

West Valley Church  
Michael W. O'Neill  
06/14/20

## **On This Rock**

### **Part Nine**

#### ***2 Peter 1:1-2***

I have a confession to make, and I would be willing to bet I'm not the only one. Frequently my iPad or my iPhone will update different apps or an operating system, and many times they will have new end-user agreements, and before you can use it, you're supposed to check a box that says "I agree." Have you seen those? It is usually pages and pages and pages of fine print in legalese that I'm supposed to read before I click the "I agree" button.

(I usually don't read it. I just click "I agree" anyway.)

Isn't that terrible? But I read an article in the paper that leads me to think I should change my ways and that it might be worth it to start reading the fine print.

One woman read the fine print and she won \$10,000. A travel insurance company hid the instructions for claiming a prize in the "fine print" for every insurance policy it sold.

The company estimated only about 1 percent of its customers read their policies, so they didn't think anyone would notice the section titled "pays to read" on page seven of the nearly 4,000-word document. But they didn't count on high school teacher Donelan Andrews. She says she's a "nerd" who always reads the terms, whether it's a digital software user agreement, or a travel insurance policy.

Andrews printed out her policy and sat down to read it right away. Then she came across a section that said, "(This is) a contest that rewards the individual who reads their policy information from start to finish. If you are ... the first to contact us, you may be awarded the Pays to Read contest Grand Prize of ten thousand dollars."

Andrews wrote to the company immediately. She got a call back the next day to let her know she'd won the \$10,000.<sup>1</sup>

Well we are continuing in our series called "On This Rock – Peter and the Church," and today we start in 2 Peter. We're only looking at the first two verses, but if we're willing to look at the fine print of those two verses, we'll discover some incredibly rich truths.

Let me read those first two sentences and then we'll look at them:

"This letter is from Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ. I am writing to you who share the same precious faith we have. This faith was given to you because of the justice and fairness of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior. May God give you

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tampabay.com/business/she-read-the-fine-print-on-her-insurance-policy-it-won-her-10000-in-a-contest-20190305/>

more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.” (2 Peter 1:1-2, nlt)

Seems straight forward, but let’s get to the fine print and find the treasure that’s there. This greeting is in keeping with the custom of writing letters in those days; it states the writer’s name, it identifies the audience that it is written to, and then there are introductory greetings.

So let’s get into this, starting with...

## 1. The writer.

Scholars agree that if Peter wrote this letter, then it was written sometime between 65-68 AD. It is very likely that Peter was in prison awaiting his execution by Nero. Like the audience for Peter’s first letter, he is writing to people who are facing intense persecution. In this letter, Peter is writing with an even stronger sense of urgency, because the persecution of the Christian readers is more intense, and Peter knows his time is short. So that means that the words in this letter really matter.

Let’s start with the name he uses for himself. We’ve covered this several times before, but let me just review: Simon was his Jewish birth name (John 21:15), and Peter was the name that Jesus gave him after Peter made his great confession of faith, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 16:13-16; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-20; John 1:42). Peter is taken from the word “Rock” – “Petros” in Greek, “Kephas” in Aramaic. But in this letter, Peter uses a different spelling for the name “Simon.” In this letter he spells it “Symeon” instead of “Simon.” Symeon was the “Semitic” spelling of it – kind of a more slang version of Hebrew. It was not an unusual thing to spell it that way, except that it is used with that spelling only one other place in the Bible, which is important, and you’ll find out why. But it shows us several intentional things that Peter was doing by using it.

First, to say “Simon Peter” was intended to be inclusive of all the languages of his audience. For example, in our church we have a mixture of both Anglo or white people and Latino or Hispanic people. So if I wrote I letter I might introduce myself as Miguel Michael. Peter was being inclusive.

But there’s more: Simon was his name *before* Christ came into his life, and Peter his name *after* he came to faith in Christ. So by using those two names, it is an illustration of the difference that Christ has made in his life – before and after Christ, from Jewish fisherman to Christian fisher of men, from Old Life to New Life, from Old Promise to New Promise, from Old Testament to New Testament.

And then also, remember that Peter was writing to Christians who were *not* Jewish; they were Gentiles, so Peter is helping them see that even an Apostle who was Jewish needed to be made new in Christ, just like his readers – just like everyone. Pretty cool, huh?

Then he identifies himself as a slave and apostle. He didn’t choose the word “servant” – he chose the word “slave.” That’s because a slave is the property of the master. Like a slave lives at the disposal of the master, a true Christian has no rights of his own or her own; he or she has surrendered his/her rights to Christ and now lives to obey the master. Like a

slave, the Christian no longer asks himself, “What do I want to do?” but asks “What does the master want me to do?” A slave had no holidays, no leisure time, no vacation days. So Christians do not divide some things in our lives for what *we* want to do and then other things for what God wants us to do. It is *always*, “What does God want me to do?”

Then Peter says he is an “Apostle.” The word literally means “one who is sent out,” and because he is an apostle of Jesus Christ, that means Peter was sent out by Christ; Peter had no authority of his own – the origin and the nature of his authority is only because it was Christ who authorized him and sent him.

Now let’s look at...

## **2. The reader.**

Remember that the readers were Gentiles; they were not Jews who became Christians. I already told you that by calling himself “Symeon Peter” he was being intentionally inclusive, and using his names as a living illustration of the difference Christ makes in a person’s life. But if you remember, I said that this particular spelling of his name was used in only one other place in the Bible? That place was in Acts 15 (verse 14). In that story, the Church has convened a counsel of leaders to try to figure out what to do with all the Gentile Christians. The first Christians were Jews, and they continued to practice some of their rituals about what foods they could eat, when to wash, all kinds of stuff that were holdovers from their Jewish life.

But both Peter and Paul went out and preached to all these Gentiles, and a bunch of them got saved, and none of them were obeying the Jewish rules. So the debate was, “Should these Gentile Christian be required to obey Jewish rules?” They decided – thank God – that the rules had nothing to do with being a Christian, but instead it was about finding our identity in Christ and being like him by the power of the Spirit. But in that meeting, Peter defended the Gentiles; in fact, the first Gentile converts were from Peter in the first place (Acts 10-11). In that passage, Peter is called “Symeon,” and he is identified as the one who opened the gates for the Gentiles. So Peter is using this name to remind his readers that he – the Rock of the Church, and Apostle of Jesus – knows more than anyone that these readers belong to the Kingdom of God in Christ. They are equals! The reason he uses that spelling is a clear message to reassure these Gentile Christians that they are equals in the Kingdom of God!

That’s why he says “a faith that is just as precious as ours” – or in some translations it says, “To those who received a faith equal to ours.” What he means by that is, again, they are equals. All of the promises of God for the Jews belong to them, even though they are Gentiles. That means that all the promises of God belong to us, too.

The word that Peter uses describes a foreigner or an immigrant who has been graciously granted the full rights of citizenship in a country. That’s why, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, we don’t look at people as immigrants, or even as different races or ethnicities; every person is made in the image of God, and in the Kingdom of God every person is equal in every single privilege. That does not mean anyone should have to give up their ethnicity; it means we *all* have been granted undeserved citizenship in the Kingdom of God when we

trust in Christ. That's why Paul said, "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28, niv)

Peter is also saying that the faith they have is the same as the faith the Apostles have. So listen – there is not a different level of spirituality between Apostles and everyone else – they all have the same faith. No one gets to say, "Well, I don't have to be as spiritual as the pastor, because he or she is a pastor and I'm not." Or, "I don't have to live that way because I'm not a pastor..." We are *all* called to the same faith, the same spirituality, and that's because it was "given to us." That's what Peter says next, and it is a loud and clear reminder that no one gets to have this faith because they earned it or deserve it; it is GIVEN to us by God through Christ; it is GRACE.

And by the way, Peter also makes it clear that Jesus is God when he says, "Jesus Christ, our God and Savior."

Christ is our God, he is our example, and he is the one who enables us to live just like Him. That's important because Peter says we have this faith because of the "justice and fairness of Jesus Christ."

So now we are getting into...

### 3. The reason

...for the letter. Pay attention here because the reason for this letter is sobering and challenging and exciting for us as Christians.

Your Bible might use one word, saying, "because of the righteousness of Christ" instead of two words, "Justice and fairness." That's because the one word is sort of a summary of the two combined. But in that phrase and in verse two there are incredible instructions to the readers – including us – about justice and fairness and the Kingdom of God.

Let's not miss this: when *we* think of the word "justice" we think of it as someone getting what they deserve, right? When a criminal receives a strong sentence we say "justice was served." That's *retributive* justice, and *sometimes* the Bible uses it that way. But the *majority* of the time, including here, the Bible uses it in a different way: it is *restorative* justice – it means that through Christ a person is restored to right standing with God and equal standing with every other person – because we are all made in God's image, and it is only through the grace of God in Christ that we are restored. So justice isn't about people getting what they deserve, it is about every person being restored. Then Peter uses the word "fairness" – this is an ethical word – in other words, it means right living, or living the way God wants us to, the way Jesus did – treating everyone with love and fairness. That's why the two words together mean righteousness, because it is about living in a right way – loving everyone equally and treating them equally.

Do you think this has any application to what we are seeing play out in our society today with the protests? Maybe if we lived more righteously – with fairness and justice, we wouldn't have as many racism issues? Listen; when Christians talk about "Social Justice," we are *not* talking about some liberal or socialist political agenda; we are not even talking about a conservative political agenda. For the Christian, social justice is about treating

everyone equally – because they are made in the image of God, and because Jesus loves everyone so much that he died on the cross so EVERY human can be saved, no matter the color of their skin, the language they use, the nation they originated in, or even the sinful lifestyle they came from. Some of you need to rewind this and hear that again. Some of you need to download the manuscript and read it so you make sure you heard what I said. Don't trigger on the words "social justice" – listen to the Biblical definition and see the example of Jesus and Peter: we are to carry out Jesus' justice and fairness in this world; that is what's called righteousness.

In fact, there are two things Peter says he wants us to have: grace, and peace, and he wants us to have it in ever-increasing amounts.

Grace of course is the undeserved favor and love of God. God loves you. Period. You can't earn it. You can never do anything to make him love you more than he does, and nothing you ever do will make him love you less than he does. That is grace. But as you know, that grace is not a license to live however we want; it warrants a response from us – to *live in* that grace and *live out* that grace in our world – that is what Peter means by "Peace." He's not just wishing that they'll have calm circumstances or a peaceful life; it is the word "Shalom" – the Hebrew word for the Kingdom of God. In other words, by God's grace in our lives, we can live out the Shalom – the Kingdom of God – the Kingdom of Love for everyone – right here and now, and in ever-increasing measure. We do that by the way we live, and we carry the Kingdom wherever we go, to everyone we meet, in every situation we find ourselves, whether things seem peaceful, or we are staying home during a pandemic, or our community is filled with protests. We never get to stop living out the justice and fairness of Jesus Christ, because we are slaves of his, sent by him, and full-rights citizens of the Kingdom of God. The laws we live by are the laws of love – for everyone – and the desire to see everyone fully restored in that love, equal in every way.

Finally, Peter wants them and us to grow in the knowledge of Jesus. He's doing two things here: one, he's setting knowledge of Jesus up against some false teaching or false knowledge that the readers are being tempted to follow – we'll see that in later sermons. Then secondly, when he says "knowledge of Jesus," Peter is describing what a relationship with Jesus is like.

The word "knowledge" means to come to an understanding of the truth. But it's more than intellectual; it is relational. Jesus is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," (John 14:6). So truth is more than an intellectual understanding or agreement; it is a relationship with the One who is Truth. The original word describes knowledge in the context of deepening relationship. That's why the Bible uses the same word to describe the relationship of a husband and wife: it is a deep and intimate knowledge. It is knowing someone deeply and intimately. This faith that we know touches both the head and the heart; we need to understand it, but only in the context of a relationship with Jesus. That's why our mission statement is: "Introduce people to Jesus Christ, equip people with a faith that works, and live as people with purpose." We aren't here to convince people to a set of religious instructions or convert them to a way of thinking; we are here to help people meet the Truth himself – Jesus Christ, and all that it means. And Peter is saying that as our knowledge grows – as our understanding and experience of Jesus Christ grows – grace and peace will overflow in our lives in abundance. The love of God and the Kingdom of God will

overflow from our lives to everyone we meet, the way we treat everyone, and the way we live in this world.

*Pray*

Didn't I tell you there was a treasure in the fine print? We are made rich by understanding what it says, aren't we?

So my friends: you can share in the same precious faith that we have – the faith that was given to you because of the justice and fairness of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior. May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge – your understanding and your experience in relationship to our God, Jesus our Lord.