



WEST VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

9:30 am Bible Class—all ages	Phone Number: (623) 695-5623
10:30 am Sunday Worship	Website: www.wvcochrist.com
5:00 pm Proverbs study (online)	Email: wvchurchofchrist@gmail.com
7:00 pm Wednesday Bible Class	Facebook: West Valley church of Christ

October 31, 2021

Why is the First Chapter of 2 Peter So Different from Chapters Two and Three?

2 Peter could possibly be said to feature an *inclusio*, a literary device by which an author repeats verbatim his opening at his closing in an attempt to point readers to the central and unifying thoughts of his work. Peter begins with a wish that grace and peace might be multiplied in the lives of his readers through knowledge (1:2) and ends with a wish for his readers to grow in grace and knowledge (3:18). Though the statements do not exactly mirror one another, it is clear that the presence of knowledge (or, using the more specific term in v. 2, *epignosis*, the presence of a growing, experiential knowledge) at the beginning and end of the epistle is intentional. Grace provides knowledge, and, in turn, knowledge provides access to grace and peace. Knowledge is central to the message of chapter one, which in turn prepares its readers for the content of chapters two and three.

The knowledge Peter describes in chapter 1 is not merely factual and informational; it is also relational and effectual. Peter encourages his readers to reflect upon the sufficiency of the knowledge they have received in light of the fact that it has allowed them to enjoy relational fellowship with the Divine Nature (1:3-4). He then encourages Christians to take advantage of this fellowship by growing both in knowledge and in all that Christian knowledge itself encourages (1:5-8). Peter warns that the person who fails to grow in knowledge and its attendant attitudes and behaviors is spiritually blind (1:9). The person who succeeds in growing finds that he or she also grows in confidence (1:10-11). Peter writes not to offer new knowledge – they already have all they need (1:3) – but to stir up their memories (1:12-15) and fortify their faith as regards what they have previously received (1:16-21).

The tone and character of 2 Peter changes dramatically in chapter 2 as Peter addresses false teachers and again in chapter 3 as Peter addresses scoffers and eschatology (the end of the world). The question might be asked: in what way does the opening chapter prepare its readers for the discussion to follow? It does not do so directly by alluding to or describing a moral or physical crisis. Instead, it chooses to affirm the knowledge readers have already received and encourage them to remember that knowledge and grow through that knowledge.

Reflection yields possible reasons why the Holy Spirit moved Peter's pen as He did. In chapter 2, false teachers were beginning to work their way amongst the Christian community, attempting to convince people that the old truths and behaviors were insufficient. In chapter 3, scoffers were about to do the same but by attempting instead to convince people that their faith was irrelevant. Peter's affirmation of knowledge not only reveals the positive nature of the truth (i.e., the truth has nothing to fear and invites scrutiny) but undermines the claims of false teachers and scoffers before they are even considered. Further, keeping Peter's instruction in chapter 1 is a sure inoculation against the false teachers and scoffers ("if you practice these... you will never fall" – 1:10).

It probably would not have occurred to me to begin a letter featuring the content of chapters two and three the way that Peter did. But again, that's the point; God always knows best how to respond to the crises His people face.