

## 2 Peter 3:1–7

### Introduction

Throughout all of 2 Peter chapter two the false teachers have been front and center. Peter's described their sin and their error and also the real horrors of their coming destruction. Last week, we saw the reality of the false teachers' *apostasy*, how they had once escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but then become entangled in them again and overcome so that now their last state had become worse for them than the first. It could be easy as we read along in this chapter to think that this really is all about the false teachers and to forget about the Christians to whom Peter's actually writing. So we've been reminding ourselves each week that the reason Peter spends all this time exposing the false teachers is really as a warning to us – so that we ourselves will not be deceived. It's not the false teachers that Peter's concerned about here, but rather all of us who are still walking in the straight way, the way of righteousness, and even those of us who may be succumbing more and more to the enticements of sin and who need to be brought again to repentance (cf. 3:9). We're reminded of this again in the first verses of chapter three.

I. 2 Peter 3:1a — This is now, beloved, the second letter that I am writing to you.

Peter begins with what is in Greek the vocative mood of direct address, “This is now, *beloved...*” If Peter was writing just to me, Peter might have said, “This is now, *Timothy*, the second letter that I am writing to you,” or, “This is now, O beloved one...” Perhaps we could translate here, “This is now, O beloved ones...” This letter's not written to the false teachers, or for the false teachers. It's written to us, and for us. Three more times in this chapter, Peter will use this same vocative of direct address:

- 2 Peter 3:8 — But do not overlook this one fact, **beloved ones...**
- 2 Peter 3:14 — Therefore, **beloved ones**, since you are waiting for these...
- 2 Peter 3:17 — You therefore, **beloved ones**, knowing this beforehand...

Here's a word filled with encouragement and comfort – especially after all the warnings and the judgments of chapter two. Peter's written chapter two for our benefit, but not so we'll be filled with doubt and fear. Peter's written chapter two so that as we heed the warnings and tremble at the warnings and are brought even more to recognize our sin and repent of it, we might rejoice *all the more* because of our place *within* the household and the family of God. Peter addresses us personally and directly (the vocative of direct address) with this wonderful title: “*agapetoi*” – “O beloved ones.”

One commentator points out that “the ones normally called ‘beloved’ were children, especially *only* children.” (Green) So we read in Genesis chapter twenty-two:

- Genesis 22:2 — [God] said [to Abraham], “Take your son, **your only son** Isaac, whom you love...”

The Greek translation of this verse reads like this:

- Genesis 22:2 — [God] said [to Abraham], “Take your son, **your beloved one**, whom you love—Isaac...”

Jesus tells a parable in Mark where there was a father who apparently had only one son – a beloved son.

- Mark 12:6 (cf. Lk. 20:13) — He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, “They will respect my son.”

What we see is that *agapetos*, or “beloved,” was a word used in the context of the family and it spoke of the special bonds of loyalty and affection that exist there – especially of parents toward their children, or even that of parents toward an only child. In light of these things consider now how the Apostle John speaks of Jesus as the “only Son” of God the Father.

- John 1:14 — The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father...
- John 3:16 (cf. 3:18; 1 Jn. 4:9) — For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son...

If Jesus is the only Son of the Father, then we shouldn’t be surprised when God the Father calls Jesus His “*beloved* Son” (cf. Mat. 12:15; Mk. 12:6).

- Matthew 3:16–17 (cf. Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22) — When Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

And again in Matthew seventeen:

- Matthew 17:4–5 (cf. Mk. 9:7) — Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

It’s *against this backdrop* and *in this context* of Jesus’ relationship to God as a beloved and only Son to His Father that we are to understand our own relationship to God as now our Father, and therefore as those who truly are His beloved ones – His beloved sons and daughters. The Apostle Paul says in Galatians:

- Galatians 4:4–7 — When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son [the Holy Spirit] into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

None of us could ever claim to be God's "only Son," but by God's calling and grace we are in His only Son and the Spirit of His only Son (the Holy Spirit) is in us so that now we, too, may rest in being called His beloved – beloved children of the God who is now our Father. We remember what Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our *Father*..." (Mat. 6:9). Here is a reality that's truly beyond our strength or capacity to ever fully understand. So we read in Romans, and then in Ephesians:

- Romans 1:7 — To all those in Rome who are **beloved** by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from *God our Father* and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Ephesians 5:1 — Be imitators of God, as [His] **beloved children**.

Peter writes: "This is now, beloved, the second letter that I am writing to you." So is Peter referring to his readers as those who are beloved *by God* as His *children* or is he addressing them as those who are *his own beloved brothers and sisters*? The answer is that he's ultimately doing both. In Romans 16, Paul sends his greetings to quite a large group of people, and he refers to three of them as "**my beloved**."

- Romans 16:5 — Greet *my* beloved Epaenetus...
- Romans 16:8 — Greet Ampliatus, *my* beloved in the Lord.
- Romans 16:9 — Greet... *my* beloved Stachys.

In Philippians four, Paul writes:

- Philippians 4:1 — Therefore, *my brothers*, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, **my beloved**.

And then listen to what Paul says in his letter to Philemon:

- Philemon 15–16 — For this perhaps is why [Onesimus] was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, **as a beloved brother**—especially to me, but how much more to you.

Do you see how the familial concept of the Father and His beloved children leads also to the familial concept of beloved brothers and sisters?

Peter can address his readers as his own beloved only *because* they're all together beloved of the Father. What we have here is truly a family, of which all other families—even at their very best—are only a copy and a shadow. So I think it's significant that all the writers of the New Testament epistles — Paul, Peter, the author of Hebrews, James, John, and Jude — they all address their readers with this "name" — "Beloved." Basic and fundamental to our identity as Christians is that we are children—sons and daughters—beloved by God the Father and therefore also brothers and sisters who are beloved of one another. Basic and fundamental to our identity as Christians is that we are members together of a family – of what Paul refers to in Galatians as the "household of faith" (Gal. 6:10) and in Ephesians as the "household of God" (Eph. 2:19).

- 1 John 3:1–2 — See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called **children of God**; and so we are... *Beloved*, we are **God's children** now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Are you beginning to see, in light of all this and also in light of everything Peter's just said in chapter two, the immense comfort and encouragement of these opening words here in chapter three? The purpose of all Peter's warnings in chapter two was not to produce doubt or despair in us (that's not the purpose of any of the warnings in the Bible), but rather to produce in us an even greater and more joyful assurance as children of God the Father and the beloved brothers and sisters of Peter who've learned to tremble at these warnings. Peter hasn't written chapter two assuming the worst about us, but only, always assuming the things that belong to future salvation. This is why he begins in chapter three: "This is now, *beloved*, the second letter that I am writing to you." This is why, throughout the rest of this chapter, Peter will address his readers three more times using this same powerful vocative of direct address: "O beloved ones..." (3:8, 14, 17). Peter wants his readers to rejoice, he wants us to rejoice—not with presumption (because chapter two obviously forbids such a thing), but with true humility and awe—that contrary to the false teachers, *we* are "those who are inside, within the circle of the family" as beloved sons and daughters of the Father and so also brothers and sisters beloved of one another (Green).

The book of Hebrews is known, in part, for its warning passages. The one time the writer of Hebrews addresses his readers as "beloved" is actually in the context of one of these warning passages.

- Hebrews 6:1, 4–9 — Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity... For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, **beloved**, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to [future]salvation.

Can you see here again, in Hebrews, the immense encouragement and comfort and peace that this one simple word affords us? The very real warnings in Hebrews and in Peter are intended not to produce doubt and despair in us; rather, they're the means that God uses to preserve and to guard and to keep those who *are* His beloved children. And we know that what the Father intends for these warnings to accomplish in the life of *His beloved children*, they *will always* accomplish (certainly, these warnings also come to hypocrites, with a very different result). In other words, these real warnings are just one of the means that God uses to guarantee that those who *are* His beloved sons and daughters will never, ever be disowned or cast off by Him. After

all the sobering warnings of chapter two and after learning to heed these warnings and to tremble at them, Peter begins chapter three with this wonderful, simple vocative of direct address:

**II. 2 Peter 3:1** — This is now, beloved, the second letter that I am writing to you. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder...

Why does Peter especially point out that this is now the second letter he's writing to his beloved readers? We find language similar to Peter's in Genesis and also in the Gospel of John (cf. Green).

- Genesis 27:36 (LXX) — And [Esau] said, “Rightly was his name called Jacob, for lo! *this is now the **second** time* that he has supplanted me...”
- John 21:14 — *This was now the **third** time* that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

“This is now, beloved, the *second* letter that I am writing to you.” What Peter's saying is something like this: If the first letter was itself already a reminder, then *how much more* must this second letter also be a reminder – coming, as it does *after* the first reminder? It's the reminder after the reminder and therefore this reminder, as with the previous reminder, must be of the utmost importance. Being beloved children doesn't mean we're exempt from the need for reminders. In fact, it's *as* beloved children that these reminders have now become so essential.

I tend to believe that the first reminder, or the first letter, is the 1 Peter that we have in our New Testaments and not another letter that's been lost to us. It's true that 1 and 2 Peter have very different themes. 1 Peter deals especially with the pressures of suffering as a Christian in this world, while 2 Peter deals especially with the deceits of false teachers in the church. But what I think we can see is that Peter views both of these letters in the same way, because all of the teaching and all of the exhortation in both letters is rooted in the same Gospel teachings that his readers have already come to know – namely, the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, His present reign, and His coming again in glory. Everything that Peter writes is ultimately a reminder to us of these things – of the things that we already know in order that we might be constantly stirred up, and aroused, and awakened to *keep on* running the race and to *keep on* fighting the good fight of faith. So what was the point of chapter two with all of its terrifying language of apostasy and judgment and final destruction? The point was not to paralyze us with fear and despair, but rather to stir up our sincere minds by way of reminder.

Did you hear that? What kind of minds is Peter seeking to stir up? Our “sincere minds.” See how Peter still continues to assume—but without any hint of presumption—that we are among those who have truly believed and whom God is truly guarding through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (cf. 1 Pet. 1:5)! Notice how the NIV changes the meaning:

- 2 Peter 3:1 (NIV; cf. HCSB) — *Dear friends*, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders *to stimulate you to* [a sincere mind].

The problem with this is that it misses the wonderful reality that Peter's actually affirming what his readers *already have* – they already have a sincere mind. He's echoing, here in chapter three, exactly what he wrote back in chapter one:

□ 2 Peter 1:12–13 — Therefore I intend always to *remind* you of these qualities, **though you know them and are established in the truth that you have**. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to *stir you up* by way of *reminder*...

There certainly isn't any room in any of what Peter's written to us for presumption, but neither is there room in any of what he's written to us for doubt or for despair. Peter assumes without any "doubts" that we are his beloved brothers and sisters and that our thinking and our understanding has not been polluted by the deceits of the false teachers, but is simple, unmixed, pure – *not* in the sense of being morally perfect, but in the sense of a true "sincerity" of repentance and faith in Jesus. On the other hand, Peter knows that this sincere mind that we already have stands in need of being always, constantly stirred up by way of reminder. This is a non-negotiable if we would one day be granted entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And so we see that if there's no room here for doubts and fears, neither is there any room for presumption. As Paul says in Corinthians, "Let anyone who *thinks that he stands* [that's presumption and not just the absence of doubt] take heed lest he fall [into eternal destruction]" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Notice what Peter doesn't say. He doesn't say: "In both of these letters I am congratulating you for your sincere mind..." Neither does he say: "In both of these letters I am stirring you up to a sincere mind." No! He says, "In both of them I am *stirring up* your *sincere mind*..." What Peter means here is that this is the way that **God keeps us**. This is the way that God effectually, powerfully guards and preserves His own beloved children – His beloved sons and daughters. God keeps us by means of these constant reminders, whether they be promises, or comforts, or exhortations – or warnings that cause us to tremble. These "reminders" do more than just recall information to our brains; instead, they prod us, and provoke us, and arouse us, and awaken us always to action. Why do sincere minds need to be stirred up? So that we'll be preserved and kept in that true sincerity that we have, never polluted by the deceits of false teaching, but always possessing a true repentance and a true faith that's simple, and unmixed, and pure. If presumption is the prelude to apostasy, then trembling is just one means by which God preserves and keeps us and by which we can be all the more assured that He is the one who is preserving and keeping us until we enter into our final inheritance. What was the point of chapter two with all of its terrifying language of apostasy and judgment and final destruction? The point was that all of God's elect should be kept and preserved safe until the end. Therefore, Peter writes:

**III. 2 Peter 3:2** — This is now, beloved, the second letter that I am writing to you. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, **that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles**...

What are the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets? They're all the many Old Testament warnings of God the righteous Judge coming to judge the world—to reward the

righteous and to punish the wicked—on the last day. So, beloved, I think it would be good and right for us to listen to some of these words this morning so that our sincere minds would even now be stirred up by way of reminder. Or maybe there are some here still who have not yet truly repented and trusted in Christ; may these words even this morning awaken you to your true peril.

- Malachi 3:1–2, 5 — Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? ... Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who... do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.
- Malachi 4:1–3 — Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.
- Isaiah 24:1–6, 17–23 — Behold, the LORD will empty the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants... The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered; for the LORD has spoken this word. The earth mourns and withers; the world languishes and withers; the highest people of the earth languish. The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left... Terror and the pit and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth! He who flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit, and he who climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble. The earth is utterly broken, the earth is split apart, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunken man; it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again. On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth... Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders.
- Joel 3:12–16 — Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.
- Isaiah 59:14–20 (cf. 63:1–6) — Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will

render repayment. So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives. “And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,” declares the LORD.

Beloved, these are the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets that the Apostle Peter would have us always remember so that we learn to tremble – so that our sincere minds will be always preserved and always persevering in genuine repentance and saving faith.

We’ve asked: “What are the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets?” (3:2a) Now we ask: “What is the commandment of the Lord and Savior through the apostles?” (3:2b) The commandment is very simply this genuine repentance and saving faith – that we should all believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ and live holy and sanctified lives until He comes in righteousness as the Judge of all the earth.

- 1 John 3:23 — This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

And the Apostle Paul writes to Timothy:

- 1 Timothy 6:13–14 — I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

One commentator writes: “In biblical thinking reminders grip the whole person, so that we are possessed again by the gospel and its truth, so that we are energized to live for the glory of God” (Schreiner). Have our sincere minds truly been stirred up, *beloved*, by these reminders? Have we put away all foolish presumption, and have we learned to tremble? And then *in learning to tremble*, have we also learned, at the same time, to put away *all* our doubts and fears? Because this trembling is, in the end, the fruit of a sincere mind – of a true repentance and saving faith. This trembling is, in the end, a means that *God* is using to preserve and to guard and to keep all of us who are His *beloved children*. Peter wants us to rejoice—not with presumption, but with a true humility and awe—that contrary to the false teachers, *we* are “those who are inside, within the circle of the family” as beloved sons and daughters of the Father and so also brothers and sisters beloved of one another. What a truly wonderful place to be. Listen one more time to what Peter says to us:

“This is now, beloved, the second letter that I am writing to you. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles...”