

## 2 Peter 1:1a

### Introduction

It's always with a sense of anticipation and excitement that I begin the study of a new book of the Bible. And so this morning, I *am* excited as we begin this new sermon series on the book of 2 Peter. But mixed with this anticipation should be also – every week – a sense of fear and trembling, because this is God's Word that we are bound to believe and therefore to obey. We must always remember that we don't come to the Word of God to do with it as we please, but to allow the word of God do with us as God pleases. That's a pretty humbling thought that should cause us to be truly sobered each and every Sunday. And yet for us who have faith, it's also a thrilling thought, and one that should fill us with joyful expectation.

For the most part, I'm going to let my introduction to 1 Peter (which is available on our website) count as our introduction to 2 Peter. But *when* did Peter write this second letter and *to whom*? We read in chapter one:

- 2 Peter 1:13–15 — I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since **I know that the putting off of my body will be soon**, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

If the tradition is correct that Peter was martyred during the persecution of Christians in Rome under the Emperor Nero (and this seems very likely), then this letter would date to somewhere between 65-68 AD, probably just a few years after 1 Peter. If this tells us *when* 2 Peter was written, now we have to ask *to whom* it was written. We read in chapter three:

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

If the “first” letter is the 1 Peter that we have in our Bibles, then this letter would obviously be written to the same Christians who were scattered throughout the provinces of Asia Minor (Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia; 1 Pet. 1:1). But we can't be sure that the “first letter” really is 1 Peter. The Apostles did write other letters that God didn't see fit to include in the inspired canon of Scripture.

- 1 Corinthians 5:9 — I wrote to you **in my letter** not to associate with sexually immoral people...
- Colossians 4:16 — When this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read **the letter from Laodicea** [*possibly*, but not necessarily, the book of Ephesians].

In chapter three, verse fifteen, we learn that the Christians Peter is writing to have also had a letter written to them from the Apostle Paul:

➤ 2 Peter 3:15 — Count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you...

So this means that Peter's almost certainly writing to a church somewhere in Asia Minor (Ephesus; Colossae; Galatia), Macedonia (Thessalonica; Philippi), or Greece (Corinth).

In the end, there's no way to be sure who were the original recipients of this letter. But we can say this by way of introduction: Whereas the major concern in 1 Peter was standing firm in the face of hostility and persecution from the world outside (cf. 1 Pet. 2:12; 4:12-19), the major concern of 2 Peter is standing firm in the face of false teachers who were arising from within the church itself.

➤ 2 Peter 2:1 (cf. 2:13, 15, 20-21) — But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be **false teachers among you**, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, *even denying the Master who bought them*, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

And so we learn that there are two main ways that Satan seeks to destroy the church: persecution from without (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8-9) and false teaching from within. Therefore, we must always be on the alert for both of these attacks – always ready to stand firm and never lulled into a false sense of security. If our study in 1 Peter has prepared us to stand firm in the face of persecution at the hands of the world, then may our study in 2 Peter enable us to stand firm in the face of false teaching that arises from inside the church.

Peter opens his letter with these words:

**I. 2 Peter 1:1a — Simeon Peter, a bonds slave and apostle of Jesus Christ...**

“Simeon” is the Hebrew name that Peter was given by his Hebrew parents (“Simon” being the Greek equivalent of “Simeon”). Peter is the name that Peter was given by Jesus, or rather, “Cephas” (rock) is the Aramaic name that Peter was given by Jesus and “Peter” (*petros/rock*) is the Greek equivalent of that Aramaic name. If you want to learn more about the significance of these names, I encourage you to read or listen to the messages, “Peter, the Apostle – the Unlikely ‘Rock’” and “Peter, the Apostle – A Man Transformed” (available on our website). Peter identifies himself not only by his two names, “Simeon” and “Peter,” but also as a “**bonds slave and apostle** of Jesus Christ.”

**II. 2 Peter 1:1a — Simeon Peter, a bonds slave and apostle of Jesus Christ...**

I think it's always so very important for us as the church to be reminded of what an “apostle” is. An “apostle” is very simply a messenger who bears the authority of the one who sent him (cf. Green); therefore, what's so important for us to understand is not just that Peter is an “apostle,” but that he's an apostle *of Jesus Christ*. Peter is a messenger to the churches (including this church gathered together here, today), and as Peter writes and speaks to us, he bears the full authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, who commissioned and sent him. Therefore, in Peter, the apostle, we see not a man lording himself over the church as its head, but rather a man who is

mediating and representing to the church the headship and the lordship of Christ. In Mark chapter three, we read:

- Mark 3:13–14 — And [Jesus] went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be **with him** and he might **send them out to preach**.

Not only were the apostles “with” Jesus and learning from Him during his earthly life, but they were also “with” Jesus and learning from Him after He was raised up from the dead:

- Acts 1:1–3 — In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Finally, even after Jesus had ascended into heaven, he continued to reveal the New Covenant realities of the Gospel and the Kingdom to His chosen apostles through the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to his disciples just before His suffering and death.

- John 16:12–15 (cf. Eph. 3:5; 2 Pet. 3:2) — I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

And so Paul can say of us, who live almost 2000 years later, that we are “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the *foundation* of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:19-20; cf. Rev. 21:14). How grateful we should be to God for the gift of the apostles (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28), and, with the New Testament church, how faithful and devoted we should be to the apostolic teaching and doctrine! We read in Acts chapter two:

- Acts 2:42 — And they [the disciples in the early church] devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

What an awesome gift and miracle that still today, in 2019, we can open our Bibles and read a letter that begins like this: “Simeon Peter... **an apostle of Jesus Christ**.” As a church, then, may we gladly and diligently devote ourselves *together* to the apostle’s teaching.

In 1 Peter, Peter identifies himself only as an “apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:1), but here in this letter, Peter prefaces this title with another one that’s equally wonderful.

**III. 2 Peter 1:1a** — Simeon Peter, **a bonds slave** and apostle **of Jesus Christ**...

How one identifies himself can be a very telling and powerful thing. So how do these two words—the lowly “bondslave” and the honored and authoritative “apostle”—go *together*? Some translations just say “slave” (HCSB; NET; NLT) and I respect them for this. Unfortunately, however, in our culture the idea of a “slave” can imply someone who’s been stolen and forced into the service of another against his or her own will. In this sense of the word “slave,” Peter was certainly *not* a “slave” of Jesus Christ; he had not been stolen and forced into the service of Jesus Christ against his will. In fact, in this sense of the word there have never been, and there never can be any “slaves” of Jesus. Remember what Jesus says in Matthew eleven:

- Matthew 11:28–30 — **Come** to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**

And the Apostle John writes:

- 1 John 5:3 — This is the **love** of God, that we keep his commandments. And **his commandments are not burdensome.**

There are no pawns or thralls in the kingdom of heaven—no puppets coerced against their will—but only those who have come freely to Christ and submitted themselves willingly to His lordship. What a wonderful miracle *this* is, especially when we remember that we were all once, by our very nature, hostile to God and His declared enemies!

It’s in light of these things, then, that quite a number of translations opt instead for the word “servant” (ESV; NIV; NRSV; NCV; KJV; ASV). The fatal flaw in this word, however, is that in our culture “servant” doesn’t convey the idea of being “owned” and “possessed” by someone else so that you’re actually someone else’s property. But in the Bible, that’s exactly what the word *doulos* means. If “slave” might wrongly imply a forced coercion, then “servant” fails to communicate the idea of being owned by another (by right of purchase). So I wonder if the best way to capture the meaning of the Greek word “*doulos*” is with the word “*bondslave*” (I think “bondservant” is still too “tame” [cf. NASB; NKJV]). By adding the word “bond” to “slave” maybe we can lose some of the cultural baggage of “slave” and yet still keep that all important word with its meaning of being bought and owned by another. In the Bible, the only true “servant” of Christ is the one who is wholly owned and possessed by Christ as His property, and therefore the one who exists entirely for Christ to do with according to His own good will and pleasure. In both the Old and New Testaments, “*doulos*” (bondslave) is always the counterpart to the “freedman,” and so it’s precisely the “bondslave” who is *not* “free” because he does truly *belong* to someone else (cf. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; Rev. 6:15). The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians:

- 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 — Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.

We see a vivid picture of this ownership of property in the book of Revelation:

- Revelation 7:2–4; 14:1 — Then I saw another angel... and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the **bondslaves [doulos]** of our God on their foreheads.” And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel... Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 **who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.**

So here we see God sealing His “bondslaves” by branding them, as it were, on their foreheads with His own name and the name of the Lamb. On the one hand, that’s a mark of inestimable honor and privilege; but it’s also fundamentally a mark of ownership. Those who have the name of God and of the Lamb written on their foreheads are truly, *in their whole person* owned and possessed by the one whose name they wear. Now, to be the “property” of another human being means that someone else can require my outward service and respect and obedience. But to be the “property” of God and of the Lamb means that someone else now owns and possesses me, both body *and* soul. I am not my own. And so we should all be able to say with the Apostle Paul:

- Galatians 2:20 — I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.
- Romans 14:7–8 — None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.

Is this how we see ourselves: as those owned and possessed by another – branded with His name? Do we see ourselves as the purchased property of another – as those who exist always for our Lord and Master to do with according to His own good will and pleasure? We know this is how Peter saw himself: “Simeon Peter, a bonds slave and apostle of Jesus Christ.”

But just as it’s one thing to be an apostle and quite another thing to be an apostle *of Jesus Christ*, so also it’s one thing to be a bonds slave, and quite another thing to be a bonds slave *of Jesus Christ*. In the New Testament, bonds slaves are very often those placed in the highest positions of trust and responsibility. So we read in the Gospels:

- Matthew 24:45 — Who then is the faithful and wise bonds slave [doulos], whom his master has **set over his household...**?
- Matthew 25:14 (cf. Luke 7:2) — It will be like a man going on a journey, who called his bonds slaves [doulos] and **entrusted to them his property.**

And we read in Revelation:

- Revelation 19:10 — Then I fell down at [the angel’s] feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow bonds slave [doulos] with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus.”

We have this idea in our culture today that true worth and value equals autonomy and independence – true worth and value must result in the freedom to be and do whatever *I* want to be and do. But we find the exact *opposite* idea in the Bible. In the Bible, it's those owned and possessed by Christ who are entrusted by God Himself with honored stewardships. It's precisely those who belong not to themselves but are the property of Christ who God places in kingdom positions of sacred trust and responsibility. So are we beginning to see, now, how Peter can call himself both a bonds slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ? In the Old Testament, we read about “Moses the bonds slave [*doulos*] of the LORD” (2 Kings 18:12; Neh. 10:29; cf. Rev. 15:3), and “Joshua the son of Nun, the bonds slave [*doulos*] of the LORD” (Josh. 24:29; Judges 2:8), and also of “David [the king!], the bonds slave [*doulos*] of the LORD” (Ps. 36:title; cf. Ezek. 34:23). All three of these men were “bonds slaves” *first* and *then* prophets, and leaders, and kings. So also, the New Covenant apostles were all “bonds slaves” first (cf. Phil. 1:1; James 1:1; Jude 1), just as we all are—wholly owned and possessed by Christ—and *then* it was in this capacity as Christ's bonds slaves that they were given a stewardship and placed in the very highest kingdom position of trust and responsibility (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Cor. 4:1).

- Romans 1:1 — Paul, a **bonds slave** of Christ Jesus, called to be an **apostle**, *set apart for the gospel of God...*
- Titus 1:1 — Paul, a **bonds slave** of God and an **apostle** of Jesus Christ, *for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth...*

And here in 2 Peter chapter one: “Simeon Peter, a **bonds slave** and **apostle** of Jesus Christ...” Isn't it beautiful how these two words can go together?—How “slave” is what opens the door to true honor and privilege?

We're all, equally bonds slaves of Christ, but just as in a human household there may be different positions and different levels of trust, the same is true in the household of God. We read in Matthew twenty-five:

- Matthew 25:14–15 — [The kingdom of heaven] will be like a man going on a journey, who called his bonds slaves and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

Jesus isn't saying that the one who was entrusted with the five talents is better or more “worthy” than the one who was entrusted with one talent because at the end of the day they're both “no more” than “slaves” of the same master. Once again, that's what we all are. And as those who belong, body and soul, to another, we know that even our differing “abilities” have all been sovereignly distributed to us according to *God's* own good pleasure. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians:

- 1 Corinthians 4:7 — What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

Only a few men at the very beginning of the church were ever granted the stewardship of apostles. So does that mean that they're better than the rest of us? Do they have more worth and value in God's sight than we do? Peter himself goes on to say in the second half of verse one:

- 2 Peter 1:1 — Simeon Peter, a bonds slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith **of equal standing with ours** by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ...

And yet as bonds slaves of Christ, Peter and the rest of the apostles did receive a position of higher trust and responsibility in Christ's church than any who came after them have ever been granted. That's why when Peter identifies himself as a bonds slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, we immediately respond with a spirit of respect and honor, and a willing submission to the apostolic teaching. We saw in the Old Testament that sometimes "bonds slave" was a special title for those that God had entrusted with the very highest levels of stewardship in His household (Moses, Joshua, David). And the same can be true in the New Testament. Paul writes to Timothy about his role as a teacher and leader in Christ's church:

- 2 Timothy 2:24-25 — **The Lord's bonds slave** must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

There's a whole lot of powerful teaching all contained in that single word "bonds slave" (*doulos*). The same word places us all on the very *same* level so that not one of us can exalt ourselves over another and yet at the same time this same word reveals that we've all been entrusted with *differing* levels of stewardship. Are we jealous of the Apostles because of the measure of grace and faith that God sovereignly assigned to them? Are we jealous of leaders and teachers in the church because of the stewardship that they've been given (cf. Titus 1:7)? Not at all! Because all of us are "only" bonds slaves of Christ existing always for Him *to do with* according to His own good pleasure and will. Therefore, rather than feeling either inferior or superior to a brother or sister, we should all rejoice together in the differing stewardships that we've all been given **as bonds slaves** in the household of God. We should thank God for one another, remembering always what Paul said:

- 1 Corinthians 4:2 — It is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

Isn't this all that should matter to us? Consider, also, these Scriptures:

- Romans 12:3-8 — For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, **each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned**. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. **Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us**, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

- Ephesians 4:4–13 (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-11) — **Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.** Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” ... And **he gave** the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
- 1 Peter 4:10–11 — As each has **received a gift**, use it **to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace**: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—**in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.**

Here’s the measure of a faithful stewardship – that as bondslaves of Jesus Christ, we use all of our gifts and abilities (and even all that we are) in the service (*diakoneo*) of one another and in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

### Conclusion

As we come to this letter of 2 Peter, we ought to see—and we ought to *rejoice*—in the special stewardship that Peter was given *as* “a bonds slave and apostle of Jesus Christ.” We should be grateful for this sacred trust that Peter received in the household of God – a trust that none of us will ever be given. As we read what Peter has written, we must be careful and diligent to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the apostolic doctrine and teaching.

But even as we consider Peter’s *special* stewardship we also remember that we’re all stewards because we’re all equally bondslaves of Jesus Christ, and so we’ve all been assigned different levels of trust and responsibility in the kingdom of God. How do you view yourself? Do we see ourselves every day as those owned and possessed by another – branded with His name? Do we see ourselves as the purchased property of another – as those who exist always for our Master to do with according to His own good will and pleasure? Timothy, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ. Insert your name, “\_\_\_\_\_ a bonds slave of Jesus Christ.” May we, then, in whatever stewardship we’ve been given (whether in spiritual gifting, “natural” abilities/talents, material and financial resources, relationships, position, etc.), be found *faithful* and hear one day those gracious words:

- Matthew 25:21 — “Well done, good and faithful bonds slave. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

When we do enter into the joy of our Master, He will still be our Master, and we will still be His bondslaves for all eternity. And can you even imagine the trust and stewardship that we’ll be granted in that day (cf. Luke 19:17)?

- Revelation 22:1–5 — Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding

its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and **his bondslaves will worship him**. They will see his face, and **his name will be on their foreheads**. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and **they will reign forever and ever**.