

2 PETER

2 PETER 1 — FALLING FROM GRACE — A WARNING

Second Peter is the first of the New Testament books of which there is any doubt as to its canonicity. It was not mentioned by the earliest Christian writers, but this may be accounted for by the lateness of its appearance, and the fact that it was not addressed to any local church with an interest in and facility for making its existence known.

On the other hand there are points of genuineness, such as similar expressions to those in 1 Peter, similar views of prophecy, the writer's testimony to his presence at the transfiguration, etc., all of which substantiate the Petrine authorship. We cannot consider the subject at any length — enough to know that the book has been regarded as canonical by the whole church, with isolated exceptions, for sixteen or seventeen centuries at least.

ITS OBJECT

Before analyzing the epistle let us consider its object which was to warn and to exhort (3:17-18). And this warning was against falling from grace, while the exhortation was in the direction of growing in grace. A working outline will be found in considering:

1. The enforcement of this warning and exhortation (1:2-11);
2. The ground of it (1:12-21);
3. The occasion of it (chaps. 2-3).

A THREE-PART WARNING

1. *The source of growth* (vv. 2-4). This source is God Himself. Grace and peace are multiplied in us through the knowledge of Him (v. 2), but that is not all. His divine power grants unto us how many other things that pertain to the same end (v. 2)? And through what channel do they come (same verse)? By this knowledge of God we

become possessed of certain things, what are they (v. 4)? And through the possession of these promises of what do we come to partake? But what antecedently has become true of us? How does "the corruption that is in the world" control men so that they can not partake of the divine nature (same verse)?

2. *The lines of growth* (vv. 5-7). If we are to be preserved from falling from grace in what general directions should we be careful to grow in grace? We have obtained faith from God, in other words, and by this we have been declared righteous in a judicial sense, but what now, are we to add to this faith, or "supply in it," to quote the Revised Version, in order to perfect assurance? The list of the virtues follows, of which one or two require a word of explanation. "Virtue," for example, is not chastity, but "Courage," perhaps moral courage to confess our faith before men. And "temperance" is not moderation in the use of intoxicated drinks merely, but in every line of conduct, self-restraint, in other words. Moreover, the word "charity" is to be interpreted by "love" as in 1 Corinthians 13.

3. *The need of growth* (vv. 8-11). The necessity for "diligence" in these matters is seen in what follows. It is the presence of these things in our lives that makes us fruitful in Christ, and bears testimony to the power of His cleansing blood (vv. 8-9). Moreover, they produce the strength of assurance of our salvation (v. 10), and secure that that salvation shall be a triumphant and glorious one (v. 11).

GROUND OF THE WARNING

Passing from the apostle's enforcement of his warning and exhortation to the ground of it (vv. 12-21), we find it built upon the truth of the Gospel. And this is set before us along two lines of evidence:

(1) *The testimony of Peter himself* (vv. 12-18). In introducing this he speaks of his object (to stir them up), his motive (his approaching decease), and his purpose (to prepare a record of these things, which, by the way, is supposed to be contained in the Gospel of Mark). But now, what is his testimony? That is, to what particular fact of Gospel history does he bear witness (v. 16)? What kind of witness is it (same verse)? What did he see and hear? Do you remember who were with him? How does he interpret the transfiguration, that is, of what greater event does it serve as a foregleam?

(2) *The testimony of the Old Testament prophets* (vv. 19-21). Verse 19 should read: "Wherefore we have the word of prophecy made more sure." It does not mean that the Old Testament prophets are more sure than the new, but that such words as his strengthen the prediction spoken before. How, then, should we regard the Old Testament prophecies (v. 19)? What does he say of their origin (for so should "interpretation" be understood in verse 20)? And when he says those prophecies were not of any "private" origination, what does he mean, as gathered from verse 21? Does not this strongly corroborate Paul in ^{² Timothy 3:16.}

QUESTIONS

1. What distinguishes this epistle in the canon?
2. What strong evidence is there to its canonicity?
3. State its object or purpose.
4. Give its outline.
5. How many questions in the text of the lesson have you answered satisfactorily?

2 PETER 2-3 — OCCASION OF THE WARNING

We now consider the last division which treats of the occasion for this warning and exhortation, chapters 2-3. In brief, this occasion was in the incoming of false teachers in the church, 2:1, whose success is predicted in verse 2; whose punishment is certain and dreadful, vv. 3-9; and whose description follows in verses 10-22.

We shall not enter upon this description in detail, and, indeed, it presents many difficulties of interpretation. The presence of such teachers, in the visible church, is almost inconceivable, but we should recall what Christ said about wolves in sheep's clothing. Their leading characteristics are carnality (v. 10), presumption (vv. 10-12), reveling (v. 13), and covetousness (vv. 14-16), but it is clear that the first-named played the largest part in the power exercised over their followers. Just what the features of this uncleanness were may come before us when we reach Jude, whose epistle contains the same picture of false teachers in about the same words.

CHARACTER OF THE FALSE TEACHING

No portion of this epistle is more important than the last one which we now enter, and which, in connection with the description of the teachers describes their teaching. The latter focuses upon the second coming of Christ (chapter 3).

In the first place notice the second verse concerning the authority of the New Testament as compared with the Old, and how the apostle places his writings on a par with the prophets.

What period is being referred to (v. 3)? Remember that "the last days" means the last days of the present age, not the end of the world. What is the subject of the scoffing marking the period spoken of (v. 4)? Of what fact do the scoffers seem to be in practical ignorance (vv. 5-6)? How will the next cosmic catastrophe differ from the last (v. 7)? The reference in verse 7 is to the end of the world, but this will not be reached till a thousand years after the coming of the Lord. How does this fact seem to be alluded to in verse 8? For what reason is the coming of the Lord delayed (v. 9)? To what period does verse 10 refer? We have seen in 2 Thessalonians the distinction between the coming of Christ for His church, and the introduction of The Day of the Lord which follows. This "day" begins and ends with judgment as Revelation reveals, although between the two series of judgments the millennium intervenes. We have been taught that the prophets see events in space rather than in time, often overlooking intervening occurrences between the objective points. In this way the church period is not alluded to in the Old Testament, while in the present instance Peter says nothing about the millennium. What application does he make of these words (vv. 11-12)? What hope is set before the believer (v. 13)? With what warning and exhortation does he close (vv. 17-18)?

QUESTIONS

1. What was the occasion for the warning?
2. Name some characteristics of the false teachers.
3. What is meant by "the last days"?
4. When does The Day of the Lord begin and end?
5. How do the prophets see events?