18).

In addition to being assured by the heavenly voice, the author also had the Scriptures of the Old Testament which gave assurances of God's promises (v. 19). The prophetic word had promised that God's Messiah would establish the glorious Kingdom.

At the transfiguration, Christ's "majestic glory" shone through His earthly tabernacle of flesh. The appearance of Moses and Elijah with Christ portrayed that the Old Testament Law and Prophets spoke of Christ, the beloved Son of whom the heavenly voice spoke. In the light of Old Testament Scriptures, the Jews expected God to send a Messiah who would be a descendant of David, but they did not understand the Scriptures concerning the nature of His messiahship. The transfiguration assured the disciples that Jesus was the Messiah. Although His death was not understood at first, Peter, along with the other disciples, came to see that the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ were according to God's plan and had

Underline the phrase which makes the following statement true.

Peter was present (at the baptism of Jesus, at the transfiguration).

(Compare your answer with the text.)

In this paragraph and the next, there are two reasons the author felt assured that God would fulfil His promises in Christ.

- 1. The proclamation of Jesus as God's Son at the _____.*
- 2. The prophetic word of _____ Scriptures.*

(transfiguration, Old Testament)

been set forth in the "sure word of prophecy" (v. 19). In the midst of sinful man's darkness and defeat, the words of prophecy containing God's promises were "a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn" (v. 19). The prophets had given guidance to men during the time of their darkness. The "dawning of day" refers to the second coming of Christ when the world's darkness will be dispelled by the dawning of the day and the rising of the "day star" in their hearts. The day star or morning star possibly refers to the rising of the sun, which drives away darkness, rather than the appearing of Venus. The coming of Jesus in the glorious Kingdom will destroy the kingdom of darkness and bring about man's full liberation.

Verses 20 and 21 imply that prophecies contained in the Old Testament Scripture had been misinterpreted by the Jewish Rabbis. The prophets who spoke the Word of God were moved by the Holy Spirit; therefore, they did not express their own human wills or desires. The implication is that prophecy inspired by the Holy Spirit must be interpreted by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost enabled Peter to interpret Old Testament Scriptures concerning the Messiah which had not been understood previously (cf. Acts. 2:14ff.). It took divine illumination for the Apostles to see that the course which Jesus followed as the Messiah was according to God's will and predetermination. The death of the Messiah, which at first appeared irrational to Peter, was revealed to him by the Spirit at Pentecost to be the decisive act by which the Messiah defeated the powers of darkness—Satan and his allies of sin and death.

Be Vigilant Against Heretics

2 Peter 2:1-22

Introduction: the Gnostic threat

Scholars have agreed almost unanimously that the false teachers were Gnostics who claimed to be part of the Christian community. A second-century dating of 2 Peter has been argued on the basis of the well developed Gnostic ideas which are assumed to have been held by the false teachers whom Peter combated.

According to statements in 2 Peter, the particular Gnosticism which threatened the Church was libertinism rather than asceticism.

Gnosticism is falsely assumed to have been a second-century development among the Gentiles. Actually, Gnosticism was a syncretism (combination of beliefs) of Hellenistic philosophy and Oriental theosophy (mystical insight into the nature of God). From

Prophecy inspired by the _____ must be interpreted by the illumination of the _____.

Place the words understood and misinterpreted in the correct blanks.

Peter implied that Jewish Rabbis had _____ the Scriptures which could only be _____ after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.

(Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, misinterpreted, understood)

Underline correct word.

The particular Gnosticism which threatened the Church was (asceticism, libertinism).

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Greek philosophy and Persian Zoroastrianism there developed a strong physical and metaphysical dualism. On a metaphysical level, the divine world was divided between good and evil which stood against each other as light and darkness.

More than three centuries before Christianity, Plato concluded that the universe is composed of the world of ideas and the world of sense. Only ideas which exist in the mind of God are perfect and permanent. The physical world consists of material which contains the element of evil or imperfection. The material is an emanation from God—the product and image of reason. Material is inherently evil because it is imperfect and not eternal. The soul of man is indestructible and divine, but it is united with the body which participates in the changeable and impermanent sensuous nature. The rational nature of the soul is divine and is the seat of knowledge and virtue. The part of the soul which corresponds to the world of sensual perception is divided into two elements: the nobler which inclines towards reason and the lower which resists reason. The nobler aspect is the will or spirit and the lower is the sensuous desire. The rational element of the soul alone, which is apart from its mixture with the body, is immortal.

The fettering of the soul to the body is both a consequence and a punishment of the sensuous desires. The rational soul (the mind), which existed before earthly life, committed sin and became ensnared in the world of sense. The goal of the soul is for the nobler nature, the spirit, to prevail over the lower nature, the appetite or sensuous desires. When the spirit masters the appetite, the soul escapes the world of sense and flesh and returns to the immortal state of reason. The supreme goal of the soul, while mixed with the sensual world, is to break the power of evil and to attain freedom, wisdom, and goodness. Plato's teachings led to a dualism which identified material with evil and non-material or divine with divinity.

Judaism contributed to syncretistic Gnosticism by providing the concept of man's knowing God through revelation. A basic principle of Gnosticism was "the doctrine of a knowledge supernaturally attained, an immediate vision of truth, whereby the nature of the deity, the interaction of the spiritual and the material, the origin of good and evil, could be explained: this knowledge was not knowledge in the scientific sense but something acquired by immediate revelation."³ The Gnostic claimed a mystical experience whereby he apprehended the true nature of God and entered into

³G.R. Driver, The Judaean Scrolls (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p. 562.

Read the second and third paragraphs on this page. Then use the following words to fill in the blanks below.

imperfect	soul
evil	sensuous
material	immortal
eternal	body

The growth of Gnosticism was aided by Plato's ideas, which included:

1. The physical world of _____ is _____ because it is _____ and not _____.
2. The goal of the _____ is to escape its _____ nature in the _____ and return to the _____ state of reason.

(1. material, evil, imperfect, eternal,
2. soul, sensuous, body, immortal)

A Judaistic idea which contributed to Gnosticism was that of man's knowing God through _____.

The Gnostic claimed a _____ experience whereby he knew the true nature of God.

(revelation, mystical)

fellowship with Him. His special knowledge was shared with others in magical passwords, secret names, and in mystic rites. The special knowledge concerned escape from the world of evil on both physical and metaphysical levels. The metaphysical world was regarded as filled with hostile powers which caused evil in this material world. The goal of the Gnostic was to escape life in the lower physical world which was ruled by demons and spirits of darkness. He could seek to accomplish his goal by one of two methods: asceticism, which attempted to bring the physical body under control by punishment, and libertinism, which was based on the conclusion that the higher spiritual life was not affected by the indulgences of the material body.

Gnosticism was not a specifically Judaistic or Christian phenomenon, but it belongs to religious history in general. Since its doctrines were derived by perverting the teaching of various movements, it is not always easy to determine when words were used in their true Christian sense and when they were used with a perverted Gnostic meaning. Gnostic libertinism is closely related to Antinomianism (disregard of law). Neither Antinomianism nor Gnosticism was limited to Gentiles. In fact, some of the teachings of Jewish Apocalyptic writings before Christ have similarities to doctrines of Gnosticism. The amount of Gnostic influence in the Qumran sect (about 130 B.C. to A.D. 70) continues to be debated.

Gnosticism was not the only movement concerned with the problems of man's redemption from the sinful and perishing world of flesh. It was not the only movement which emphasized the importance of knowledge in gaining redemption. All religious movements are concerned with both doctrine (knowledge) and ethics (how to attain righteousness). The fact that *gnosis* (knowledge) appears frequently in writings of the New Testament does not give certain proofs that the recipients were threatened by Gnosticism. On the other hand, Gnostic tendencies were characteristic of most first-century religious movements, and there was always the possibility of a group's moving from orthodoxy to the heresy of Gnosticism.

There are significant differences between Christianity and Gnosticism, but there are also some common aspects. *Gnosis* is common to both, but in Gnosticism it is a special concept which enables the soul to liberate itself progressively from its imprisonment in matter by ascending through the spheres to the upper realm of light. In Christianity, *gnosis* is an understanding of the Gospel of Christ and a response by submission to Him. Dualism in Gnosticism held the material world to be evil as well as the God of the Old Testament who created it. In Christianity, the world of matter was created good by a righteous God, but it has come under the control of Satan and his forces. The powers of evil are inferior to God, however, and will ultimately be defeated.

Gnosticism viewed the metaphysical world as filled with _____ powers which caused _____ in this material world.

The Gnostic's goal: To _____ life in the lower physical world which was ruled by _____ and _____ of darkness.

(hostile, evil, escape, demons, spirits)

The two elements in all religious movements are: *d* _____ and *e* _____.

(doctrine, ethics)

In Christianity, knowledge is understanding the Gospel through an _____ of _____ and _____ to Christ. In Gnosticism, knowledge is a philosophical concept which enables the soul to _____ itself by ascending through spheres to the upper realms of _____. Christianity sees the material world as created _____ by God, but it has come under the control of _____. Gnosticism sees the material world as _____ and in _____ to God. (See the text.)

Both Christianity and Gnosticism required righteousness, but Christianity teaches that righteousness comes through the atoning death of Christ and by walking in the power of the Spirit. Gnosticism taught that righteousness is achieved by asceticism or by the philosophical belief that the rational soul is not affected by sins of the flesh.

The expectation of false prophets (2:1-3)

Peter warned his readers that false teachers would arise among them just as false prophets had appeared in the Old Testament (v. 1). These teachers may have been Gnostic libertines. The false prophets had prophesied what the people and the king wanted to hear. Their prophecies, which pleased the people, actually were destructive heresies. The false teachers denied the Master who had bought them with His life. This fact indicates that they were possibly Christians who had denied the deity of Christ. Denying the Master recalled a sad experience for Peter when he denied Christ at His trial. The heretical doctrines would bring swift destruction to the teachers.

The false teachers would influence many to follow their licentious (excessively lustful) ways. The influencing of many to turn to sensuality would cause the way of truth in Christ to be blasphemed (v. 2). If these false teachers were Gnostic Jews or Gentiles, it appears that they were libertines who encouraged the shameful indulgence of the passions of the flesh. They may have been Antinomians who misinterpreted Paul's teachings concerning the ineffectiveness of the Law and the Christian's freedom from it (cf. Gal. 5:1ff.). Perhaps denial of their Master by sinful living caused Christianity to be maligned (v. 2).

The greedy teachers made money with their false words (v. 3). Their words appealed to their followers because they said what sinful man wanted to hear. Similar movements frequently emerge today. The cult of Satan worship renounces Christian morality and advocates a life of indulgence. Other movements play on the racial and nationalistic emotions of people. Modern man lets his sensual desires determine what he will do. Peter reminded his readers that condemnation was not idle and destruction was not asleep (v. 3). Both were ready to pounce upon the false teachers and to require them to account for their sinful deeds.

The judgement of false teachers (2:4-10a)

Peter used several illustrations to show that God's judgement is certain. An 'if clause' begins the sentence in verse 4 and extends through verse 8. The 'then clause' continues the sentence to verse 10a. This statement can be translated, "Since it is true

Christianity teaches that righteousness comes through the atoning death of _____ and by walking in the power of the _____.
Gnosticism teaches that righteousness is achieved by _____ and _____.
(Compare your answers with the text.)

The false teachers denied the _____ of Christ.
(deity)

The false teachers influenced many to turn to _____.
(sensuality)

that God did not spare . . . , then God knows how. . . ."⁴

The first illustration of God's certain judgement is the angels whom God did not spare when they sinned. The angels are not identified, but the reference may have been to Genesis 6:1-4 where the "sons of God came in unto [entered into sexual union with] the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men" The angels were cast down to Tartarus, a word of pagan origin meaning a dark abyss as far below Hades as the earth is below heaven. The word was used by Peter perhaps to mean the place of future endless punishment. Its use may have been suggested by 1 Enoch 10:12 (cf. Jude 6, 14).

Peter's second illustration was based on the ancient world in the day of Noah (Gen. 6:5ff.). God saw the wickedness of man and repented that He had made him. Only Noah, who walked with God, pleased Him; therefore, the flood was sent to destroy all men except Noah, his wife, and their three sons and daughters-in-law (v. 5). A third illustration is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah because of the wickedness of the people in the two cities (v. 6; see also Gen. 19). In comparison to the wickedness of the Sodomites, Lot is described as a righteous person who was disturbed daily by the immorality of His neighbours (v. 8).

The three illustrations reveal that the wicked have received their punishment already, continue to be kept under punishment, and will face the wrath of God in the day of judgement (v. 9). The last two indicate that God is able to deliver the righteous from being punished with the wicked (v. 9).

Peter identified the wickedness of the false teachers with corrupt fleshly desires and rebellion against authority (v. 10a). The sexual indulgence in the day of Noah and the lewdness of the Sodomites were applied appropriately to the conduct of false teachers, who advocated yielding to the passions of the flesh rather than the commandments of God.

The character of false teachers (2:10b-22)

In spite of the judgement which they faced, the false teachers were daring and self-willed in pursuing their evil desires (v. 10b). They had become so vile that they were not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries. Whether the dignitaries were church leaders or angels, who are higher created beings, is uncertain. Possibly

Read this paragraph and the next one. Then do the following exercise.

Certainty of God's judgement is illustrated by:

1. God's punishment of _____ who sinned;
2. Destruction of wicked men in _____ day;
3. The destruction of _____ and _____.

(angels, Noah's, Sodom, Gomorrah)

These illustrations reveal that--

1. The wicked have received their _____ already.
2. They continue to be _____.
3. They will face the _____ of God in the day of _____.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

⁴Ray Summers, "2 Peter," Vol. 12 of The Broadman Bible Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), p. 181.

the latter was meant since angels are mentioned in verse 11. Although angels, who are powerful celestial beings and God's invisible servants, did not escape the insults of the false teachers, the heavenly beings did not accuse their defamers before the Lord. The teachers revealed their creaturely natures to be that of brute beasts, which would be caught and killed (v. 12). They were made for fellowship with God, but their perverse natures controlled them and would bring them to destruction in proportion to the evil they had wrought. They had become so bold that they boasted of their wickedness. They no longer attempted to hide it under the cloak of darkness but revelled in the daytime (v. 13).

Peter's description of their activities sounds very much like a clipping from a recent newspaper. The epistle is not irrelevant today, and certainly it does not show "the intellectual shallowness of the author."⁵ The so-called 'mature' religious thinkers of today have contributed to the contemporary moral deterioration by propounding a humanistic view of man and condemning Biblical ethics as puritanical. Supposedly the sophisticated man of the twentieth century is capable of controlling his life according to the principle of love; therefore, he does not need a higher authority issuing commandments which limit his conduct. Contrary to popular present-day philosophies, Peter's view that man is controlled either by the indwelling divine power or his lustful passions is still relevant.

The revellers who wilfully chose wrong and influenced others to do wrong will perish in their own corruption. They will receive the reward of their unrighteousness (v. 13). Their conduct was so contemptible that they played tricks on their hosts and deceived them while they feasted. Their presence at the table was actually a blight on the company assembled because they revelled in their own deceptions (v. 13). Their desires were so impure that they could not look at a woman without lust (v. 14). Their desires were insatiable and they could not cease from sin. Their thoughts were given to beguiling the unstable person. Their hearts were committed to covetousness. Like the false prophet Balaam, they had forsaken the right way in order to gain money. For a sum of money, Balaam had taught Balak how to entice the people of God to sin. The grossness of Balaam was revealed by his lowly ass which rebuked him for his covetousness and thus showed more intelligence than his master (v. 16; cf. Num. 22).

⁵J.C. Beker, "Second Letter of Peter" in Vol. 3 of The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 770.

Read all of this page. Then do the following exercise.

The false teachers were characterized as:

1. _____ in pursuing evil desires;
2. speaking _____ of dignitaries;
3. boasting of their _____;
4. being _____;
5. having insatiable _____ desires;
6. having _____ thoughts;
7. committing their hearts to _____.

(1. self-willed, 2. evil, 3. wickedness, 4. contemptible, 5. impure, 6. beguiling, 7. covetousness)

Is this statement true or false?

Description of false teachers' characteristics and activities applies also to many people in our own day. _____

(true)

The purposeless and worthless lives of those committed to unrestrained fleshly indulgences were compared to waterless springs and rainless clouds driven before the storm: they could not produce what they promised. Their hypocritical nature assured their doom. Their boastful words were used to stir up the passions of those who barely escaped domination by their lusts (v. 18). Their boastful words describing their folly were empty and offered nothing constructive, but only error.

Verse 19 is an excellent description of the modern cry for freedom. Modern society is seeking to escape the fetters of past traditions. The surge for freedom calls for laying aside the moral restraints set forth in the Bible and yielding to passions. Instead of finding the promised freedom, those who so indulge find themselves enslaved to their corrupt natures. Life in sin becomes so entangled that a man cannot live a respectful life. Every time he attempts to do so, he is confronted by the fruit of his past corrupt life. For example, when he has opportunity to attain a position of honour and respect, he is always in danger of having his past deeds exposed. A happy family life escapes him and he lives constantly with the shame of his past actions.

Through Christ, a person is delivered from the enslavement of sin (v. 20). His wrong deeds are forgiven and he is given divine power to escape mastery by his lusts. If, however, he returns to the old way of life and becomes entangled in sin and overpowered by lust, his last state is worse than his first because there is no hope of a second redemption (v. 21). Sinning in a state of ignorance is preferable to wilful sin which comes by repudiating Christ. Peter compared the perverted nature of those who would take such action to that of a dog which vomits that which made him sick and then returns to eat it (v. 22). A second analogy is that of a hog which is washed and changed in outward appearance but not in inner nature. The hog's true nature is not revealed by the outward appearance but by its return to wallow in the mire. The person who revels in iniquity does not reveal intelligence, uniqueness, nor maturity in being free. He simply reveals his true sinful and perverted nature to which he is enslaved. Only those who are "partakers of the divine nature" and experience divine power within are enabled to become new and to escape the world of lust (see 1:3-5).

The paradox in laying aside moral restraint to find _____ is that such attitudes and activities actually bring _____.

(freedom, enslavement)

A person can become new and escape the world of lust only through _____ within.

(divine power)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. List the internal and external evidences which have caused the authenticity of 2 Peter to be questioned. _____

2. Give Guthrie's four arguments supporting Petrine authorship. _____

3. How can the differences in style of 1 Peter and 2 Peter be explained? _____

4. Why was 2 Peter written? _____

5. What was the author's view of the nature of Christ? _____

6. Interpret 2 Peter 1:4. _____

7. What is the divine power which works in man? _____

8. Interpret 2 Peter 1:10. _____

9. What did the author feel his part to be in promoting righteousness? _____

10. Give two reasons the author was confident that God would fulfill His promises in Christ.

11. Interpret 2 Peter 1:20-21. _____

12. How did Plato's ideas contribute to the rise of Gnosticism? _____

13. How did Judaism contribute to Gnosticism? _____

14. Describe Gnosticism's view of the physical and metaphysical world.

15. What are the similarities and differences between Christianity and Gnosticism? _____

16. In what ways were false teachers leading the Christians astray? _____

17. Give three illustrations which were used to show the certainty of God's judgement. _____

18. Briefly describe the character of false teachers. _____

19. Interpret 2 Peter 2:19. _____

Supplementary activity (Level 2):

Read pages 156-172 in The Layman's Bible Commentary by Bowman and answer the following questions.

1. List the differences in style between 1 and 2 Peter as noted by Bowman.
2. List the arguments given by Bowman to support Petrine authorship.
3. What does Bowman state to be Peter's thesis in 1:3-4?
4. What is the relation of election and ethical living?
5. What two sins were particularly abhorrent to the author?

Advanced activity (Level 3):

Read pages 100-127 in The Letters of Peter and Jude by A.R.C. Leaney and answer the following questions.

1. What is Leaney's conclusion concerning the authorship of 2 Peter?
2. List eight parallel points in Jude and 2 Peter.
3. What does the author conclude from the name Simon Peter in 2 Peter 1:1-2?
4. Why does Leaney say that 2 Peter was influenced by Stoicism?
5. How does Leaney interpret 2 Peter 2:12-13?

Seminar Discussion

1. Why has objection been raised to Petrine authorship of 2 Peter? What is the traditional view of authorship and what arguments support it?
2. According to 2 Peter, how does a Christian attain moral excellence? Does this author's view of moral victory differ from that of Paul and John?
3. Describe the origin and characteristics of Gnosticism.
4. Why were the heretical teachers, referred to in 2 Peter, like the Jewish or Gentile Gnostics?
5. Why were the false teachers wilfully leading others astray, and what was to be their end?