

## Being a confident, clear-minded Christian

We have discovered in our studies so far that Peter is writing to encourage his readers to be clear-minded about what is important and what is not. In this respect, Peter has stressed that the clear-thinking Christian understands the importance of a knowledge of Jesus Christ (1:3). More than that, Peter says the clear-thinking Christian can also be confident in his or her knowledge of Jesus because it comes from eyewitnesses and from God himself speaking through the prophets.

This is a powerful thought.

We live in a world that doesn't believe in capital "T" Truth. We live in an age in which nothing is absolute—truth is what happens to suit you. The apostle Peter's teaching lifts the mist of this sort of hazy thinking to show that the Christian faith is founded on clear facts, not fairy stories.

Christianity is not people thinking about God. It is God revealing himself to eyewitnesses. That is surely something to excite us and fill us with a clear and certain belief in Jesus Christ.



### Think it through

1. Think about the times you have doubted Christianity. What has been causing these doubts? How can 2 Peter 1:16-21 help you at these times?
2. Are there other things Peter doesn't mention which you feel have led you to have confidence in your knowledge of Jesus?

3. Peter has a very high opinion of Scripture. Do you share his opinion, especially in regard to the Old Testament? How might this show in your lifestyle?

# 4

## 2 Peter 2:1-22

# The surprising virtue of intolerance

"I just can't believe this sort of thing is in the Bible."

"It's so harsh, so narrow-minded, so intolerant!"

"How on earth could anyone write this and claim to be Christian. Jesus would never say these sorts of things."

These are some of the reactions people have to 2 Peter 2. It is certainly not the part of the Bible most likely to appear on a poster with alpine scenes.

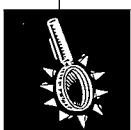
2 Peter 2 concerns a situation so disastrous that some straight talking is required, irrespective of who it upsets or offends or embarrasses. This chapter concerns such a disaster that it is impossible to remain calm about it.

The disaster is that certain false teachers are spreading lies about Jesus. That makes Peter angry. Peter is passionate when false teachers peddle a false gospel about Jesus, because he knows what is at stake. People's eternal destinies are being played around with here.

### Investigate

Read 2 Peter 2:1-3

1. What can you discover about the content of the heresies being promoted by the false teachers of Peter's day?



2. How might heresies be “secretly?” (v.1) introduced?

3. Peter says that many will follow the false prophets (v.2). Glance over the remainder of the chapter to see if you can discover any reasons why these false teachers might be so popular.

### The false teachers: their beliefs

The particular false teachers that Peter has in mind here are characterised by their beliefs. Firstly, Peter says that they are denying the sovereign Lord (v.1). The key word here is sovereign. These are people who deny that Jesus has the right to rule our lives.

It is unlikely that the false teachers were coming straight out and telling people to forget about what Jesus says. If they did that, they probably wouldn't get to square one in most churches. But Peter also says in verse 1 that they are *secretly* introducing destructive heresies. This is an undercover job. They are not denying Jesus outright but, nevertheless, the effect of their teaching is to undermine Jesus' authority.

Interestingly, Peter goes on to say that such teachers may well be very popular. They are successful because they are saying things that people want to hear (v.18). False teachers may well be the leaders of large and growing churches.

All this is a warning to us to examine our motives for attending Christian gatherings. Are we drawn to them for reasons other than the truth of Jesus? Are we secretly being led into falsehood,

destruction and “shameful ways?”? Are our teachers greedily exploiting us (v.3)?

We might also be taken in by more subtle falsehoods. Is your church focussing on something other than the truth of Christ: social appearances? great music? denominational loyalty? Any number of things might lead us away from the truth of our sovereign Lord. That would be diabolical.



### Investigate

Read 2 Peter 2:4-22\*

1. What does Peter say about the fate of these false teachers?

2. In these verses, Peter reminds his readers of several Old Testament incidents. If you are unfamiliar with any of them it would be helpful to look them up and read them. (You will find the story of Noah in Genesis 6-9; Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's story in Genesis 19; and Balaam in Numbers 22.) How do each of these incidents add force to Peter's argument?

\*Note: vv. 10b-11 are difficult both to translate and to interpret. The original recipients of the letter evidently had the appropriate background knowledge to understand what exactly Peter was referring to, but it is very difficult for us to know with certainty. See Michael Green's Tyndale commentary for a good summary of the various possibilities. Fortunately, the verses are not integral to the argument of the chapter as a whole.

### 3. What impressions are you left with after reading 2 Peter 2?

#### **The false teachers: their fate and true nature**

Peter is uncompromising in his description of the false teachers. The false teachers are described as abusive, slanderous, unreasonable dreamers. They are wicked, stupid people with less spirituality than apes. They promise much, but they can deliver nothing. They are froth and bubble with no substance.

It's a savage word picture, but it doesn't even end there. In a series of "if" statements, Peter refers us back to the way God has dealt with sin in the Old Testament (vv.4-9). Peter's conclusion is that there will come a time when such false teachers will face the full fury of God. 'Gentle Jesus meek and mild' will reward them with eternal punishment.

It's at this point that some people get upset because this all seems too hard, too unloving, too intolerant. But we need to think about the seriousness of what the false teachers are doing. They may be really nice, friendly people, but they are also very dangerous because they are giving those who hear them a false gospel and a false assurance about eternal life.

Consider the outcry when a medical doctor gets it wrong and a patient is misdiagnosed. Consider the outcry when a politician makes a mistake in Parliament and everyone is screaming for his or her resignation. Consider the outcry that *should* go up when a Bible teacher gets it wrong and people never hear the true gospel.

#### **Investigate**

Re-read 2 Peter 2:20-22

1. In these verses, Peter describes the condition of those who come under the influence of false teachings and are led away from Jesus. What effect can these false teachers have on people?

2. What things do you think we can do to help prevent people drifting away from Jesus?

#### **The truth of falsehood**

As we've discovered, this chapter concludes with a very passionate warning. Nothing can be more serious than someone teaching false things about Jesus, because it affects the eternal destinies of people. That is why Peter gets so angry about false teachers who are luring people away from Jesus. They are, in effect, luring people to hell. When that's happening, it's not the time to sit back and be polite. It's far too serious for that.

What we are discovering over and over again in 2 Peter is the sheer importance of our knowledge of Jesus. A true knowledge of Jesus can give us a place in the Kingdom of God. A false knowledge of Jesus is, therefore, disastrous.

The spirit of this age says that everything is relative, especially in the area of religion. If something works for you, that's considered great—but something different may work for me. Everything

is considered right in its own way. 'Tolerance' is the buzz word. To be intolerant of anything is to be narrow and bigoted.

But sometimes you have to be intolerant. I am intolerant of my daughter playing with sharp knives. Society is intolerant of drunk drivers. Sometimes being intolerant is the most loving thing you can be. We should be intolerant of people who teach a false knowledge of Jesus. The truth is that some things are false.



### Think it through

1. Do you think this chapter is too severe and uncompromising? Why or why not?
2. How can we guard ourselves against falling victim to false teachers?
3. How can we help others whom we think are being influenced by false teachers?

# 5

## Does God wear a wristwatch?

2 Peter 3:1-10

Several years ago a leading news magazine ran a story about the second coming of Jesus. The magazine gathered a team of marketing experts to plan how Jesus should be promoted when he does come back. Public relations directors were asked what advice they would give to Jesus in order to ensure that his return visit would be a success. This advice included:

The new Jesus must come across as action orientated. He must be perceived as a Leader, able to deliver. Therefore, He should participate in a sport that helps profile those qualities... I think tennis is just right for Jesus.

He can still dress in white, television coverage is guaranteed and the corporate sector will really identify with Him. Tennis also gives Jesus a chance to perform some miracles. Twenty aces in a row, that sort of thing.

*The Bulletin*, September 12, 1989

In the final chapter of 2 Peter, God explains what Jesus' return *will* be like and it's interesting to note the different perspective. Whereas the magazine article was full of ideas about what *Jesus* will have to do when he comes back, God is much more interested in telling us what *we* have to do in order to get ready for Jesus.

That's a big difference. Jesus is the important one, not us! When Jesus comes back it won't be a matter of him changing to suit us—it'll be a matter of whether or not we have changed to suit him. This perspective dominates the last chapter of 2 Peter.

Before Peter can get to the specifics, there are some initial problems that need to be cleared up.