



## The Real Dea

*Series: A Divine Antidote to Heresy – Sermons in 2 Peter*

1 Peter 1:1-2

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### Introduction:

Through our study of the First Epistle of Peter we have come to know Peter as a man and shepherd whose calling was to comfort, to encourage, and to strengthen the body of Christ. We have seen a man who embraced the weighty calling of Christ to feed His lambs and His sheep and we have heard his message – calling us to the true gospel of grace, to faith, to hope, to trust, to endurance in the face of trial and difficulty, in the face of persecution. Throughout Peter’s first letter, the threat to the church was always seen as coming from the outside, from the world. But in this second epistle, Peter is going to train his sights on the threat is among us, the threat from within the professing church, and that threat is from false teachers, from false prophets, from error and lies paraded in the church as truth. Peter is concerned in this letter to protect the church, to encourage our growth in grace so as to protect young believers and even more mature believers from spiritual disaster and shipwreck. He is concerned in this letter both to expose false prophets and their error and their character, but also to give to the church a strategy to fight doctrinal error and the moral perversions that follow after it. What is at stake, Peter sees, is truth and therefore the very life of the church itself, the very core of the church’s existence. If we care about the church, if we care about God, if we care about souls, we must care about the truth. If we do not care about the truth, we do not truly care about the truth, we do not care about God, we do not care about his church and we do not care about the souls of men and women. To love God passionately is to love His truth passionately.

Throughout this letter we will find that there is a sense of urgency, an urgency born of Peter’s certainty of his imminent death. (**2Pe 1:13-15**) The reality of his soon death galvanizes Peter into writing these words to the church so that the gospel truth will endure when he is gone. As we look at this epistle, we will see that just as 1 Peter was so relevant to the times in which we live, so too is Peter’s second letter thoroughly relevant to today.

We live in a time when many of those who profess to be followers of Christ nevertheless are indifferent to faithful adherence to and proclamation of the Word of God, believing that the message of Christianity should be flexible and vague, revealing a heart that is more in tune with the culture than with Christ and a heart in love with the spirit of the age rather than filled with the Spirit of Truth. We are in an age of rapid production and proliferation of heresy via TV, radio, internet, books, magazines, seminars and blogs. Well-packaged deceit persuades multitudes to exchange truth for lies. What is worse, many in today's church, some of them popular figures in the church, motivated by a fear of rejection or criticism, motivated by the seductiveness of tolerance, or by some unbiblical notion of love and unity are unwilling to expose today's apostates. What a refreshingly gutsy and bold and truly pastoral contrast Peter is to these modern day cowards. He has no fear of denouncing the false prophets, exposing their error, immorality and deception.

The reason that Peter is so bold is because Peter knows that authentic Christianity must be rooted in the truth. In fact, one of the revealing characteristics of those who perish, those who are damned, according to Paul is that **they are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. (2Th 2:10)** Peter would have agreed with the assessment of Charles Spurgeon who said: **The Church of Christ is continually represented under the figure of an army; yet its Captain is the Prince of Peace; its object is the establishment of peace, and its soldiers are men of a peaceful disposition. The spirit of war is at the extremely opposite point to the spirit of the gospel. Yet nevertheless, the church on earth has been, and until the Second Advent must be, the church militant, the church armed, the church warring, the church conquering. And how is this? It is in the very order of things that so it must be. Truth could not be truth in this world if it were not a warring thing, and we should at once suspect that it were not true if error were friends with it. The spotless purity of truth must always be at war with the blackness of heresy and lies.** We are not playing games here. Spiritual truth is life and death. The spotless purity of truth must always be at war with the blackness of heresy and lies but let me add this, that at the same time we must remember that while we must contend for truth, we must guard our hearts lest we become like the church of Ephesus to whom the risen Christ said: **(Rev 2:2-4)** As important as it is for us to contend for the truth, we must remember why it is that we do so – not for the thrill of vanquishing a foe, but out of a genuine love for Christ who is the very embodiment of all we hold true and for the sake of His bride, the church. Peter strove for truth for the right reasons and in his second epistle, we see some distinct theological themes established and developed.

## Theological Themes in 2 Peter:

The overarching theme that we will see developed through this epistle is simply this: **Growth in the grace and true knowledge of God in Christ will fortify the church and make it to stand unwaveringly and eternally steadfast against the destabilizing and soul-destroying power of error.** This will be the main theme of Peter's message as he "stirs us up by way of reminder" of these things. Peter is going to remind us in this letter that:

**(1) The true knowledge of God is sufficient for salvation and for growth in godliness.** The emphasis on knowing the Lord and knowing the truth is one of the resounding themes of 2 Peter. First, there is the saving knowledge of God and of His Christ, the initial gift of grace which makes us true believers, the personal knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior which gives to us a faith of equal standing with the apostles as Peter talks about in verse 1. Secondly there is that personal knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus which grows as the truth of God is pursued by us and applied to our hearts and makes for our sanctification and growing more and more into his image. Just as we cannot believe and love Him of whom we have not heard, so we cannot grow in our faith and love of Him if we do not learn more about Him. It is this kind of growth of which Peter writes, saying: **(2Pe 1:5-8)** As Don Whitney says: **Christians must realize that just as a fire cannot blaze without fuel, so burning hearts are not kindled by brainless heads. We must not be content to have zeal without knowledge... To follow Christ and become more like Him, we must engage in the Spiritual Discipline of learning.** And the learning that he is speaking of is the learning of God's Word that we might more deeply and with hearts and heads know Christ. It is this growth and stability in the gospel, it is this deepening personal knowledge of Christ that is the antidote to the disease of error in doctrine and Christian living.

**(2) The true knowledge of God is rooted in the knowledge of the power, majesty, and glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.** Repeatedly we will see Peter refer to our redeemer as "our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" – a phrase believe it or not that is found only in this letter. Repeatedly we will see Peter refer to Jesus Christ in exalted terms, saying: **(2Pe 1:16)** Peter will speak of eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (1:11), of the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as essential to growth in grace and godliness and stability in the faith (3:18). Peter will magnify Christ and it will serve as a massive contrast to

the false teachers who belittle the person of Christ in terms of His divine sovereignty and universal Lordship through their Christless messages, their Christless spirituality and religious ideas and their Christless living. Growth in the true knowledge of God is rooted in the right knowledge of Christ. Growing in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ can be founded upon the Word of God because, as Peter will tell us:

**(3) Scripture is an absolutely sure and thoroughly sufficient standard of truth because it is the very revelation of God.** Peter's intent in this letter will be to remind us of the absolute sufficiency and trustworthiness of the Word of God. That is why he writes these words saying: **(2Pe 1:19-21)** We live in a time when, in the church, individual feelings and personal experiences have replaced the Word of God and sound biblical interpretation. This sort of thing undermines Biblical authority and sufficiency by implying that personal experience is to be sought more than an understanding of Scripture. RC Sproul calls this sensuous Christianity. He says: **"The new "sensuous Christian" doesn't need to study the Word of God because he already knows the will of God by his feelings. He doesn't want to know God, he wants to experience Him."** This kind of ill-defined spirituality is a fertile field for false and foolish entanglements of our souls.

By contrast, Peter will call us to stake our souls on that which is more sure, the prophetic Word of God. He will call us to see that in contrast to the false teachers, the essential ministry of the pastor is to preach the Word of God, to exalt our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to so in the power of the Holy Spirit. Churches and Christians who are unanchored to the Word of God and the work of Christ cease to be Christian despite their claims.

**(4) God's truth will expose and God will judge fully and without mercy the numerous false teachers and false prophets who prey upon the church.** Peter will pull no punches in showing us that the Word of God will reveal the false teachers and false prophets of his day and of our own as: **irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, (who) will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!** **(2Pe 2:12-14)** Against contemporary advice, Peter goes negative. This book is a polemic. It boldly goes after the wickedness of the false prophets because they seek to destroy the souls of

God's children. Peter doesn't sound very sweet, but he doesn't because he rightly understands the soul murderers that false prophets and false teachers truly are. They are not benign men and women. They are instruments of Satan. The horrible prospect of judgment without mercy lies ahead them. Peter tells us: if God did not spare angels when they sinned, there is no hope for these men and women but only the surety of judgment without mercy. Peter makes sure we know that:

**(5) God keeps His promises – the promise of judgment and the promise of a new heaven and a new earth for His people.** Peter will tell us that though there will be scoffers that will question God's faithfulness to do what he has promised, God will accomplish his purposes: **(2Pe 3:9-13)** One of the themes that Peter will develop through this letter is the faithfulness and surety of God to accomplish all His purposes, both the judgment of the wicked and the establishment of the new heavens and new earth for His people. In light of that day that is soon coming, God expects of his people holiness and godliness as we see the day approaching. Peter paints an overarching picture of God in this way...

**(6) God is revealed in the epistle as a glorious and majestic God, fully revealed in Jesus Christ, not to be trifled with in His moral demands, not to be escaped in his relentless justice, whose truth may not be regarded lightly, who pours fury on His enemies but unflinching love upon his covenant people, a God who never falters in accomplishing His eternal plan for the sake of His glory.**

#### **An Intentional and Theologically Rich Greeting: (2Pe 1:1-2)**

Look with me first at Peter's introduction of himself. He calls himself a **servant and apostle of Jesus Christ**. Notice the humility in Peter to call himself a servant, literally a slave of God. He understood himself to be God's possession, to be at the disposal of God for God to send him where He will and to do with him what He will. Peter had no rights of his own. Peter saw himself as one who should have an unquestioning obedience to God because he had been redeemed not with perishable things like silver or gold **but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1Pe 1:19)** Additionally, however, Peter calls himself an Apostle and that is not without significance. He wants to press home to his readers the fact that in contrast to the false teachers that were plaguing them, he was

divinely commissioned by Christ to preach the truth of God and to declare the gospel of salvation.

He tells his readers that they **have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.** Do you see how Peter is meaning to encourage those to whom he is writing? He says you have a faith of the exact same nature, of the exact same worth and standing as the apostles themselves. Peter's point is that there is only one faith that saves, there is only one faith that delivers from hell and death, only one faith and it is a faith that cannot be altered or added to, a faith that has at its center the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Notice how profoundly Christ-centered these words are.

The apostolic gospel is centered in the righteousness of Christ alone. God punished our sins by placing our guilt and sin on Christ. He imputed our sin to Christ. God placed it on Christ and punished Him in our place. But that is only half the story. The fullness of the gospel is found in this that our sin was put on Christ's account and Christ's righteousness was put on our account. God doesn't just view us as if we had never sinned; He views us as if we had always kept all of His commands just as Christ did. We have a faith, rooted in Christ's righteousness that is the equal of the apostles themselves.

Peter tells his readers of his wish for them: **May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.** Peter wishes for them to know the fullness of Christ's grace and peace and the way in which that takes place is through a deepening knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. The word that Peter uses here for knowledge is the word epignosis – it means a deep, personal, soul nourishing, mind-shaping, Scripture driven and truth enabling knowledge of God – a knowledge of God that leads to a deeper affection for God and greater boldness for His truth

So Peter is setting up the bulk of his message even here in these first verses, because the point is clear – Satan's strategy is simple. If it is in knowing God and Christ our Lord that we grow in grace and peace, Satan's strategy, carried out by false prophets and teachers, will be to move the church away from the knowledge of God, to wean God's people off the Word, little by little, so less and less of the true knowledge of God gets into their lives.

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