

# THE ENEMY FROM WITHIN

## II PETER 1:1-2

**STANDING TOGETHER AGAINST AN OUTSIDE ENEMY IS DIFFICULT BUT DOABLE. FACING AN ENEMY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY IS MUCH MORE CONFUSING AND MUCH MORE DEVASTATING.**

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# **THE ENEMY FROM WITHIN**

## **II PETER 1:1-2**

This morning, we are going to start the Apostle Peter's second letter. Even though he talked a lot about suffering in his first letter, he told us how to successfully navigate circumstances beyond our control. The clear message was that we need to stand together as a community. If we do, we can weather almost any storm in life. In my opinion, it is relatively easy to stand against enemies outside.

However, it is much more difficult to fight against enemies within. That's why one of the main rules in military combat is that if a soldier is found to be a traitor or deserter, he or she is to be shot right on the spot. People, who introduce false doctrine in the church, cause problems, or cause divisions, are enemies of the community. More churches are destroyed from within rather than from outside enemies. Peter's pastoral heart came out in his first letter; his warrior side will come out in this second letter. The battle will center on the battle for truth and holy living.

When people don't tell the truth, they are often caught in a lie, cause confusion, and in the end become indignant when they are caught.

Let me give you an example. In one of the churches I pastored, we had a lady that was never willing to admit her real age. One day, the person who was doing the church newsletter, asked her how old she was. Without hesitation she said that she just turned 68. The interviewer was astonished. He said, “How is that possible? I just interviewed your son. He said he was 63. The lady became indignant and said, “My son lives his life, and I live mine.”

This was kind of a funny incident. However, distorting the truth can cause all sorts of confusion and conflict, especially when it comes to maintaining the unity of the church.

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Let me just give a little background of this book we are about to study. The book of *II Peter* had a great deal of difficulty getting accepted into the Bible. The early church debated its authenticity from the beginning. It was finally accepted into the official canon in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. If you were to study the short book of Jude alongside this second letter of Peter, you would quickly see that there are a lot of very similar words and concepts.

There is still a lot of debate today about the authorship, date, and authenticity of the book. I’ll leave you to read and study the issues for yourselves. There are plenty of books in our church library. My personal belief is that the book was written by Peter the apostle, by his own hand or through the use of an amanuensis. I believe he wrote it from Rome as a follow-up to his first letter, and I believe it was addressed to the churches he addressed in his first letter, and meant to be read and distributed to all the churches.

One of the main arguments against the authenticity of the letter is that the style and tone are much different than the first letter. However, I would say the issues Peter is addressing in both letters are much different and call for a much different approach. That, in fact, is the main idea for this morning’s text. **STANDING TOGETHER AGAINST AN OUTSIDE ENEMY IS DIFFICULT, BUT DOABLE. FACING AN ENEMY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY IS MUCH MORE CONFUSING AND MUCH MORE DEVASTATING.** In other words, we can stand together against outside persecution, but when someone or some group inside

the church is trying to undermine the unity and integrity, it is much more difficult to fight against. People often end up taking sides and splitting the church. Peter knew the church was about to undergo severe persecution from the government and other outside forces. If they did not remain united in truth, they would never survive.

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## I. ANOTHER SIDE OF PETER

*In The First Book Of Peter, We Saw Peter As A Warm Shepherd. In Second Peter, His Fighting Side Will Come Out.*

That's why in the first half of verse 1 we see another side of Peter. **IN THE FIRST BOOK OF PETER, WE SAW PETER AS A WARM SHEPHERD. IN SECOND PETER, HIS FIGHTING SIDE WILL COME OUT.** In this book, we are going to see Peter take off the gloves and pull no punches.

### A. A RICH TRADITION OF JUSTICE

If we were to look at the spelling of Peter's name, we could see that he comes from a rich tradition of justice. Now I don't know why, but many of the very good modern translations miss this point. The author identifies himself as Simeon Peter. The NASB, NIV, and NLT versions all spell Peter's Hebrew name "Simon." Only the ESV captures the literal spelling. It should be *Simeon*. Peter was probably named after one of Jacob's sons. Simeon becomes the leader of one of Israel's 12 tribes. The interesting thing about Simeon is that one of the only stories told concerning him had to do with an incident that surrounded the rape of his sister Dinah.

When the man who raped Dinah along with his father, tried to make things right by marrying Dinah, Simeon and his brother Levi instructed Shechem, the young man, and his father Hamor the king, to get circumcised along with all the males in the city. Then they would allow their sister to get married. They complied by having themselves and all the males in the city circumcised. They couldn't move around while recovering and Simeon and Levi went into the city, slaughtered all the men, and took Dinah home. When their father Jacob confronted them with their treacherous behavior, Simeon and Levi responded, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?"

For Peter life was much like that. He didn't always use good judgment, but he had a real sense of right and wrong, and had a strong sense of justice. Even though his actions were often misguided, his heart was always in the right place. One of the last words Jesus spoke to Peter was that Peter was responsible to care for the church; people who had given themselves in faith to following Christ. Peter took that charge seriously.

The other time the spelling of Simon's name is spelled with the "e" is at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. That was a council gathered together to discuss the acceptance of Gentile believers into the church. Again, Peter tells how God used him to unlock the door of salvation to the Gentiles. All the other times Peter is referred to as Simon, it is without the "e."

And I'm sure we all remember the story of how Simon was also named Peter. Jesus asked His disciples who people were saying He was. Let's pick up the story at this point in Matthew;

*"Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

*Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in Heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven ; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven."*  
(Matthew 16:16-19 NIV)

*Peter* means Rock in Greek. Scholars argue as to whether the rock Jesus builds His church on is Peter the person or Peter's testimony that Jesus is the Promised Messiah, God in the flesh, and the Savior of humankind. The point is this. Simeon Peter has been given the assignment by Jesus Himself to guard, protect, and feed the flock. That's why we see a very different Peter here. He is to protect the church from all enemies: from without and from within. The battle inside will be for the truth of the Gospel message without any distortion.

## **B. A PASSIONATE DEDICATION**

We see his passionate dedication come out in the rest of the verse. First, he is passionately dedicated to his Lord Jesus Christ. Peter learned to judge everything in his life based on his relationship with Jesus. After confessing Jesus as the Christ, Peter acknowledged Jesus as his Lord several times. He stumbled several times and even fell. But each time he stumbled or fell, Peter got up and rededicated himself to his faith and life in Jesus. During a particularly tough sermon, many disciples of Jesus left. When Jesus asked Peter and the rest of the twelve if they planned on leaving,

*“Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”*

(John 6:68 NIV)

### **B.1. HIS LORD**

Peter successfully died for Christ under Nero’s persecution somewhere between 64AD and 67AD. Let me just make an aside comment about the dating of this letter. Since chapter 3 verse 1 of this book says it is his second letter, I would say the letter had to be written a short time after his first letter and before his death. So again, I think this was written sometime between 62AD and 66AD. So Peter lived and died for his Lord Jesus Christ.

### **B.2. HIS AVAILABILITY**

Peter also had a passionate desire to be available for Christ. He refers to himself as a servant. I think I understand why most modern translations translate this word as servant. However, the word should be translated slave. There are different words used to describe household servants who had rights and privileges. This word is *dulos*. It refers to a slave who has no rights or no possibility of freedom. The NASB comes closest to the idea by translating it as bondservant.

We often make a distinction between our religious life and our everyday life. We make distinctions between the secular part of our lives and the sacred. For Peter there was no distinction. Whether he was playing golf, fishing, preaching, or being crucified, it was all related to his Lord Jesus. There was no distinction between the sacred and

secular. All of life's endeavors for Peter were sacred. He was sold out to Jesus: lock, stock, and barrel. He had no life of his own. He lived to serve Jesus. The Apostle Paul put it this way, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21 NIV).

In other place he says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20 NIV).

### **B.3. HIS MISSION**

Both Peter and Paul considered themselves slaves. But Jesus considered them to be very valuable ambassadors. Peter has a passionate dedication to his mission. In the Greek and Roman world, apostles were messengers sent on a mission. Jesus personally commissioned Peter to be a very special apostle. All Christians are ambassadors for Christ. Peter was a very special apostle. He was not only sent as an ambassador of the Gospel, he was sent to protect, guard, nurture, and direct the early church. He took this mission very seriously. And that is why we can see such a harsh tone come out in this letter. He would demolish anything that would set itself up against the truth of the Gospel.

Peter's passionate dedication to his Lord, to his position, to his mission, and to his sense of justice, makes him the perfect candidate to write this letter. This truly is a different side of Peter than we were exposed to in his first letter. However, if we take time to look back over his whole life, we can see this side as well. **IN THE FIRST BOOK OF PETER, WE SAW PETER AS A WARM SHEPHERD. IN SECOND PETER, HIS FIGHTING SIDE WILL COME OUT.**

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## **II. ANOTHER IDENTIFICATION OF HIS CONGREGATION**

*It Is Important For Believers To Always Remember Who We Are And What We Have Received.*

In the second half of verse 1, we get another identification of his congregation. **IT IS IMPORTANT FOR BELIEVERS TO ALWAYS REMEMBER WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE HAVE RECEIVED.** And that's why Peter reinforces this thought one more time. He stated it in I Peter. In that letter he referred to believers as living stones, royal priests, and God's family. Here he reminds his congregations of this in describing some of the rights and privileges God has given them.

In this letter, the specific geographic location is not mentioned. I think the location is not mentioned because this is following up letter to his first. Therefore, I think it is primarily addressed to the churches scattered throughout modern day Turkey .

## **A. THE GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

The first gift they have received is the gift of righteousness. We have already studied through the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. In that book, Paul talked about righteousness in a forensic way. In other words, he talked about our legal standing with God through Jesus. We are completely forgiven through the blood of Jesus. God doesn't put us on parole; He gives us a full pardon.

I think that based on the rest of this letter, Peter has righteous living in mind here. In other words, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have been set free from the bondage of sin and we now have the ability to live righteous lives through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I think that we often read over little phrases without catching the full force of them. Look at this phrase in the second half of verse 1. *This gift comes by way of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.* Do you see that? This is not describing two different persons. This is not referring to God the Father and God the Son. This is identifying Jesus as our God and our Savior. This is one of the New Testament references that clearly identify Jesus as God outright.

The point is that all religions are not as good as one another. If Jesus is God, and for Peter, witnessing Jesus' life, death, and resurrection convinced him that Jesus is the one True and Living God, then what He says is true. In response to a question Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except

through me.” John 14:6 (NIV).

In this letter Peter argues against false righteousness. Some people think they are pretty good and do not need the forgiveness of Jesus. If we were brutally honest, examined all the good things and bad we have done in life, how many people we have hurt, and compare ourselves to some really good people like Mother Teresa, could we really say we are good enough to go to Heaven? If we think we are pretty good, then I would suggest that we have some pretty low standards.

The Bible makes it very clear that if God were to judge us on the basis of our being good, we would all spend an eternity in Hell. The truth is that Jesus came to earth with the intent to suffer and die so that if we will place our faith and trust in Him and His sacrifice for us, we can be forgiven of our sins and put back in a right relationship with God.

The second error Peter is going to have to argue against is that once we’re saved, it doesn’t matter how we act. We have received salvation as a gift from God. He has declared us to be not guilty, not because we deserve it or have earned it in any way. We have been declared not guilty as a gift from God through Jesus. That’s what this Christmas season is all about, the birth of our Savior.

We as Christians have to remember that righteousness has been given to us by God. God has not only given us His Son, He has given us His Holy Spirit. We have been given the power to live holy lives. We are called to live holy lives. Our lives must be demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit which is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

## **B. THE GIFT OF FAITH**

We receive all of this through the gift of faith. There is nothing we can do to earn God’s love. God already loves us. That’s why He sent Jesus. We are put in a right relationship with God by confessing our sinful behavior and asking Jesus to come into our lives. And notice that this is a gift. If you are not a believer, I would just like to invite you to reflect on how many times God has approached you demonstrating that all is not right in your life. That is a gift from God inviting you to place your faith and trust in Him. That is a true gift.

As we buy, wrap, and unwrap presents, let's remember that God gave us the greatest gift, a Savior. The word *savior* in Greek could refer to a doctor or a counselor or a policeman. Jesus wants to help us. But we must first open up the gift of faith. Jesus wants to heal us in every way and make us whole. But as Peter will demonstrate in the rest of the letter, it has to be done His way.

### **C. THE GIFT OF STATUS**

With all of this, we as believers receive the gift of status. This last phrase in verse 1 is difficult to translate in English although it is perfectly clear in the Greek. The phrase "as precious as ours," is one word in Greek. It is a compound word. The first part of the word is *isos*. It means equal to or identical with. The second half of the word is a very rich word. It is *timos* which means honor, privilege, wealth, and status. So what Peter is telling the congregations is that it doesn't matter what their background was and it doesn't matter where they came from. Former behavior, education, wealth, status, race, or ethnicity ... none of it matters. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, we become part of God's chosen people and family, just like the Jews were God's chosen people. We all share the same status as all of the great heroes of the faith. It really doesn't matter if you came from a home in which you were loved, abandoned, or abused. That all counts for nothing because through faith, we are received into God's family. That is the only designation or status that counts.

I think that this point is very important to understand. We are family. We share in each other's strengths and gifts. If one of us is highly educated, we all share in that education. If one of us is wealthy, we all share in that wealth. There is no earthly or worldly distinctions made in the church. Each and every believer is equally valuable in the family of God. God shared His ministry with the Apostles. They shared it with their churches and even to this day, we share in the ministry of each other. **IT IS IMPORTANT FOR BELIEVERS TO ALWAYS REMEMBER WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE HAVE RECEIVED.**

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## **III. ANOTHER PROBLEM**

***If We Are To Remain Healthy And Happy, We Must Know And Live The Truth.***

Having said that, we must stay vigilant in our thought lives and behavior. **IF WE ARE TO REMAIN HEALTHY AND HAPPY, WE MUST KNOW AND LIVE THE TRUTH.** I'm not sure from where all our bad theology has crept into the church, but I'm sure it has only been able to take root because Christians have been extremely lazy in studying the Bible. You would think I'd be used to it by now after all these years in the ministry, but I'm almost always stunned to hear the theology that comes out of Christians' mouths.

In the United States especially I hear Christians say that if we are Christians and we pray and are good, God should give us plenty of money, food, shelter, good health, healing, and even a mate. And then I'll hear them go on to quote all sorts of Bible verses out of context. How can anybody reading the same Bible I am come to these conclusions? I think you only have look as far as your television set. It seems to me that Peter is arguing against false teachers whose doctrines will confuse his congregations. Many so-called Christian leaders are telling people that if you just have enough faith, you will be healed, you will have plenty of money, and you'll find a mate. Even right here in verse 2 the word *abundance* is used.

**A. UNDERSTANDING THE TRUTH OF ABUNDANCE**

But first we must understand the truth of abundance. Let me just point this out. Deeply devoted Christian men, women, and children are starving to death every day. Deeply devoted Christian men, women, and children are being arrested and killed in Communist and Muslim countries every day. Deeply devoted Christian men, women, and children are dying a slow, painful death because of AIDS. Before someone preaches this cockamamie gospel of health and wealth from the warmth and security of the wealthy suburban churches, they need to have a worldwide perspective of Christianity. They don't even have to travel that far. Just come to the city and see the pain and suffering that Christian men, women, and children suffer here.

**B. RECEIVING ABUNDANCE**

Peter offers the common blessing of grace and peace. Grace is receiving things we don't deserve. Mature believers come to start from the premise that the only thing we deserve is death and an eternity in Hell. We come to realize that the simple fact that Jesus changed our eternal destinies from death to life is an incredible grace. We come to realize that every single thing we have or have become is a direct grace from God.

Some people think that we have all the things we have as a result of our hard work and wise decisions. And then the thought that immediately follows is that they deserve what they have. With that kind of attitude, that person can never receive a gift from God.

However, learning to receive everything as a grace from God will lead us to incredible contentment in life. Knowing that we are at peace with God brings incredible joy and comfort. These are the sorts of things we receive in abundance. Jesus promised us an abundant life. Never did He promise us health, wealth, or even a pleasant experience of life. What He did promise was that, through it all, He would never leave us nor forsake us. He promised to journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death with us. He promised to bring us safely home to Heaven. He promised us that we would be in a right relationship with God through Him. Oh, and He promised us that we would face all kinds of suffering in this life.

Jesus promised us an abundance of love, joy, peace, and contentment. How does this agree with your theology? Let me speak as a preacher for a moment. You will get sick and die. Your loved ones will definitely get sick and die. You will face all sorts of setbacks in life: relational setbacks, financial setbacks, health setbacks, all kinds of setbacks. People will betray you. You will feel hurt for all sorts of reasons. That is the truth. I promise it.

But we should never complicate suffering with bad theology. If we think God promises all sorts of things He doesn't, then we will feel doubly betrayed. I know so many people who have been Christians for twenty or thirty years or more who are still baby Christians because they have a very superficial knowledge of the Bible and thereby believe all sorts of things about God that are just plain false.

So how do we get on a healthy track? By receiving abundance the way Peter tells us

in the second half of verse 2. We enter and receive more of the abundant life Jesus promises by growing in the knowledge of God the Father and of Jesus our Lord. Peter doesn't mention it here, but we can add to that knowledge of the Holy Spirit. Peter doesn't use the normal word for *knowledge* here. The word here indicates either a continued growth in knowledge or reaching the full knowledge of something. Peter is using this word because he will argue against two false views of knowledge in the church.

The first is the philosophical approach and the second will be the mystical approach. We will discuss this more in depth as we study the rest of the letter. But here is Peter's reason for using this word. We grow to maturity in the Christian faith through two avenues. The first is growing in knowledge by studying the Bible. In order to know where we are going, what God promises, and what He commands, we are to study Scripture. But we must also grow in our behavior.

Faith can be defined as the actions we take based on what we believe. In order for us to grow we must put what we learn into practice. I have seen people who claim to be Christians living lives as immoral as unbelievers. How can that be? Usually either because they don't have a clue as to what's right and wrong because they don't study the bible, or they know what's in the bible, but continue to presume on God's grace to forgive. Peter is up against both of these problems. The point is that we must be growing in knowledge both informational and behavioral. **IF WE ARE TO REMAIN HEALTHY AND HAPPY, WE MUST KNOW AND LIVE THE TRUTH.**

The chances are we will recognize when the Devil is attacking us and trying to sell us a lie. But we are much more vulnerable to people who sound like they know what they're talking about when it comes to faith. We are at much greater risk from faulty theology. **STANDING TOGETHER AGAINST AN OUTSIDE ENEMY IS DIFFICULT, BUT DOABLE. FACING AN ENEMY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY IS MUCH MORE CONFUSING AND MUCH MORE DEVASTATING.**

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## IV. EPILOGUE

Perhaps we find ourselves with such bad theology because we have been compromising little by little over the years. A Russian parable nicely illustrates the result of compromise:

*“A hunter was tracking a large black bear. He had the bear in his sights, and was just about to pull the trigger when the bear spoke. The bear spoke in a smooth soft voice, ‘Isn’t it better to talk than to shoot? What do you want? Let us try to negotiate the matter.’*

*Lowering his rifle, the hunter replied, ‘I want a fur coat.’*

*‘Good,’ said the bear, ‘that is a negotiable question. I only want a full stomach, so let us negotiate a compromise.’*

*They sat down to negotiate, and after a time, the bear walked away alone. The negotiations had been complete. The bear had a full stomach, and the hunter had his fur coat.”*

In the name of tolerance and in the reaction to legalism, we have compromised all sorts of Christian truths that will allow us to feel comfortable with our level and style of living. Peter wants to make sure his congregations have a good handle on truth. That is my desire for our congregation as well.