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## Feeding the Sheep

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**O**ur study this quarter is 1 and 2 Peter. We will be reading the words of Peter himself. How thrilling to read the words of someone who was with Jesus during many of the important times in His work for God! Not only did Peter spend a lot of time with Jesus, but he also became a well-known leader among the first Christian believers. These facts alone make Peter's letters worth reading. But something else also makes these letters special. Peter wrote them to churches who were experiencing difficult times. The people in the church faced persecution from enemies outside the church. And they also faced the danger of false teachers rising up from within the church.

Peter warns against what these false teachers will do. He says they will cause others to doubt in the second coming of Jesus. "They will say, 'Where is this "return" he promised? Everything goes on in the same way it has since our people of long ago died. In fact, it has continued this way since God first created everything'" (2 Peter 3:4, NIV). Almost two thousand years have passed since Peter first wrote those words. And now, more than ever, we know just how true his words are.

Peter's warning about false teachers is just one topic he writes about. Another topic Peter writes about is the suffering that the churches experience. He returns to this topic several times in his letters. Peter says that the church's suffering mirrors the sufferings of Jesus. Jesus took our sins in His body when He died on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). But here is the good news. Jesus' death brought nothing less than freedom from the eternal death caused by sin. And His death made it possible for those who trust in Him to live a holy life (1 Peter 2:24).

Peter says that Jesus died for our sins. And Jesus also will return to earth. Then He will introduce the judgment of God (2 Peter 3:10–12). Peter makes it clear that the coming judgment should be life changing for every believer. Jesus will destroy all sin when He returns. He will cleanse the earth with fire (2 Peter 3:7). Then Christians will receive the possessions that God has been storing up for them in heaven (1 Peter 1:4).

Peter also has very useful words about how Christians should live. First and most important, Christians should love one another (1 Peter 4:8). Peter sums up his view by saying, “Finally, I want all of you to agree with one another. Be understanding. Love one another. Be kind and tender. Be humble [not proud]” (1 Peter 3:8, NIV).

Peter’s letters are also a very earnest announcement of the gospel. The gospel is the main message of the whole Bible. And if anyone should know the saving grace<sup>1</sup> of the Lord, it is Peter. This same Peter once turned away from Jesus, his Lord. He turned away from Jesus as his Savior in public. And he did so with cursing. “Then Peter began to curse [swear] and said to them, ‘I [do not] know the man!’ ” (Matthew 26:74, NIV). But this same Peter is the one to whom Jesus later says, “‘Feed my sheep [people]’ ” (John 21:17, NIV). Peter’s two letters are examples of his doing just that—feeding the Lord’s sheep.

And, of course, that feeding would include the great truth of salvation by faith in Christ. Peter’s fellow worker Paul also preaches this great truth. This great truth is the theme of God’s grace. As we have seen, grace is not just an idea to Peter. It is not just a teaching. Instead, Peter can explain grace. He can do this because he has experienced how real the power of that grace is for himself.

Martin Luther writes in his book on Peter: “This letter that Saint Peter wrote is one of the greatest books of the New Testament. It is the true, pure Gospel. For Peter does the very same thing that Paul and all the Evangelists<sup>2</sup> do. Peter repeats the true teaching of our faith. Over and over, Peter teaches how Christ has been given to us. He teaches that Christ takes away our sins and saves us.”—Adapted from *Commentary [Explanation] on the Epistles [Letters] of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1982), pages 2, 3.

Jesus told Peter to feed His sheep. We are among those sheep. So let us get fed!

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***Peter’s two letters are examples of his feeding the Lord’s sheep [people].***

1. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

2. Evangelists—preachers that travel from place to place, spreading the good news about Jesus.

3. archaeology—a science that deals with past human life and activities by studying the bones, tools, and so forth of people who lived long ago.