

2 PETER: HOW TO HANDLE THE CRISIS IN THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Authorship: The traditional view is that the apostle Peter is the writer.

The reasons are:

- There is reference to the transfiguration of Jesus (1:17-18) of which Peter was an eyewitness.
- There is reference to the coming death of Peter (John 21:18-19).
- A previous letter is referred to (3:1), which is probably 1st Peter.
- There is personal familiarity with the apostle Paul and a recognition of him as an inspired writer (3:15-16).

Reasons against Peter as writer are:

- the writing and imagery of the letter are very Greek, whereas Peter is an illiterate Jewish Fisherman.
- It draws heavily on the letter of Jude, which was written about 90 AD, after Peter's death.
- It refers to the letters of Paul as "scriptures" (3:16), an expression used at the time of the apostles only for books of the Old Testament.
- Some of the later church fathers dispute the authorship of Peter, and this letter was only included in the biblical canon by 397 AD.

However, for reasons already offered in the introduction to 1st Peter, we will consider this letter as written by the apostle Peter also. Peter is the inspiration and source of the contents even if someone else may have done the writing (possibly Silvanus, 1 Peter 5:12). Jude may have borrowed from Peter, or both may have borrowed from other sources. Reference to "Scriptures" is more loosely applied to sacred writings and is only formalized as a term later on. The letter is written around 64 AD. Both Peter and Paul would have died in Rome between 64-67 AD.

Even though the broader theological themes in 2nd Peter match those of 1st Peter (i.e. being chosen by God and destined in Christ to resurrection hope through suffering in the present time), the focus of second Peter is much more on the quality and sustainability of Christian community in trying times. The challenges coming to Christians are from "false prophets" who are encouraging a more worldly and laissez-faire approach to Christian living and are more dismissive of apostolic authority.

COMMENTARY ON THE LETTER

- In this letter the emphasis shifts from suffering of Christians to immoral and faithless living of Christians as they are influenced by false teachers and prophets. In order to fend off temptations to follow such destructive influences, Christians must support their faith with goodness (compassion toward others), further supported with knowledge (following Jesus' way of life and his ethics), further supported with self-control (versus bad forms of indulgence), further supported with endurance (keeping on keeping on), further supported with godliness (prayer, worship and meditation on scripture), further supported with mutual affection (healthy relationships of Christian friendship and care), further supported with love, which is the crowning virtue (1:5-6). Peter is concerned that Christians have a solid foundation and healthy spiritual practices to help them ward off harmful influences.
- Christians have been chosen by God and enlightened accordingly. But it is also their responsibility to build on this foundation. What is gained can be lost. God will always be there to help complete what has been begun in the life of a Christian. But there is also a point where a Christian must choose to put God first in their life, again and again.
- Peter's authority and apostolic authority can be trusted. What they speak and write doesn't come from them but from God, inspired by the Spirit and the living testimony of Christ. There are others, however, who are questioning and undermining this authority, and telling Christians to enjoy life in the world in such a way that they live more selfishly and self-indulgently. It's not a question of enjoying life, but of discerning real purpose and fulfillment in life. Do we find real purpose and joy in living under the call of God to give, serve and love, or to live by indulging for ourselves with our money, time and pleasures?
- Peter uses a number of biblical references (e.g. the flood in Noah's time, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Lot's time, Balaam the false prophet at the time of Moses) and non-biblical legends (the fall of angels from heaven) to make the point about the destructive consequences of false prophecy. Eventually, judgment will come. He also warns Christians that the consequences of turning back to an immoral life when they have already been saved from it, will be worse than the first time. It gets harder and harder to heal and change when you repeatedly fall into bad old habits and lifestyles.
- False teachers and prophets create uncertainty, doubt and questioning in Christians of a bad kind. They make them wonder whether Christ will ever return, and therefore whether their struggle to live holy and pure lives is worth it. Peter insists that God's

time is not our time. A Christian is called to live faithfully, waiting patiently, especially under suffering and need. God's time is intended to give more time for all people to come to repentance under the welcoming embrace of God's love. Time is not our enemy but our friend. Our waiting in faithful action and purposeful hope will only build strength and wisdom in us. Let us not be impatient for some reward but enjoy the rewards of living as God's children now.