

Zealous for the Truth

Zealous for the Truth

2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude

This inductive Bible study is designed for individual, small group, or classroom use. A leader's guide with full lesson plans and the answers to the Bible study questions is available from Regular Baptist Press. Order RBP0051 online at www.regularbaptistpress.org, e-mail orders@rbpstore.org, call toll-free 1-800-727-4440, or contact your distributor.

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The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

ZEALOUS FOR THE TRUTH: 2 PETER, 2 & 3 JOHN, JUDE

Adult Bible Study Book

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Preface

What are you zealous for? Your kids, your bank account, your health, the Cubs? Does the *truth* make the initial list that comes to your mind? Have you ever considered the need to be zealous for the truth God carefully conveyed in His Word?

Second Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude have a lot to say about being zealous. *Zealous for the Truth* is a study of these four epistles that were written to instruct believers about life during the last days before the rapture of the church. We are living in the last days so these epistles were written with us in mind.

This study emphasizes being zealous for God's Word, living with proper Christian behavior and evangelistic concern, and the importance of identifying and rejecting false teachers. Through studying these epistles, you will understand the need for discernment of truth. The epistles will prompt you to consider how well you know the Bible. And they will encourage you to live as a genuine Christian during these troubled-filled last days.

Enjoy this study. Let these challenging books of the Bible guide you as you consider how your priorities need realigned to fit God's instructions for the church today.

Lesson 1

Growing Expectations

God's power is sufficient for believers as they strive to be all God wants them to be.

2 Peter 1:1–7

“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3).

Being zealous for the truth is perhaps hardest for defense lawyers to do. They are sworn to be a zealous advocate for their clients, even those clients who confess to them that they are guilty as charged. A good defense lawyer will be zealous to defend his client without using chicanery to deceive juries concerning witnesses or evidence. But the line between loyalty to clients and ethical behavior is sometimes fuzzy and hard to define. Defense lawyers must decide how to be loyal while remaining ethical.

Believers don't have to struggle with such questions. God calls us to be zealous for the truth and for Him. There is no conflict in such callings. As we defend the truth we are also taking a stand for God.

Getting Started

1. What are you zealous for?

2. Does the *truth* make your initial list? Why or why not?

3. Can you really say you are zealous for anything? Explain.

The books of 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude were written to instruct believers about life during the last days before the rapture of the church. These books have a lot to say about zealously defending and living the truth.

Searching the Scriptures

This study will focus on becoming all God wants you to be. Learning about His provisions for your spiritual growth should cause you to be zealous about growing.

Writer and Readers

4. Read 2 Peter 1:1a. Peter calls himself a “servant.” Why is that an indicator of spiritual growth in Peter’s life?

Peter is both Christ’s servant and one of His apostles (2 Peter 1:1). A servant of Christ is ready always to receive and to obey the directives of his Master. Personal humility is combined with apostolic authority in Peter.

Peter takes his place next to the other apostles and not above them. Though he was one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church, Peter refers to himself as “an” apostle and not “the” apostle of Jesus Christ.

The apostles were messengers sent out with orders from Christ with full authority from Him. Their responsibility was to deliver Christ’s message, not their own (Galatians 1:11).

5. Read 2 Peter 1:1b. How does this verse dispel the idea that some believers have special privileges from God that account for their ability to grow spiritually?

Peter identifies his readers as those who have received the same precious faith as that of the apostles. While Peter's letter is written first to believers in a certain geographical location, it is written to all of us who embrace the same precious faith. There is no distinction between the apostles and all other Christians. We all have this faith through God's grace. The word "obtained" (v. 1) implies the lack of any merit as the source of the gift.

Our possession of faith is due to God's righteous act of providing the gospel. It is "God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" Who has righteously provided for our salvation.

Greeting

Peter's greeting in verse 2 is more than a typical first-century greeting, for it has doctrinal significance. The apostle desires that grace and peace be multiplied in the lives of God's people. There are no limits to the experience of grace and peace that God has for us. Grace is God's unmerited kindness extended to us. Peace is the inward tranquility that flows from experiencing God's grace.

6. What happens to the believer who seeks peace through a means other than a growing relationship with Christ?

Both grace and peace come to us because we know God (v. 2). This is knowledge that springs from a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

Our knowledge of God grows with the study of the Scriptures. As we place our trust continually in His Word and commit ourselves to His

purposes, our knowledge of Him becomes more personal. We experience answers to prayer, the evidence of God's working in our lives, and the strengthening of our faith.

Divine Power

7. The United States Army had a recruitment slogan: "Be All That You Can Be." What did this slogan mean in that context?

Christians can be all that God wants them to be. He has supplied us with all the resources necessary to make spiritual growth and maturity possible and practical.

8. Read 2 Peter 1:3. Why are all excuses for not growing as a Christian unreasonable?

God's power is more than adequate for us to live godly. The words "all things" sum up this truth.

Life and godliness merge together in Christian experience (v. 3). A believer is divinely equipped to live a godly life, which is what the Christian life is all about. "Life" is the eternal life that we possess now, which means that we know God within a personal relationship with Him. Respect out of reverence for God is the meaning of "godliness," which all believers are expected to pursue. The moment we came to know God through Jesus Christ, He made His power available to us to live godly lives in fellowship with Him.

9. What might be some clues that a person is trying to live a godly life based on his or her own power instead of God's power?

Peter explains that God called us to this experience for His own

glory and virtue (v. 3). God's glory is the sum of all that He is, while His virtue is His moral goodness.

Precious Promises

God has also given His promises to us for His own glory and virtue (v. 4). These promises are beyond our comprehension and precious.

10. Read 2 Peter 1:4. Which of God's promises do you particularly appreciate as you seek to grow spiritually?

God's promises to us include all of God's provisions for our salvation and godly living. What God has promised makes His promises precious to us.

11. Do believers generally value God's promises? Why? Why not?

The purpose for these promises is that we might be sharers in His nature (v. 4). To share God's nature means believers share in certain attributes of God's character. Some of these attributes are mercy, kindness, long-suffering, and forbearance. As a result, we are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is not the end of the story though. At the rapture of the church, we will be conformed completely to Christ's likeness (Romans 8:23–29). Can there be any doubt that these promises are great and precious promises?

Our participation in the divine nature is parallel to experiencing eternal life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The "all things" that God gives to us for godly living include sharing in some of His attributes.

This transforming experience involves a radical change from what we were to what we have become in Christ (v. 4). It began when we embraced Christ by faith and turned our backs on the moral pollution resident in the world. The change involves a switch from living to satisfy personal desires to seeking to know and fulfill God's desires.

The false teachers with whom Peter takes issue in this letter have not fled from the moral corruption of the world (2:20, 21). Eventually they are snarled and overpowered by it. Their situation illustrates Peter's decisive point (1:4). We began to share in God's nature only after we separated ourselves from the world's moral corruption. The moment we placed our trust in the promises of God and were spiritually renewed, we crossed the point of no return.

12. What can you do to apply the resources for growth to your life?

Faith in God's promises generates a chain of internal and external changes in us. This is what participation in the divine nature is all about.

Faith First

13. Read 2 Peter 1:5–7. Why is faith first in the list of Christian character qualities?

Peter now stresses the Christian's part in the outworking of his or her salvation. This is the meaning of "and beside this." We are to bring along the side of our faith in God those things consistent with godly living. The massive resources of God's power and promises make this possible.

Faith is both foundational and functional. Through the channel of faith, we receive God's grace (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Character development follows. Faith is a virtue itself, but it is also the root of all the other virtues.

Character Qualities

Peter presents a list of Christian character qualities to be added to our faith in Christ. These virtues provide us with a sketch of a true Christian character (2 Peter 1:5–7). There is not a logical flow to Peter's list, except that we must begin with faith.

Peter mentions virtue after faith (v. 5). Virtue is goodness and is an attribute of God. When we behave in a virtuous manner, we reflect God's character.

The next character quality on Peter's list is knowledge (v. 5). Our knowledge of God comes from careful study and meditation on His Word. Adding knowledge is more than accumulating information bites. It is arranging our knowledge of God's Word in a meaningful way. This means that we claim His promises and obey His commands while worshipping, trusting, and relying on Him.

14. How should the virtue of knowledge affect the way we read and study the Bible?

Temperance follows knowledge on the list (v. 6). Temperance is self-control. The word was an athletic term denoting strict discipline. Athletes were expected to abstain from unwholesome food, drink, and sexual indulgence in preparation for their contests. Self-control for the believer is moderation with regard to good things, as well as abstention in all circumstances from unwholesomeness. We exercise self-control with God's provision of divine power for godly living.

15. What happens when we try to exercise self-control by our own power?

Peter adds patience next (v. 6). The word "patience" means "to remain under." Patience is perseverance. It is the character trait of persisting in faith while experiencing the severest of trials and suffering. Patience has its source in faith, because the Christian knows that God is in complete control of every situation.

16. How aware have you been of the connection between patience and trust in God?

17. How does understanding the connection help you be patient in trials and sufferings?

Godliness follows next in the apostle's roster of virtues (v. 6). Godliness is respect and reverence toward God, which springs from a proper relationship with God. It is devotion toward God, which results from faith in God.

18. How would you know a person reverences God?

The last two character qualities in Peter's catalog express love (v. 7). Brotherly kindness is the love that Christians express to each other as brothers in Christ. We are partakers of the divine nature together. The quality of our relationship is demonstrably different from any other human relationship experienced by people.

Love for our brothers in Christ is loyal love. It entails bearing each other's burdens, sorrows, and difficulties. It means that we guard each other from the destructive power of gossip, prejudice, and narrowness, and the refusal to accept a believer for who he is in Christ.

19. What might believers convey about their relationship with God if they are fighting with one another and sinning against one another with their words?

Christian love is not restricted to other Christians (v. 7). Love is a debt that we owe to all men, even our enemies. God models this for us because His love is not evoked by who we are, but by Who He is (John 3:16). So it is not that we are lovable, but instead that God is love. We, therefore, are to be marked by an indiscriminate and deliberate habit of loving those outside the Christian family circle.

Making It Personal

20. What excuses, if any, have you been using for a lack of spiritual growth?

21. What specific truths in 2 Peter 1:1–7 will help you stop making excuses for not growing?

22. What steps will you take to deepen your faith in God's provision for your spiritual growth?

23. When was the last time you praised God for the spiritual growth in your life? Do so today.

24. Memorize 2 Peter 1:3.