

# Notes on 2 Peter

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## Introduction

### AUTHORSHIP

This epistle claims that the Apostle Peter wrote it (1:1). It also claims to follow a former letter written by Peter (3:1), which appears to be a reference to 1 Peter, although Peter may have been referring to a letter that we no longer have.<sup>1</sup> The author's reference to the fact that Jesus had predicted a certain kind of death for him (1:14) ties in with Jesus' statement to Peter recorded in John 21:18. Even so, "most modern scholars do not think that the apostle Peter wrote this letter."<sup>2</sup>

The earliest external testimony (outside Scripture) to Petrine authorship comes from the third century, namely, the commentary by Origen (ca. A.D. 185-254) on John's Gospel. The writings of the church fathers contain fewer references to the Petrine authorship of 2 Peter than to the authorship of any other New Testament book. It is easy to see why critics who look for reasons to attack Scripture have targeted this book. Ironically, in this letter Peter warned his readers of heretics who would depart from the teachings of the apostles and the Old Testament prophets, which is the very thing some of these modern critics do. Not all who reject Petrine authorship are heretics however. The arguments of some critics have convinced some otherwise conservative scholars who no longer retain belief in the epistle's Petrine authorship and/or in its inspiration.

"There is clear evidence from the early centuries of Christianity that the church did not tolerate those who wrote in an apostle's name. In one instance (specifically *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*), the author of such a work was disciplined for

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<sup>1</sup>See Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*, pp. 237-38.

<sup>2</sup>Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 659. For the arguments of these scholars and rebuttals, see *ibid*, pp. 659-63.

doing so. Paul also condemned such practices in his Thessalonian letters (2 Thess. 3:17)."<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of the external evidence, there is strong internal testimony to the fact that Peter wrote the book. This includes stylistic similarities to 1 Peter, similar vocabulary compared with Peter's sermons in Acts, and the specific statements already mentioned (i.e., 1:1, 14; 3:1). In addition, the writer claimed to have witnessed Jesus' transfiguration (1:16-18) and to have received information about his own death from Jesus (1:13-14; cf. John 21:18). Critics of Petrine authorship point to the many dissimilarities between 1 and 2 Peter.<sup>2</sup>

"Most scholars, in fact, date 2 Peter in the early part of the second century and consider it the last New Testament book to have been written. The author's claim to Petrine authorship, therefore, is part of the phenomenon of 'pseudonymity' in the ancient world, whereby the authority and tradition of a revered religious figure were attributed to a later work by an anonymous author."<sup>3</sup>

This quotation reflects the majority of scholarly opinion, but not the conviction of many conservatives, including myself. Moo noted the inconsistency of pseudonymity and inerrancy.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 2128. Cf. Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4:1:148-58.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., R. H. Strachan, "The Second Epistle General of Peter," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5:106-9; Steven J. Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter*, pp. 75-76. For defenses of Petrine authorship, see Alford, 4:1:143-44; Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, pp. 1484-85; Michael J. Kruger, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:4 (December 1999):645-71; Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, pp.199-215; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6:139-44; and Kenneth O. Gangel, "2 Peter," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, pp. 859-61.

<sup>3</sup>Donald Senior, "The Letters of Jude and Second Peter," *The Bible Today* 25:4 (July 1987):212. See also Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, pp. 134, 145-46, 158-62; and E. M. Sidebottom, *James, Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, pp. 22-24.

## ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

Assuming Peter's reference to his former letter (3:1) is to 1 Peter, he seems to have sent this second epistle to the same general audience. That audience was primarily Gentile, but also Jewish, Christians living in northern Asia Minor (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1). The background of the readers and the situation they faced, as Peter described these, fit such an audience well. Thus this was not a "catholic" epistle, namely, a general epistle sent originally to all Christians at large.<sup>1</sup>

## DATE AND GENRE

Peter's reference to his imminent departure from this life (1:13-15) suggests that the time of composition may have been just before Peter suffered martyrdom. Second Peter bears some of the marks of a last will and testament (cf. 1:3-11; 2:1-3; 3:1-4) as well as those of a letter: two literary genres (types of literature).

"By framing a 'farewell testament' within features of an ancient letter, the author of 2 Peter created a novel form, with no real analogies either in the New Testament or ancient Jewish/Christian literature."<sup>2</sup>

The writings of church fathers place Peter's death at A.D. 67-68 in Rome.<sup>3</sup> Consequently a date of composition about A.D. 67-68 seems most likely. Early church tradition also says that Peter spent the last decade of his life in Rome.<sup>4</sup> Calvin, however, argued that he probably did not live that long in Rome.<sup>5</sup> Nero began persecuting Christians in Rome in A.D. 64. Kenneth Hanna dated the writing as probably A.D. 65.<sup>6</sup>

"Second Peter is the swan song of Peter, just as 2 Timothy is the swan song of Paul. There are striking similarities between the two books. Both epistles put up a warning sign along the

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<sup>1</sup>Lenski, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup>Kraftchick, p. 73.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, pp. 79-80 (bk. 2, ch. 25) and p. 82 (bk. 3, ch. 1).

<sup>4</sup>See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 382-84, 471-74.

<sup>5</sup>See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4:6:15.

<sup>6</sup>Kenneth G. Hanna, *From Gospels to Glory*, p. 436.

pilgrim pathway the church is traveling to identify the awful apostasy that was on the way at the time and which in our time has now arrived. What was then like a cloud the size of a man's hand today envelops the sky and produces a storm of hurricane proportions. Peter warns of heresy among teachers; Paul warns of heresy among the laity."<sup>1</sup>

### SIMILARITIES TO JUDE

The similarities between 2 Peter 2 and the Book of Jude, especially Jude 4-18, have raised several questions. Did Peter have access to Jude's epistle, or did Jude have a copy of 2 Peter? Which book came first? Did one man use the other's material, or did both draw from a common source? The commentators and writers of New Testament Introductions deal with these questions thoroughly. See them for further explanations.<sup>2</sup>

Suffice it to say that the church through the ages has recognized the end product of both 2 Peter and Jude as epistles that God inspired. As far as which came first, we may never know for sure until we get to heaven. The more common view today among scholars is that Jude probably wrote before Peter (or his agent) composed 2 Peter.<sup>3</sup> However, I tend to favor the priority of 2 Peter, as do many conservative authorities.<sup>4</sup> This is an academic question, however, and has nothing to do with the interpretation of the texts.

### PURPOSE

"The purpose of 2 Peter is to call Christians to spiritual growth so that they can combat apostasy as they look forward to the Lord's return."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5:715.

<sup>2</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude: An Expository Commentary*, pp. 1-20, also has an excellent discussion of the authenticity of this epistle, as do Bigg, pp. 216-32; Bauckham, pp. 141-43; and Moo, pp. 17-18.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Alford, 4:1:145-48; Bauckham; J. B. Mayor, "The General Epistle of Jude," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5:211-25; Kraftchick, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Jamieson, et al.; Bigg, Lenski, and Moo.

<sup>5</sup>Gangel, p. 862.

"Second Peter is best understood as a document of polemical [hostile] defense and moral exhortation."<sup>1</sup>

## OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1-2
- II. The condition of the Christian 1:3-11
  - A. The believer's resources 1:3-4
  - B. The believer's needs 1:5-9
  - C. The believer's adequacy 1:10-11
- III. The authority for the Christian 1:12-21
  - A. The need for a reminder 1:12-15
  - B. The trustworthiness of the apostles' witness 1:16-18
  - C. The divine origin of Scripture 1:19-21
- IV. The danger to the Christian ch. 2
  - A. The characteristics of false teachers 2:1-3
  - B. The consequences of false teaching 2:4-10a
  - C. The conduct of false teachers 2:10b-19
  - D. The condemnation of false teachers 2:20-22
- V. The prospect for the Christian 3:1-16
  - A. The purpose of this epistle 3:1-2
  - B. Scoffing in the last days 3:3-6
  - C. End-time events 3:7-10
  - D. Living in view of the future 3:11-16
- VI. Conclusion 3:17-18

## MESSAGE

Peter wrote this epistle, as he did 1 Peter, in order to establish believers in their faith. He wrote both letters in obedience to Jesus' instructions to him

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<sup>1</sup>Kraftchick, p. 73.

to "strengthen your brothers" (cf. Luke 22:32).<sup>1</sup> Both epistles contain reminders of fundamental Christian teaching. Both evidently were sent to the same audience, according to 2 Peter 3:1. Both deal with how to handle various kinds of trials, among other things: suffering in 1 Peter, and false teachers in 2 Peter. Both also emphasize God's grace.

The differences between these two epistles are also significant. The first epistle ends, "Stand firm in it [grace]" (5:12). Its theme is the sufficiency of God's grace. We need to stand fast in grace as Christians. The second epistle ends, "grow in ... grace" (3:18). Its theme is the responsibility of grace. We need to keep growing in God's grace. This second letter builds on the first: We do not only need to stand fast in grace, but we also need to keep growing in it.

We could state the message of the book therefore as follows: Fulfill your responsibilities as recipients of the true grace of God. The message of 1 Peter is: Stand firm in the true grace of God.

Note the major revelations of this letter:

First, as recipients of God's grace Christians have resources that create responsibilities. Peter emphasized two of our resources. Our first resource is the power of God (1:3). God's power supplies us with everything we need for godly living. Godly living becomes possible when we come to know God by saving faith. We grow in our knowledge of God as we get to know Him better through study of the Scriptures. We also do so as we respond to our increasing knowledge of Him properly, namely, by abiding in (trusting and obeying) Him.

One area of life that God's power transforms is our spiritual vitality or energy. God wants us to be vital Christians (John 10:10; cf. James). The opposite condition is to have no spiritual energy. God's power enables us to demonstrate His own glory by giving us spiritual vitality (1:3). Peter saw the glory of God manifested through Jesus Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (1:17). God wants to manifest His glory through every Christian (3:18). People can see God's glory in our spiritual vitality. The clearest illustration of spiritual vitality is Jesus Christ during His earthly

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<sup>1</sup>Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 2020 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

ministry. Spiritual vitality is not just enthusiasm for the things of God but also strength to persevere in following Christ in the face of difficulties.

Another area of life that God's power transforms is, more specifically, our conduct. By conduct I mean how we conduct ourselves in thought, word, and deed: what we do, and what we do not do. God wants us to be godly Christians as well as glorious Christians. He wants us to be virtuous as well as vital. The opposite condition is ungodly and unclean. The false teachers that Peter wrote about reflected the opposite condition, and Peter described their conduct quite fully in chapter 2. God's power enables us to demonstrate His own excellence by making us godly (like God, 1:3). Peter heard the excellence of God testified to on the Mount of Transfiguration when he heard God say about Jesus Christ, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 17:5; cf. 1:17-18). God wants to manifest His excellence through every Christian (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). People can see God's excellence in the godly conduct of His children.

The second resource that Peter emphasized that every Christian has is the promises of God (1:4). God's promises grant us everything that we need to realize our potential as Christians and to maintain our purity in godly living. These promises are "magnificent" because they are essentially great and wonderful. They are "precious" to us because they are gifts of our loving heavenly Father, and because they are the keys to realizing our potential and to maintaining our purity. These promises are like the cable that pulls skiers up a mountain. If we hold onto them, they will take us far—to new heights.

One area of life that God's promises transform is our character. God wants us to partake of His nature. We receive His nature (i.e., the Holy Spirit) initially when we believe His promise that Christ died for our sins. However God wants us to partake of that nature fully in this life. When we do so, we realize our potential as the children of God. We do so by continuing to believe God's promises to us. As we began the Christian life by faith, we should continue to walk by faith (cf. James). Because the false teachers rejected the promises of God they failed to realize their potential as human beings. They did not become partakers of the divine nature.

Another area of life that God's promises transform is, more specifically, our morality. We receive future deliverance from the penalty of sin by believing that Christ died for our sins. But we also receive present deliverance from the power of sin by believing God's other promises to us. For example, God

promises us that sin will no longer have enslaving power over us (Rom. 6:14; cf. 1 Pet. 4:11; 5:11). He also promises us that He will give us a way of escape in temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). He also promises us that He will give us the desire and the ability to obey Him (Phil. 1:6).

One of the promises that Peter emphasized especially in this epistle was the promise that Jesus Christ will return (3:4-16). When Christ returns He will perfect us. God has given us many more promises. Relying on these is the key to maintaining our purity as Christians. Because the false teachers rejected the promises of God they failed to maintain moral purity. They did not escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.

These then are the resources that create our responsibility that Peter emphasized in this epistle: God's power within us, and God's promises in His Word. Every Christian can succeed in life and in ministry because he or she has these resources.

Next notice what Peter appealed to his readers to do in view of their resources. He called them to give diligence to do two things:

First, we should diligently appropriate our resources (1:5-8). We do this by responding to them responsibly. We must respond by fulfilling our responsibility as well as by trusting God to fulfill His. We must exercise effort and self-discipline in order to develop the qualities that God wants to perfect within us (1:5-8). No one can become a strong Christian without self-discipline. Fortunately self-discipline comes from God (Gal. 5:16, 23).

Second, we should diligently avoid our perils. We do this by remembering God's promises (1:9, 12-13; 3:1-2). Our tendency is to forget God's power and our responsibilities (1:9; 3:5) and to forget God's promises (3:4). Peter's concern was mainly that his readers not forget the promise of the Lord's return (3:9, 13). This promise should affect us by encouraging us to live pure lives (3:14). Because the false teachers chose to forget this promise they failed to fulfill the responsibilities of God's grace. Scripture memorization and review (meditation) are valuable activities because they help us remember God's promises.

These are the major revelations in this short book. As recipients of God's grace we have resources that create responsibilities, namely, God's power, and His promises. We, for our part, need to give diligence to our

responsibilities of responding to God's power and remembering God's promises.

I would also like to suggest some applications of this epistle's message to the lives of Christians:

First, God's resources do not free us from the responsibility to diligently cultivate godliness. On the contrary, they increase that responsibility. The Christian life is a combination of trusting and toiling. We must balance these two things. When we neglect either responsibility we get into trouble (1:5). We are partners with God. Our progressive sanctification is a process in which we labor together with God. We are responsible to trust and to obey, to exercise faith in God and to work. We frustrate the Holy Spirit's work of sanctifying us if we do not trust, on the one hand, or if we do not obey, on the other.

The Christian life is a lot like water skiing. We have to lean back and let God pull us out of the dragging influences that holds us down. However, we also have to hold on to the rope: to keep following His leading. When we do both things He enables us to overcome. We can even fly over what formerly held us in its clutches.

Second, we should cultivate habits that will help us remember our resources: God's power and promises. One of the most important reasons that we should read our Bibles regularly is that they remind us of things that we need to remember. The same is true of memorizing Scripture, attending church services, and having fellowship with other Christians. Peter said it is better not to know Scripture than to know it and then forget it (2:21).

Third, God intended the promise of the Lord's return and the events that will follow His return to be important motivations for us. This is our hope. If we neglect the prophetic portions of Scripture our motivation for godly living will sag (3:14).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:2:161-75.

## Exposition

### I. INTRODUCTION 1:1-2

Peter began his second epistle as he did both to introduce himself to his readers and to lay a foundation for what follows.

1:1 The writer could hardly have stated his identity more clearly than he did in this verse. "Simon" was Peter's Hebrew name, and "Peter" is the Greek translation of the nickname Cephas (Rocky, cf. Matt. 16:18). There is only one Peter mentioned in the New Testament.

"Double names like 'Simon Peter' were common in the ancient Near East. Many people used both the name they were given in their native language and a Greek name, since Greek was so widely spoken."<sup>1</sup>

This is the only New Testament epistle in which the writer identified himself with a double name. Peter may have done this to suggest the two aspects of his life: before and after discipleship to Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Peter called for discipleship in this letter and referred to the changes that it produces in Christians (e.g., vv. 4-11).

Peter regarded himself, first, as a "bond-servant" (Gr. *doulos*) of Jesus Christ, and secondarily, as His "apostle" (cf. Rom. 1:1; Tit. 1:1). "Bond-servant ... of Jesus Christ" is the New Testament equivalent of "servant of the Lord" in the Old Testament. Peter probably mentioned his apostolic authority in his salutation in this epistle not only to identify himself clearly to his readers but also because he proceeded to deal with false teachers. His readers needed to remember that what they were reading came from an apostle of Jesus Christ and was therefore authoritative.

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<sup>1</sup>Moo, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup>W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Apostle Peter: Outline Studies in His Life, Character, and Writings*, p. 247.

Peter referred to his audience at first in very general terms that could apply to all Christians: "those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours." This reference does not help us identify exactly who the original recipients were. The faith of all believers is a gift from God: they had received a faith. Other non-biblical Greek writers used the unique Greek word translated "same kind" (*isotimos*) to describe immigrants who received citizenship privileges equal to those of native inhabitants.

The word "ours" may be an editorial plural, but it is more likely a reference to the other apostles (cf. 3:2; 1 John 1:1-4; et al.). A second view is that "ours" refers to the whole Christian community.<sup>1</sup> A third view is that "ours" refers to Jewish Christians, with whom the Gentiles had been admitted into the same fellowship.<sup>2</sup> Some of the early Gnostic false teachers claimed a higher level of spiritual experience that, they claimed, only Christians who followed their teachings could attain. However Peter here asserted that every Christian has the same essential faith—including all of its spiritual benefits—that the apostles had.

"Throughout this chapter St. Peter is thinking of the contrast between the doctrine of the apostles and that of the False Teachers. 'Your faith,' he seems to say, 'is as honourable as ours, though you received yours from us and we received ours from Christ.'"<sup>3</sup>

The Christian's faith, in both its subjective and objective aspects, comes to us as a result of Jesus Christ's righteousness. The Greek grammatical construction of the last phrase of this verse indicates that Peter believed that Jesus Christ was both "God and Savior" (cf. Matt. 16:16; John 1:1; 20:28; Tit. 2:13). This is one of many verses in the New Testament that explicitly calls Jesus "God." Jesus' role as "Savior" was one that Peter emphasized in this letter, because

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<sup>1</sup>Strachan, 5:123.

<sup>2</sup>Alford, 4:2:389.

<sup>3</sup>Bigg, p. 250.

of his readers' need for deliverance (cf. v. 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18). Salvation is also a major theme in 1 Peter.

1:2 The first half of Peter's benediction on his readers is identical with the one that he gave in his first epistle (1 Pet. 1:2). "Grace" and "peace" were the typical greetings that the Greeks and Jews used respectively. This probably suggests that Peter wrote this epistle to a mixed audience of Gentile and Jewish Christians, as he did his former letter. Both grace and peace come to us through the full "knowledge" (Gr. *epignose*) "of God and of Jesus our Lord" (again equal, cf. v. 1). The Greeks, and especially the Gnostics, prided themselves on their knowledge, but Peter noted that the knowledge of God and of Jesus was the key to grace and peace (cf. 3:18). These blessings become ours as we get to know God intimately—by reading His Word and abiding in Him. The false teachers could offer nothing better than this.

"The words *know* or *knowledge*, in their varied forms, occur sixteen times in the epistle. Six times the intensive form, signifying *full knowledge*, is used."<sup>1</sup>

"... as used in 2 Peter ... *epignosis* [full knowledge] designates the fundamental Christian knowledge received in conversion, whereas *gnosis* is knowledge which can be acquired and developed in the course of Christian life ..."<sup>2</sup>

"In our day we are rightly warned about the danger of a sterile faith, of a 'head' knowledge that never touches the heart. But we need equally to be careful of a 'heart' knowledge that never touches the head! Too many Christians *know* too little about their faith; we are therefore often unprepared to explain how our 'God' differs from

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<sup>1</sup>D. Edmund Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 3:153.

<sup>2</sup>Bauckham, pp. 337-38.

the 'God' of Mormonism or of the Jehovah's Witnesses."<sup>1</sup>

## II. THE CONDITION OF THE CHRISTIAN 1:3-11

"The author of 2 Peter had two basic aims: to emphasize faith's ethical component and to counter the detractors who were causing harm and distress."<sup>2</sup>

"The first chapter vividly portrays the nature of the Christian life with its challenge to spiritual growth and maturity, built on a sure foundation. The second part of the epistle is a ringing polemic against the false teachers who would allure and seek to mislead God's people, while the third chapter deals with the heretical denial of the return of Christ and concludes with some fitting exhortation to the readers."<sup>3</sup>

Second Peter is one of the few New Testament epistles in which chapter divisions consistently coincide with subject divisions.

"In seeking to prepare the readers against the danger from the false teachers, Peter states in chapter 1 that their safety lies in their clear apprehension of the nature of the new life in Christ and their spiritual growth and maturity in the faith as the best antidote against error."<sup>4</sup>

### A. THE BELIEVER'S RESOURCES 1:3-4

Peter reminded his readers of God's power and promises that were available to them. He did this in order to rekindle an appreciation for the resources that God had given them in view of their present needs. This epistle begins and ends on a note of victory (cf. 3:14-18).

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<sup>1</sup>Moo, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Kraftchick, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, "The Necessary Growth in the Christian Life: An Exposition of 2 Peter 1:5-11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:561 (January-March 1984):43.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

1:3 Grace and peace (v. 2) are possible because God and Christ have granted to all Christians everything we need in order to live godly lives.

"'Power' is one of the key-words of the epistle."<sup>1</sup>

It is possible that Peter meant the apostles specifically when he wrote "us" in verses 3 and 4.<sup>2</sup> The apostles are evidently in view in verse 1 ("ours"), and they may contrast with the readers ("you" and "your") in verses 2 and 5. If this is what Peter meant, he was probably continuing to stress his apostolic authority, specifically in the teaching that follows. This would have been important because the false teachers were claiming that their teaching was authoritative (ch. 2). However the opening sections of most other epistles that contain reminders of God's blessings (e.g., Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Pet. 1:3-9), as 2 Peter 1:3 and 4 do, seem to refer to all believers as "us." Moreover the "ours" in verse 1 seems to be inclusive of all believers, rather than a specific reference to the apostles.

On the other hand, the prologue to 1 John (1:1-4) apparently does refer to the apostles as "us." I have not found any commentators who believed that Peter was referring to the apostles alone in verses 3 and 4.

"Life and godliness" is probably a hendiadys meaning "a godly life."<sup>3</sup> The resources in view are available to us through the "true knowledge" (cf. v. 2) of Jesus Christ, namely, through a proper relationship with Him (cf. Phil. 4:13; Col. 2:9-10; 2 Tim. 1:7). Lenski correctly, I believe, called *epignosis* ("true knowledge") "... the key word of this epistle."<sup>4</sup>

"Just as a normal baby is born with all the 'equipment' he needs for life and only needs to

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<sup>1</sup>Sidebottom, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup>Strachan, 5:124.

<sup>3</sup>A hendiadys is a figure of speech in which the writer joins two substantives with "and" rather than using an adjective and a substantive.

<sup>4</sup>Lenski, pp. 271, 332. Cf. 1:2, 8; 2:20.

grow, so the Christian has all that is needed and only needs to grow."<sup>1</sup>

Is what God has given us in His Spirit and His Word sufficient for a godly life, or do we also need the insights of other branches of knowledge (e.g., psychology)? Clearly our basic resources as Christians do not equip us for every task in life (e.g., auto maintenance, gardening, orthopedic surgery, etc.). This was not Peter's claim. But how do the resources that he identified and modern psychology interface? Can psychology provide tools for growth in godliness, or is the Bible sufficient in itself for this?

It seems to me that Peter's point was that God's Spirit and His Word provide everything that is essential to godly living, not that these are the only resources that we have or should use. Peter's point was that there is nothing more that all believers need in order to become more godly that He has not already made available to us (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Some people, for various reasons, need more specialized help in dealing with the obstacles to godly living that they face, which psychology, counseling, and psychotherapy may provide. Nevertheless, no one can get along without God's Spirit and His Word to make progress in godliness.

Jesus Christ "called" Peter's readers to Himself in the sense that His excellent glory ("glory and excellence," another hendiadys?) attracted them to Him. "Excellence" (Gr. *aretē*) specifically refers to moral excellence or virtue (cf. v. 5). Both Christ's "glory" and His moral virtue ("excellence") appealed to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

1:4 The Lord's "promises" come to us by way of Christ's divine power and the true knowledge of Him (v. 3). We learn to benefit from these promises as we get to know Him better. And the God-supplied divine power for fulfilling what He has promised comes from Him. The word "granted" translates a Greek word (*doreōmai*), also found in verse 3, that stresses the great worth of what God has given. The promises in view

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<sup>1</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:437.

are biblical promises (including God's covenant promises) that all believers can know about; they are not secret promises. They are in the Scriptures. The promises that Peter referred to in his first epistle deal with the believer's inheritance (1 Pet. 1:3-5) and the Lord's return (1 Pet. 1:9, 13).

Here Peter's reference is to all of God's promises including the prophetic promises that he referred to later in this epistle (vv. 16-22; 3:4, 9, 13). They are "precious" (Gr. *timia*) because of the great worth of the spiritual riches involved (cf. 1 Pet. 1:7, 19; 2:7). They are "magnificent" (Gr. *megista*, lit. greatest) because they are intrinsically excellent. Someone has said that you can never break God's promises by leaning on them. The Old Testament, especially, emphasizes God's faithfulness to His promises repeatedly. The biblical covenants are His big, formal promises.

"... one of the great lessons of 2 Peter is that to maintain a holy life in a world like ours, we must be deeply rooted in the prophetic promises of God's word. Above all, we must hold fast to that 'blessed hope' of the coming again of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [cf. Matt. 24:48-50]."<sup>1</sup>

"Here, again, we have an instance of St. Peter's habit of anticipation, and a link between the introduction and the third chapter. Already the author is thinking of the doubts about the Parousia [the return of Christ]."<sup>2</sup>

Christians become "partakers" of God's very "nature" by faith in His promises. In our day, as in Peter's day, many people are interested in becoming partakers of "the divine nature," though they may conceive of it in non-Christian ways (Eastern mysticism, new age spirituality, etc.).<sup>3</sup> Peter evidently used this phrase ("become partakers of the divine nature") to

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<sup>1</sup>Zane C. Hodges, "Exposition of Second Peter," *The KERUGMA Message* 1:2 (July-August 1991):4.

<sup>2</sup>Bigg, p. 255.

<sup>3</sup>See Robert V. Rakestraw, "Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis [Deification]," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:2 (June 1997):257-69.

capture the interest of his formerly pagan Hellenistic readers, but he proceeded to infuse it with distinctively Christian meaning. He was an effective communicator.

When God saved us by faith in His promise (cf. John 1:12; 5:24; 6:47; et al.), He indwelt us, and we therefore possess the "nature" of God within us (cf. John 16:7; Acts 2:39). God's Spirit in us manifests the likeness of God and Christ through us. He also gives us power that enables us to overcome (escape) the temptations of "lust" that result in "corruption" (cf. Gal. 5:16-17). This "corruption" can refer to moral decadence (e.g., Gal. 6:7) or to the decay or decomposition of nature (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:42, 50; Gal. 6:8; 2 Pet. 2:12). In the latter case, Peter meant that death and decay are the result of sin or lust (cf. Rom. 5:12; 8:20-21; Eph. 4:22).<sup>1</sup>

Note that Peter did not say that we have the divine nature (which is true), from which we might infer that we no longer have a sinful human nature and do not sin. He said that we participate in ("become partakers of") the divine nature, from which we should infer that we experience some of God's qualities but not all of them here and now.

Peter spoke of our "having escaped" this "corruption" in the past (Greek past tense verb). He meant that our justification has already assured our escape from this corruption, not that we escape it automatically simply because we are Christians. Another view is that Peter meant that Christians will become partakers of the divine nature when we die, having escaped the world's corruption through death.<sup>2</sup> Yet we already possess the divine nature through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The temptations that we presently face characterize the world as a whole (cf. 1 John 2:17). The assurance of ultimate victory over this corruption should encourage us to strive to overcome it now.

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<sup>1</sup>Kraftchick, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup>See Bauckham, pp. 181-84.

"Each man must make a choice. Either he becomes freed from sin, or he becomes further enslaved to sin."<sup>1</sup>

"Man becomes either regenerate or degenerate."<sup>2</sup>

Godliness, goodness (lit. virtue), divine nature, and corruption are all concepts that fascinated the philosophical false teachers of Peter's day. Peter reminded his readers of God's provisions for them that made them adequate and in need of nothing that the false teachers, to whom he would refer later, said that they could provide.

### **B. THE BELIEVER'S NEEDS 1:5-9**

Having established believers' basic adequacy through God's power in us and His promises to us, Peter next reminded his readers of their responsibility to cultivate their own Christian growth. He did so in order to correct any idea that they needed to do nothing more because they possessed adequate resources.

"In this beautiful paragraph Peter orchestrates a symphony of grace. To the melody line of faith he leads believers to add harmony in a blend of seven Christian virtues which he lists without explanation or description."<sup>3</sup>

1:5 Since believers have resources that are adequate for a godly life (vv. 3-4), we should use them diligently to grow in grace (cf. 3:18). Escaping the corruption of lust (v. 4) takes effort (cf. 1 Tim. 6:11-12; 2 Tim. 2:2). It is possible to frustrate the grace of God by having faith without works (James 2:20).<sup>4</sup> Therefore we must apply "all diligence." This is the most basic requirement for experiencing effective Christian growth: pursue it diligently (cf. vv. 10, 15; 3:14).

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Barbieri, *First and Second Peter*, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>Strachan, 5:126.

<sup>3</sup>Gangel, p. 865.

<sup>4</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 51.

"Spiritual growth in the Christian life calls for the strenuous involvement of the believer."<sup>1</sup>

"Without *giving all diligence*, there is no gaining any ground in the work of holiness."<sup>2</sup>

"The Christian must engage in this sort of cooperation with God in the production of a Christian life which is a credit to Him."<sup>3</sup>

"Spirituality, then, is a choice. It does not come automatically or inevitably. Indeed, if the Christian fails to add 'virtue' to his faith, his faith will soon become what James described as 'dead faith' (James 2:14-26). Its vitality and productivity will disappear. In fact, Peter says this same thing in his own way in v. 8, 9."<sup>4</sup>

To his "faith," which is foundational, the believer needs to add seven qualities or virtues—with God's help (grace). Each virtue contributes to the total spiritual growth of the believer. Note that Peter placed responsibility for attaining them on the Christian ("supply," add to). Though, again, we can only make progress in godliness as God enables us to do so.

"The Christian life is like power steering on a car. The engine provides the power for the steering, but the driver must actually turn the wheel. So the Lord provides the power to run our lives, but we must 'turn the wheel.' To a great extent the Christian determines the course of his life."<sup>5</sup>

Peter said to "supply" (add in and mix together, like in a recipe) the following ingredients in order to produce a mature godly life. He used a literary device that was common in his day in

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 1949.

<sup>3</sup>Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup>Hodges, 1:3:2. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>5</sup>Barbieri, p. 96.

order to impress upon his readers the importance of giving attention to each virtue. Unlike other New Testament ethical lists (except Rom. 5:3-5), Peter used a literary device called sorites (also called climax or *gradatio*). Sorites (from the Gr. *soros*, a heap) is a set of statements that proceed step by step to a climactic conclusion through the force of logic or reliance upon a series of indisputable facts. Each new statement picks up the last key word or phrase of the preceding one.<sup>1</sup> Other examples of sorites are in Romans 8:29 and 30; 10:14 and 15; and James 1:15.

We should not infer that before we can work on the third virtue, we must master the second, and so on. This literary device simply arranges the virtues in an advancing order but presents them so that each one receives emphasis. The total effect is to create the impression of growing a healthy tree, for example, in which each of several branches is vital.

Often children want to grow up faster than they can. They sometimes ask their parents to measure their height again, perhaps only a week or two after their last measuring. The wise parent will tell the child not to be so concerned about constantly measuring his or her growth. Instead the child should give attention to certain basic activities that will ensure good growth over time: drink your milk, eat your vegetables, get enough exercise and rest. This is the spirit of Peter's advice.

"Moral excellence" (Gr. *aretē*) is virtue or goodness (v. 3; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). Moral purity and uprightness of character, cultivated through obedience to God, are in view. The Greek word describes anything that fulfills its purpose or function properly. In this context it means a Christian who fulfills his or her calling (i.e., Matt. 22:37-39; 28:19-20; et al.). Darby described moral excellence as "moral courage which overcomes difficulties."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See H. A. Fischel, "The Uses of Sorites (*Climax, Gradatio*) in the Tannaitic Period," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973):119.

<sup>2</sup>J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 5:466.

"Knowledge" (Gr. *gnosis*, cf. *epignosis* in vv. 2-3) refers to acquired information. In particular, the Christian needs to know all that God has revealed in His Word, not just the gospel (cf. Matt. 28:19-20).

"*Gnosis* here is the wisdom and discernment which the Christian needs for a virtuous life and which is progressively acquired. It is practical rather than purely speculative wisdom (cf. Phil 1:9)."<sup>1</sup>

"Christian prudence regards the persons we have to do with and the place and company we are in."<sup>2</sup>

1:6 "Self-control" (Gr. *egkrates*) means mastery of self, disciplined moderation, the reining in of one's own desires and passions (cf. Prov. 16:32; 25:28; Acts 24:25; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Gal. 5:23; Phil. 3:12-16; 1 Tim. 4:7-8; James 4:17). Many of the early Christian heresies taught that, since the body was evil (some claimed) or unimportant (others claimed), it was not necessary to curb fleshly lusts but only to think correctly.

"Any religious system which claims that religious knowledge emancipates from the obligations of morality is false."<sup>3</sup>

"Perseverance" is the need to keep on keeping on in spite of adversity. It is patient endurance in holiness when we encounter temptation to give in or to give up (cf. Rom. 5:3-4; 15:4-5; 2 Cor. 1:6; 6:4; Col. 1:11; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:4; James 1:3). The Greek word (*hypomonen*) literally means "to remain under" something, such as a heavy load.

"Many folk have the wrong concept of what patience really is. They think it means sitting in a traffic jam on the freeway in the morning without worrying about getting to work. Well, that is not patience. It just gives you an excuse for being late

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<sup>1</sup>Bauckham, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, p. 1949.

<sup>3</sup>Hiebert, "The Necessary ...," p. 46.

to work. Patience is being able to endure when trials come."<sup>1</sup>

"Godliness" (Gr. *eusebeia*) refers to behavior that reflects the character of God (cf. v. 3; 3:11; et al.). It presupposes a desire to please God in all the relationships of life.

1:7 "Brotherly kindness" (Gr. *philadelphia*) is thoughtful consideration of fellow believers (cf. 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8; Rom. 12:10; 1 Cor. 12:25-26; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1). Overt acts of kindness manifest this characteristic (Gal. 6:10).

"Love" (Gr. *agape*) refers to the highest form of affection, God's kind, that seeks the welfare of the person loved above its own welfare (John 3:16; 13:35; Gal. 5:22; 1 Pet. 4:8; et al.). It reaches out to all people, not just fellow believers.

This list of qualities begins with those inside the believer and progresses to those that he or she demonstrates outwardly, and from the more elemental to the more advanced. It moves from private to public qualities. This list begins with faith (v. 5) and ends with love. Another shorter virtue list that begins with faith and ends with love is in 2 Corinthians 8:7.

"Christian faith is the root from which all these virtues must grow, and Christian love is the crowning virtue to which all the others must contribute. In a list of this kind, the last item has a unique significance. It is not just the most important virtue, but also the virtue which encompasses all the others. Love is the overriding ethical principle from which the other virtues gain their meaning and validity."<sup>2</sup>

"Faith is the root principle, and this must be developed until it reaches the ultimate fruitage, which is love."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 5:723.

<sup>2</sup>Bauckham, p. 193.

<sup>3</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 525.

This is a good checklist that helps us Christians evaluate whether we are growing toward all that God wants us to be. These are the traits of a maturing Christian whose faith is vital, not dead.<sup>1</sup>

"Their presentation here seems to observe an order from the more elemental to the more advanced, but they are all of them facets of the Spirit's work in the life of a believer, aspects of the glory of the indwelling Christ, his character shown in the Christian's character."<sup>2</sup>

Each child in a family bears some resemblance to his or her parents while at the same time remaining distinctive. Just so each growing Christian normally manifests similarities to Christ and yet remains different from every other Christian.

Ultimately, any progress in godliness that we make is due to God's enabling grace. When I was a small boy, my parents gave me money to buy them Christmas presents. I was using "my money" to buy them presents, but "my money" had come from them. Likewise, all that we have, including the desire and the ability to please God, comes from Him. But we must choose to use what He has given us to pursue godliness. Olympic athletes do not just wake up one day and compete. They spend months and even years in training. Likewise those who run the Christian race must pursue godliness diligently.

Unfortunately many Christians prefer a different approach: instant sanctification (transformation) through a crisis experience, perhaps at some revival meeting. Our instant gratification culture encourages this approach rather than the regular development of these qualities over a longer period of time, which Peter encouraged.

1:8 We must continue to grow in these "qualities" as well as possessing them. We must grow in grace (3:18). Failure to do

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<sup>1</sup>See Frederic R. Howe, "The Christian Life in Peter's Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:627 (July-September 2000):309-13.

<sup>2</sup>Stephen W. Paine, "The Second Epistle of Peter," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1458.

so will make us "useless" (Gr. *argous*) in God's hands as His representatives in the world (cf. James 2:20; cf. Matt. 20:3, 6) and "unproductive" (Gr. *akarpous*) as demonstrators of His life (John 15:2, 4; cf. Mark 12:12-14, 20-26). This is so even though we have received everything necessary for godly living through the knowledge of Christ (v. 3). "Make you useless nor unproductive" is a litotes, a figure of speech that affirms an idea by denying its opposite. Put positively Peter meant: These qualities will make you useful and productive.

"'Idle' (*argous*) is literally 'unworking'; it is not a picture of one unavoidably unemployed but of one who avoids labor for which he should assume responsibility."<sup>1</sup>

When we diligently increase these virtues in our lives, we will be both useful and productive, and we will evidence "true knowledge [Gr. *epignosis*] of our Lord Jesus Christ." True knowledge of Him involves not just intellectual understanding but knowledge that comes through obedience. This growth should be the goal of every believer (cf. 3:18).

"Each advance in the Christian life deepens and widens our spiritual understanding."<sup>2</sup>

"Some of the most effective Christians I have known are people without dramatic talents and special abilities, or even exciting personalities; yet God has used them in a marvelous way. Why? Because they are becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. They have the kind of character and conduct that God can trust with blessing. They are fruitful because they are faithful; they are effective because they are growing in their Christian experience."<sup>3</sup>

1:9           The absence of these virtues gives evidence of lack of true knowledge. Peter described this condition as spiritual blindness

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 56. Cf. Matt. 20:3, 6.

<sup>2</sup>Strachan, 5:127.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, 2:439.

to the realities connected with their relationship with God and, in particular, shortsightedness (lit. myopia, Gr. *myopazo*). Such people show concern mostly about living for the present with little regard for the future (cf. Esau). James called this dead (inactive) faith (James 2:17, 26).

Many Christians have "forgotten" how much God has forgiven them, or they have appreciated His forgiveness only superficially.

"As is usual in the Bible, the idea of 'forgetting' is not a mental process but a practical failure to take into account the true meaning and significance of something."<sup>1</sup>

Often it is both in our lives.

Those who "have forgotten" have little motivation to grow in grace and thereby please God. They do not add the seven qualities to their faith that Peter urged. Peter referred to this omission as forgetting one's "purification from his [or her] former sins." Having forgotten one's escape from the corruption that is in the world through lust (v. 4), this person fails to see the importance of present purification through continued Christian growth.

"Since the epistle as a whole lays heavy stress on the reality and certainty of the Lord's coming (vv 11, 16, 19; 3:4-14), the Apostle is probably thinking of believers who no longer look ahead to the Rapture. Instead their vision is severely limited to the here and now, or for the present world."<sup>2</sup>

This is one of the most practical and helpful passages in the New Testament that deals with spiritual growth. Peter here presented both the reason for and the method of this growth clearly and attractively.

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<sup>1</sup>Moo, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>Zane C. Hodges, "The Second Epistle of Peter," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, 2:1173.

"Peter was certainly a spiritual realist even if many modern theologians are not. He does not take it for granted that spiritual growth will occur automatically or inevitably. Indeed, the character development he thinks of cannot occur apart from the believer 'giving all diligence' toward that end (v 5). This does not mean, of course, that the believer does this all on his own. God supplies the basic resources and provides help along the way. But Christian growth *will not occur* apart from our diligent participation in the process. If we learn nothing else from this passage, we must learn this. We do not passively experience Christian growth, but actively pursue it!"<sup>1</sup>

### C. THE BELIEVER'S ADEQUACY 1:10-11

Peter concluded this section of his letter, on the nature of the Christian, by assuring his readers that simply practicing what he had just advocated would prepare them adequately for the future. He did this to help them realize that they had no need for the added burdens that false teachers sought to impose on them.

1:10 In view of what Peter had just said (vv. 3-9; "Therefore"), it was imperative that his readers make the proper moral response. By doing so, they would give evidence that they were genuine Christians. The evidence of divine nature in a person demonstrates his or her salvation. Conversely, if a person gives no evidence of having the divine nature, then his or her salvation is in doubt as others observe that one. By cultivating the seven virtues, other people could see the divine nature more clearly in the Christian who had them. This would make God's "calling and choice" of him or her clearer to everyone.

"All Christians have been called and selected, otherwise they would not be Christians, but they must 'work out their own salvation' (Phil. ii. 12)."<sup>2</sup>

"The Christian who progressively develops these virtues in his life will grow steadily. This growth will

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<sup>1</sup>Idem, "Exposition of ...," 2:1:3. Cf. Rom. 8:12-13; Phil. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:14-16.

<sup>2</sup>Bigg, p. 261.

be obvious proof that he has been elected by God."<sup>1</sup>

"The Christian life is not a list of propositions or a tight theological system; it is a vital relationship to a resurrected Lord. The commandments He gave us and the theological systems we devise as an understanding of those propositional truths exist only to help us live in a vital relationship with Christ day by day as we follow Him as Lord."<sup>2</sup>

Another interpretation of His "calling and choice of you" is that it refers to God's summons to Christians to reign with Christ in the life to come (cf. v. 11; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21) and that not all Christians will be chosen to co-reign with Him (cf. Rom. 8:17b; 2 Tim. 2:12):

"Peter, therefore, wishes his readership to produce in their lifestyle appropriate verification that they are 'royal' people, destined for high honor in the coming kingdom of God. By doing *these things* (i.e., the things Peter is talking about) their road into the glories of that kingdom will be smooth. They will not *stumble* on that path and thus run the risk of losing the rewards they are 'called' to obtain (see 1 Cor 9:27). Instead, they shall prove themselves 'chosen' for divine reward."<sup>3</sup>

Another reason for adding these virtues is that by doing so we can walk worthy of the Lord without stumbling along the way (cf. Jude 24). Loss of salvation is obviously not in view here. Peter said we might "stumble," not fall completely, unable to rise again (cf. Rom. 8:1).

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<sup>1</sup>Barbieri, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>Paul A. Cedar, *James, 1, 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 213.

<sup>3</sup>Zane C. Hodges, "Making Your Call and Election Sure: 2 Peter 1:5-11," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 11:20 (Spring 1998):32. See also Robert N. Wilkin, *Confident in Christ*, pp. 73-80.

"We do not stumble when we are giving attention to where we are stepping. We stumble when we become preoccupied with other things and do not pay attention to where we are going."<sup>1</sup>

Neither is this verse saying that our assurance of salvation rests on our good works. Our assurance of salvation rests on the promise of God that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior has eternal life (John 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 5:1; 8:38-39; 1 John 5:11-13).

"This passage does not mean that moral progress provides the Christian with a subjective assurance of his election (the sense it was given by Luther and Calvin, and especially in seventeenth-century Calvinism) ..."<sup>2</sup>

"Nowhere in the Bible is a Christian asked to examine either his faith or his life to find out if he is a Christian. He is told only to look outside of himself to Christ alone for his assurance that he is a Christian. The Christian is, however, often told to examine his faith and life to see if he is walking in fellowship and in conformity to God's commands."<sup>3</sup>

What "make certain about His calling and choice of you" does mean is that, by pursuing Christian growth, we give evidence that He really did call and choose us. The uncalled and unchosen have little or no desire to become useful and productive by growing in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 8).

1:11 One of the greatest motivations for pursuing growth in grace is that, when we go to be with the Lord forever, He will

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<sup>1</sup>Cedar, p. 213.

<sup>2</sup>Bauckham, p. 190. See also R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1648*, pp. 8-9, 25.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 288. Cf. pp. 295-99. His twelfth and thirteenth chapters on faith and assurance, pp. 271-91, and self-examination and faith, pp. 293-310, are helpful. See also Hodges, "Exposition of ...," 2:2:3.

welcome us warmly. The alternative is to get in "by the skin of our teeth," without much commendation—saved "so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). Every Christian will enter Christ's millennial kingdom and receive much eternal inheritance (1 Pet. 1:3-5). However, our Lord's welcome of those who have sought to express their gratitude for His grace through a life dedicated to cultivating godliness will be especially warm. It will be even warmer than what He extends to other less committed believers (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 12:21, 31; Acts 7:56).

"Only if believers *add* to their faith the character qualities Peter describes will God *add* to him a rich entrance to the kingdom. Heavenly reward, not salvation from hell, is the theme here. The holy and fruitful lifestyle of vv 3-8 can be a demonstration that an individual Christian has not only been *called*, but actually *chosen*, for great reward in God's future kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

"The eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" in view seems to refer specifically to Christ's future kingdom. Peter described it as a kingdom to be entered into in the future by his believing readers. Christ's messianic kingdom began on this earth when He began His public ministry and will continue forever. Now as He rules from heaven on His Father's throne, He will rule on the earth during the Millennium, and then He will rule in the new heavens and new earth (cf. 2 Tim. 4:18). I take it that Peter was referring to the time when his readers would go to be with the Lord.

Another view is that it is Christ's earthly millennial kingdom that Peter meant.<sup>2</sup>

"The prophets always view the Kingdom of God as being established on the earth ..."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Idem, "The Second ...," 2:1174. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>2</sup>Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 433.

<sup>3</sup>George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 607.

"This passage agrees with several in the Gospels and Epistles in suggesting that while heaven is entirely a gift of grace, it admits of degrees of felicity, and that these are dependent upon how faithfully we have built a structure of character and service upon the foundation of Christ. Bengel likens the unholy Christian in the judgment to a sailor who just manages to make shore after shipwreck, or to a man who barely escapes with his life from a burning house, while all his possessions are lost. In contrast, the Christian who has allowed his Lord to influence his conduct will have abundant entrance into the heavenly city, and be welcomed like a triumphant athlete victorious in the Games. This whole paragraph of exhortation is thus set between two poles: what we already are in Christ and what we are to become. The truly Christian reader, unlike the scoffers, will look back to the privileges conferred on him, of partaking in the divine nature, and will seek to live worthily of it. He will also look forward to the day of assessment, and strive to live in the light of it."<sup>1</sup>

The writer just quoted also suggested that the underlying picture is of a victor in the Olympic Games returning to his hometown in triumph.<sup>2</sup>

"... there will be degrees of glory hereafter proportioned to our faithfulness in the use of God's gifts here."<sup>3</sup>

"Here is an intimation that heaven's society will not be classless. Good stewardship of Christ's riches will bear eternal proceeds. The Christian endowed with wealth through Christ's provision,

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<sup>1</sup>Green, pp. 76-77.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 75. See also Wiersbe, 2:440.

<sup>3</sup>B. C. Caffin, "The Second Epistle General of Peter," in *The Pulpit Commentary*, p. 6. Cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10.

invests and saves for future wealth (cf. I Tim 6:9)."<sup>1</sup>

It is remarkable that so many commentators take verse 11 as indicating that entrance into heaven depends on our diligently seeking to grow in grace. Understandably Pelagians (who believe that man does not have a sinful human nature and can, without any help from God, turn from evil to good) and Arminians (who believe that believers can lose their salvation and must therefore remain faithful to be saved) hold this view, but even some Calvinistic interpreters (who believe that salvation is by God's grace through faith alone) have come to this conclusion. This is adding works as a condition for salvation.

### III. THE AUTHORITY FOR THE CHRISTIAN 1:12-21

Perhaps Peter sensed that his readers might resist his teaching that believers must diligently pursue godliness since he proceeded to remind them that his apostolic witness was in line with divine inspiration.

#### A. THE NEED FOR A REMINDER 1:12-15

Peter returned to the subject of God's promises (v. 4). He developed the importance of the Scriptures as the resource of the believer. He did so in order to enable his readers to appreciate their value and to motivate them to draw upon them so that they would grow in grace.

"These verses make it obvious that Peter's primary concern in this epistle is not to refute the false teachers but to ground his readers in personal holiness."<sup>2</sup>

1:12 In view of what he had written to this point ("Therefore"), Peter explained that he realized his previous words were a reminder to his readers, not new instruction. Verses 3 through 11 contain basic Christian life teaching. His readers had heard this previously, but they, like all believers, needed a reminder

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<sup>1</sup>Paine, p. 1458.

<sup>2</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, pp. 63-64.

of it periodically so that they would not forget it (v. 9; cf. Heb. 2:1-4).

"We must not glide lightly over Peter's concern about reminding the readers of already known and familiar truth. The history of the Church as a whole shows how careless the Church can be about clinging to divine revelation. So bad have things become in our own day, that the truth of justification by faith alone and of salvation as a free gift has already been submerged and lost among many evangelicals. The Reformation almost needs to occur again!"<sup>1</sup>

1:13-14 Peter's "earthly dwelling" (lit. tent) was his physical body (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1, 4). The Greek word *apothesis* ("laying aside") means "a divesting," and it refers elsewhere to removing clothes (cf. Acts 7:58). We do not know exactly how Peter knew that someone would soon separate his mortal body from his spirit. Peter's words allow for the possibility of separation by either death or translation (transformation at the Rapture). Both events were "imminent": overhanging. Peter was probably at least in his 50s, if not older, when he wrote 2 Peter, and he may have known that he would die soon as a martyr. The "Lord Jesus Christ" had told Peter that his earthly life would end as a captive of some kind (John 21:18-19). Alford argued that Peter meant that his imminent death would be sudden rather than soon.<sup>2</sup> But "imminent" implies "possibly soon" more than sudden.

J. Sidlow Baxter noted the danger of life without growth, in verses 3 through 8, and the danger of knowledge without practice, in verses 9 through 14.<sup>3</sup>

1:15 Peter wrote this epistle specifically, among other reasons, so that after his death his exhortation that is contained in it would be a permanent reminder to his brethren. It was his testament

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<sup>1</sup>Hodges, "Exposition of ...," 3:1:3.

<sup>2</sup>Alford, 4:2:395. See also Lenski, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup>J. Sidlow, Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 6:311.

(cf. 2 Tim.). Having exhorted his reader to be diligent (vv. 5, 10), Peter claimed that he also would "be diligent" in giving his readers these reminders. Whether Peter realized that God was inspiring this epistle or not, he regarded it as containing very important and helpful information for Christians. We believe that God did inspire it and consequently what Peter said of the value of this letter applies to the rest of Scripture as well. We too need reminders of what God has revealed. Mark's Gospel may also have been in Peter's mind when he wrote this.<sup>1</sup> There is good evidence that Peter's preaching formed the basis of the second Gospel.

"Certainly no document would redeem the apostles' promise so well as a gospel; and if a gospel is meant, the reference can hardly be to any other than that of St. Mark."<sup>2</sup>

#### **B. THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE APOSTLES' WITNESS 1:16-18**

Peter explained that his reminder came from one who was an eyewitness of Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, namely, himself. He did so in order to heighten respect for his words in his readers' minds. This section begins Peter's defense of the faith that the false teachers were attacking, which continues through much of the rest of the letter.

1:16 The apostles had not preached myths ("cleverly devised tales") to their hearers, as the false teachers to whom Peter referred later in this epistle were doing. Probably the false teachers had charged the apostles with using ill-founded myths about rewards and punishment to coerce and control the morality of their audiences.<sup>3</sup> The apostles' testimony rested on historical events that they had observed personally. They had personally observed Jesus' "power" in action during His first coming as God's anointed Messiah. Jesus Christ's "majesty" appeared especially clearly on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8). "Power and coming" are a hendiadys that means "powerful coming," with emphasis on

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<sup>1</sup>Hodges, "Exposition of ...," 3:1:4; Robertson, 6:155.

<sup>2</sup>Bigg, p. 265.

<sup>3</sup>Bauckham, p. 214; J. H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, p. 175; Kraftchick, p. 108.

the fact that Jesus' coming was with power. This is the only explicit mention of the Transfiguration outside the Synoptic Gospels.

1:17-18 The apostles' message was essentially that Jesus was the Christ (i.e., God's promised Messiah; cf. 1 John 5:1). God had revealed this clearly at Jesus' transfiguration when He had announced that Jesus was His beloved Son (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). Peter referred to that event in order to establish the credibility of his witness and that of the other apostles. The terms "honor," "glory," "Majestic Glory," and "holy mountain" all enhance the special event that was the Transfiguration.

"The author is ... pointing out to his readers that the Transfiguration, to which the apostles bore witness, is a basis for the expectation of the Parousia. ... The emphasis of the account is that *God himself* has elected Jesus to be his vicegerent, appointed him to the office and invested him with glory for the task."<sup>1</sup>

### C. THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF SCRIPTURE 1:19-21

Peter proceeded to emphasize that the witness of the apostles, as well as the witness of Scripture, came from God. He did this to help his readers see that their choice for authority boiled down to accepting either God's Word or the word of men, specifically men who disagreed with God's Word (i.e., the false teachers).

"Peter points out the character of the prophetic Word (v. 19a), pictures the present function of biblical prophecy (v. 19b), and stresses the origin of prophecy (vv. 20-21)."<sup>2</sup>

"The reliability of revelation is the idea that links verses 16-18 and verses 19-21."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bauckham, p. 222. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>2</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, "The Prophetic Foundation for the Christian Life: An Exposition of 2 Peter 1:19-21," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:562 (April-June 1984):159.

<sup>3</sup>Moo, p. 75.

1:19 "And" introduces a conclusion that Peter drew. The meaning of the clause "we have the prophetic word made more sure" is not completely obvious. It may mean, on the one hand, that the voice which the three apostles heard at the Transfiguration (vv. 17-18) confirmed the words of the Old Testament prophets concerning the deity of Christ. On the other hand, it may mean that the prophetic Old Testament Scriptures confirm the witness of the apostles (cf. Rom. 15:8). The latter view seems more probable to me, because of the Greek grammar. However many good scholars prefer the former view.<sup>1</sup>

"'More sure' (*bebaioteron*) renders a comparative adjective that is in the predicate position and placed emphatically forward. A literal rendering of this statement is, 'We have more sure the prophetic Word.'"<sup>2</sup>

"You do well" was a common way of saying "please" in the Greek papyri (cf. James 2:3).<sup>3</sup> The papyri are documents written in *koiné* (common) Greek that deal with many everyday non-biblical matters, such as judicial proceedings, tax receipts, marriage contracts, birth and death notices, business dealings, private letters, and a host of others, which date from the New Testament period.

"In this phrase ["in your hearts"] Peter seemed concerned about the inner attitude of those who await the glorious day of Christ's return. The truth that Christ is coming again must first arise in their hearts, like the morning star, giving inner assurance that that day is coming. Assured of His

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Lenski, p. 292; Edwin Blum, "2 Peter," in *Hebrews-Revelation*, vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 274; Gangel, p. 868; Jamieson, et al., p. 1489; J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, pp. 320-21; and Robertson, 6:157.

<sup>2</sup>Hiebert, "The Prophetic ...," p. 159. Cf. Barbieri, p. 105; Green, pp. 86-87; Bigg, pp. 267-69; G. T. C. Frömmel, "The Second Epistle General of Peter," in Lange's *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 12:19-20; and Sidebottom, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup>Sidebottom, p. 111.

impending return, they will be alert to detect the gleams of dawn breaking through the darkness."<sup>1</sup>

"The morning star" in the physical world is the star (actually a planet, usually Venus) that appears late at night, just before dawn, and so announces the arrival of a new day. Just so, Jesus Christ's return at the Rapture will signal the beginning of a new day: the day of the LORD. The day of the LORD, as the Old Testament prophets used it in reference to a far distant day in which God will act dramatically in history, includes the Tribulation and the Millennium.

Peter's point was that in view of the Lord's return, his readers should give attention to the Old Testament and to the apostles' teaching, especially since false teachers were perverting them.<sup>2</sup> That was the only real light available to enlighten them. The alleged light of the false teachers was no light at all.

1:20

Peter wanted to add a word of clarification about Old Testament predictions. "First of all" probably means that what Peter proceeded to say was of first importance. Bible students have recognized that what Peter said about messianic prophecy in particular is true of all prophecy. "Prophecy" is another word for the Word of God, since it is what the Old Testament writers spoke forth, which is the literal meaning of the Greek word *propheteia*, translated "prophecy."

John Lillie discussed several views of the interpretation of "someone's own interpretation" that I have quoted in the following paragraphs:

"A prevailing view is that the reference is to the reader's own efforts to understand written prophecy, that 'one's own interpretation' must not be imposed on a specific prophetic passage. Under this view the problem is the method of

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, "The Prophetic ...," p. 163.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Kelly, p. 321.

interpreting prophecy. Yet Peter does not tell how believers are to interpret prophecy.

"Varied views as to the meaning of 'one's own interpretation' are offered. (1) The believer as a private individual does not have the ability to interpret prophecy but needs ecclesiastical direction.<sup>1</sup> But many scriptural prophecies have been rightly understood by the common reader apart from any ecclesiastical guidance; nor have the views of 'authorized interpreters' always been uniform. (2) A prophecy must not be interpreted in isolation but needs the light of the unfolding fulfillment thereof. While it is true that Christians' understanding of prophecy now is often vague and uncertain, to hold that it cannot be understood till it is fulfilled makes valueless the present lamp of prophecy. (3) Prophetic predictions should not be interpreted in isolation from other Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> It is obvious that each prophecy must be so interpreted as to be consistent with other prophecies; but this does not prove that any individual prophecy in itself is obscure. Peter has just declared that Old Testament prophecy was a shining lamp. And its light is clearer now that Christ has come in His First Advent. (4) It is not the individual but the Holy Spirit who must interpret, as well as inspire, prophecy. This is true, but it does not invalidate or eliminate the human effort to understand. These views do not arise out of the main thought of the context.

"More probable is the view that the statement concerns the origin of prophecy and relates to the prophet himself.<sup>3</sup> This is the view of the New International Version: 'No prophecy of Scripture

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<sup>1</sup>[See also Robertson, 6:159.]

<sup>2</sup>[E.g., Hodges, "The Second ...," 2:1176-77.]

<sup>3</sup>[E.g., *The Nelson ...*, p. 2131.]

comes from the prophet's own interpretation.' The meaning, then, is that no prophecy arose out of the prophet's own solution to the scenes he confronted or his own interpretation of the visions presented to his mind. Calvin remarked that the prophets 'did not blab their inventions of their own accord or according to their own judgments.' [John Calvin, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter," in *Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 343.] The false prophets of Jeremiah's day were charged with doing precisely this (Jer. 23:16-17, 21-22, 25-26; Ezek. 13:3).

"The view that prophecy did not arise 'from one's own interpretation' (ablative case) is supported by the natural meaning of the verb (*ginetai* ["was ... made," had its origin, or came]); it is in harmony with the scriptural picture of prophecy; and it is in accord with the following verse. It is supported by Peter's picture of the prophets in 1 Peter 1:10-12. The prophetic lamp 'was neither fashioned nor lighted by the prophet himself,' and its divine origin offers 'a distinct and powerful motive for taking heed to the prophetic word, and one well fitted to produce a patient and reverent and docile spirit of investigation.'"<sup>1</sup>

1:21 Verse 21 helps to explain what Peter meant by the last clause in verse 20: "no prophecy of Scripture becomes a matter of someone's own interpretation."

What we have in "Scripture" (v. 20) did not originate in the minds of men ("by an act of human will"), but in the mind of God.

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<sup>1</sup>John Lillie, *Lectures on the First and Second Epistles of Peter*, p. 428. Cf. Bigg, p. 270. See also Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, pp. 81-82; Buist M. Fanning, "A Theology of Peter and Jude," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 462-65; and Sigurd Grindheim, "Biblical Authority: What Is It Good For? Why the Apostles Insisted on a High View of Scripture," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59:4 (2016):791-803..

"False teaching flows from the minds of men and women; truth flows from the heart and mind of the living God."<sup>1</sup>

The prophets did not simply give their own views ("interpretation," v. 20) of how things were or would be. They spoke as God's mouthpieces and articulated His thoughts in words that accurately represented those thoughts.

"'Spake' ["spoke"] implies that, both in its original oral announcement, and now even when in writing, it has been always, and is, *the living voice* of God *speaking* to us through His inspired servants."<sup>2</sup>

"The Holy Spirit" "moved" the prophets to do so, just like the wind moves a sailboat (cf. John 3:8). The same Greek verb (*phero*) occurs in Acts 27:15 and 17 to describe that action.

"The Spirit, not human volition, is the originating power in prophecy."<sup>3</sup>

"Thus, the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it."<sup>4</sup>

This passage does not explain specifically how the Holy Spirit did this. However in view of what we find elsewhere in Scripture, we know that He did it without overriding the vocabulary and style of the prophet. In some cases the writers of Scripture used other resource materials (e.g., Josh. 10:13; 1 Kings 14:19; Luke 1:3; et al.). Even though verses 20 and 21 do not describe the method of inspiration in detail, they clearly affirm the basic method and the fact of inspiration.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cedar, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 1489.

<sup>3</sup>Hiebert, "The Prophetic ...," p. 166.

<sup>4</sup>Calvin, 1:7:4.

<sup>5</sup>See Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration," ch. 3 in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp.131-66.

"God" is the Author of Scripture (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16). He guided the writers of Scripture to record His words by His Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

"Peter's statement recognizes both the divine and the human element in the production of Scripture. Any balanced doctrine of the origin of Scripture must recognize both."<sup>2</sup>

In this section of his letter (vv. 12-21) Peter reminded his readers that they had adequate resources for their own spiritual growth in the apostles' teachings and in the Old Testament.

#### IV. THE DANGER TO THE CHRISTIAN CH. 2

"The next two chapters set before us ... the two forms of evil that characterize the last days—the false and corrupt teaching of bad men, and the unbelief which denies the return of the Lord on the ground of the stability of the visible creation."<sup>3</sup>

Peter next warned his readers of the false teachers who presented a message contradictory to that of the apostles. He did this in order to help them avoid their influence. In chapter 1 Peter stressed the importance of building oneself up spiritually. In chapter 2 he described the reason that it is important to be strong. He began by describing the characteristics of false teachers, then the consequences of their teaching, then their conduct, and finally their condemnation. The connecting link with the end of chapter 1 is the allusion to the false prophets of Old Testament times: those prophets who generated their own prophecies but did not receive them from the Holy Spirit (v. 20).

"Only Christ's withering woes on hypocritical leaders in Matthew 23 and the parallel picture in the Epistle of Jude

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<sup>1</sup>See Gordon R. Lewis, "The Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture," in *Inerrancy*, pp. 229-64.

<sup>2</sup>Hiebert, "The Prophetic ...," p. 166.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, 5:476.

convey the same severe denunciation of false teachers contained in this chapter."<sup>1</sup>

This whole chapter gives evidence of being written out of great emotional concern. Peter did not discuss his subject of false teachers in a cool, dispassionate fashion. He kept returning to previous thoughts and adding additional information. Some of his sentences are quite long and involved. His thoughts seem to have been rushing ahead of his ability to state them.

#### A. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FALSE TEACHERS 2:1-3

2:1 "The people" to whom the "false prophets ... appeared" in the past are probably God's people in Old Testament times, the times to which Peter had just been referring (1:19-22). False prophets in Old Testament times sought to lead God's people away from the revelations of the true prophets (cf. Num. 22—24; Jer. 6:13; Ezek. 13:9). "False teachers" in Peter's time would try to lead God's people away from the teaching of the apostles. These men—they were typically males in Peter's day—would arise from among the believers ("you"; cf. Jer. 5:31; 23:9-18; Acts 20:29).

The term "false prophets" (Gr. *pseudoprophetai*) may refer to those who falsely claimed to be prophets of God and/or those who prophesied falsely. Likewise "false teachers" (Gr. *pseudodidaskaloi*) can refer to those who claim to be teachers of God's truth, but whom the churches' leaders do not recognize as teachers, and/or those who teach falsehood. This is the only place that the Greek word *pseudodidaskaloi* ("false teachers") occurs in the New Testament.

Peter's contrast between false prophets in Israel and false teachers in the church may suggest that teachers in the church had replaced prophets in Israel. However other references to prophets and teachers in the New Testament indicate that both were present in the church, and both were present in Israel. The contrast intended, therefore, must not

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<sup>1</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, "A Portrayal of False Teachers: An Exposition of 2 Peter 2:1-3," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:563 (July-September 1984):255.

be between former prophets and present teachers but between the true communicators of God's Word and the false.

In Israel prophets were the more prominent communicators of God's truth, whereas in the early church teachers were. In Peter's audience, Jewish rabbis and other teachers who professed to communicate God's truth posed the greatest threat to the Christians. By comparing false teachers in the church with false prophets in Israel Peter was saying that, just as there were those who misrepresented God in Israel, so there would be those who misrepresent Him in the church.

To "secretly introduce" literally means "to bring in alongside" (other teaching). The heretics would seek to add some other teaching to the orthodox faith, and/or some other teaching as a substitute for the truth (cf. Gal. 2:4). The implication is that they would seek to do this in some underhanded way. They would seek to unobtrusively change the doctrinal foundation of the church with "destructive heresies" and thereby make it unstable. "Heresies" refers to ideas inconsistent with the revealed truth of God.

These men would even go so far as repeatedly or typically "denying" (present participle in Greek) teaching and practices associated with Christ. The inconsistency of their position is that they deny the Person that they profess to submit to as Christians: their "Master" (Gr. *despoten*), the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter himself had denied Jesus three times, so he did not want others to follow his example.

When Jesus Christ died He paid the penalty for everyone's sins and redeemed (purchased, "bought," Gr. *agorasanta*) every human being, even unbelievers (John 3:16; Acts 17:30; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 4:10; Titus 2:11; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2). This verse supports the doctrine of unlimited atonement, which is the view that Jesus Christ died for everyone, not just for those who would believe on Him for salvation. One limited atonement advocate believed that the whole case for unlimited

atonement hangs on this verse.<sup>1</sup> This is an over-simplification since there are many other verses that teach it. Another writer wrote, "... no assertion of universal redemption can be plainer than this."<sup>2</sup>

Peter was not claiming that all the false teachers were Christians. In view of how he described them they appear to have been unbelievers (cf. vv. 4-6, 17). However some believers can become false teachers (2 Tim. 1:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18), and Peter warned that false teachers would arise "among you." Therefore this warning applies to any false teacher, unbeliever or believer. Of course, frequently only the teacher himself knows whether he is an unbeliever or a believer; others cannot tell for sure.

"... New Testament writers sometimes use the language of Christian conversion for such people [non-Christians] on the basis of their appearance."<sup>3</sup>

The destruction of these heretics will be "swift" (Gr. *taximen*, quick) in the sense that when their judgment descends it will be sudden, not that it was about to descend shortly after Peter wrote necessarily. They were saying that the Lord was slow in coming to exercise judgment (3:9). Yet their own judgment would be swift in coming. Their spiritual, rather than their physical destruction, seems to be in view primarily. In the case of Christian false teachers who departed from the truth that they previously embraced, they too brought sudden spiritual ruin on themselves. This ruin would come upon them at Jesus Christ's judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10) if not sooner.

"Ironically, the false teachers incur judgment by teaching that there will be no future judgment and

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<sup>1</sup>Gary D. Long, *Definite Atonement*, p. 68. For an analysis of Long's arguments, see Andrew D. Chang, "Second Peter 2:1 and the Extent of the Atonement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:565 (January-March 1985):52-63.

<sup>2</sup>Alford, 4:2:402. See also Lenski, p. 305.

<sup>3</sup>Moo, p. 154.

thereby leading themselves and others into immorality."<sup>1</sup>

"... 'destruction' for leading others to 'destruction' is inevitable."<sup>2</sup>

"False teachers are better known for what they deny than for what they affirm."<sup>3</sup>

2:2 "Indecent behavior" would accompany their doctrinal error.

"Clearly they permitted and defended immorality in a very broad sense."<sup>4</sup>

When people abandon God's standard of truth they usually adopt a lower standard of morality. Since indecent behavior appeals to the flesh, many people follow the example of heretics, believing that they are correct in doing so based on the rationalizations of their teachers.

"No doctrine, however senseless and monstrous, which under the guise of a religious faith ministers to the sensual appetites of men, will ever want followers."<sup>5</sup>

This type of religion brings great dishonor on the church ("the truth will be maligned") because unbelievers identify the immoral as professing Christians, judge their behavior as hypocritical, and then conclude that the church is full of hypocrites.

2:3 False teachers, "in their greed," typically desire to satisfy themselves rather than God. This leads them to take advantage of their audiences ("exploit you with false words").

"... Peter pointed out that the false teachers used 'feigned words.' The Greek word is *plastos*, from

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<sup>1</sup>Bauckham, p. 241.

<sup>2</sup>Moo, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, 2:447.

<sup>4</sup>Bigg, p. 273.

<sup>5</sup>Lillie, p. 442.

which we get our English word *plastic*. Plastic words! Words that can be twisted to mean anything you want them to mean! The false teachers use our vocabulary, but they do not use our dictionary. They talk about 'salvation,' 'inspiration,' and the great words of the Christian faith, but they do not mean what we mean. Immature and untaught believers hear these preachers or read their books and think that these men are sound in the faith, but they are not."<sup>1</sup>

Many of the cults use biblical words but change their meanings.

"There are also plastic preachers who can be molded and shaped by the people that they serve."<sup>2</sup>

Peter personified the false teachers' judgment and destruction ("their destruction is not asleep"). His point was that God is never late or asleep in executing justice, though He is patient (cf. 3:9).

"We can argue that the danger of false teaching is greater in our day than it has ever been. Why? Because we live in an era that is deeply suspicious of absolute truth."<sup>3</sup>

#### **B. THE CONSEQUENCES OF FALSE TEACHING 2:4-10A**

Having described the characteristics of the false teachers, Peter next described the consequences that follow false teaching in order to help his readers see the importance of avoiding it.

"Verses 4-10a form one long, complex conditional sentence; verses 4-8 form the conditional statement, and verses 9-10a the conclusion. This long sentence skillfully combines the

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 2:447.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 5:732.

<sup>3</sup>Moo, p. 97.

different aspects involved in God's judicial dealings with mankind."<sup>1</sup>

"Now Peter will give us three examples of apostates in the past. His first example is of the angels who sinned (v. 4), and it is an example of how the *Devil* works. His second example is that of the world of Noah's day (v. 5), and it is the example of the *world*. The third example (v. 6) is the turning of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, and that is the example of the *flesh*."<sup>2</sup>

2:4 We could translate the "ifs" in verses 4, 6, and 7 as "sinces." Each one is a first class condition in Greek. A first class condition assumes for the sake of the argument that what the writer wrote is true. In this case each statement describes a situation that is indeed true to reality.

"Angels" are in many respects superior to humans, yet God judged even some of them for sinning by consigning them to *tartarosas* ("hell"). This is the only reference to Tartarus in the Bible. This term evidently originated in Greek mythology.<sup>3</sup>

"'Tartarus' was the name for the lowest part of the underworld where, according to classical Greek mythology, Zeus imprisoned the Titans after they were defeated in war."<sup>4</sup>

This is probably the same angelic rebellion to which Jude referred (Jude 6). Tartarus is evidently a holding place of "darkness" and bondage.<sup>5</sup> Another view is that the reference to Tartarus is metaphorical and indicates a limitation on the sphere of influence that God imposed on these angels who fell, rather than a literal place where they currently reside.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 5:734. An apostate is a person who renounces a belief or principle.

<sup>3</sup>Strachan, 5:135; Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 97.

<sup>4</sup>Kraftchick, p. 126.

<sup>5</sup>Gangel, p. 870.

<sup>6</sup>Moo, pp. 102-3.

God will send these rebel angels from Tartarus to the Lake of Fire, which is their terminal place of punishment, after He pronounces their final judgment (cf. Matt. 25:41). These angels appear to be those that rebelled with Satan. However, since they are in bondage now ("held"), they are evidently not the demons that assist Satan in his work on earth now. "Chains" (Gr. *seirais*) has slightly better textual support than "pits" (Gr. *seirois*; cf. Jude 6). We should probably not equate these angels with the sons of God that Moses wrote about in Genesis 6:1 through 4, as some expositors have done.<sup>1</sup>

"It is implied that fallen angels and unrighteous men alike undergo temporary punishment until the day of their final doom, *cf.* ver. 9."<sup>2</sup>

2:5 Peter's second example was the sinners in Noah's day. God "did not spare" the sinners in "the ancient world" of Noah's day either. Consequently there is no basis for supposing that He will spare any sinner in the world today. Both types of sinners (rebellious angels and people) are "ungodly." Peter called "Noah" "a preacher [herald] of righteousness" here (cf. 1 Pet. 3:19). By his words and deeds Noah proclaimed righteousness to his ungodly neighbors. By referring to "seven others" whom God saved with Noah (i.e., his family members) Peter was probably hinting that he was the beginning of a new creation.<sup>3</sup>

"The reason for this stress is perhaps to be found in the eschatological symbolism of the number eight, which represented an eighth day of new creation, following the seven days of the old creation's history (cf. *2 Enoch* 33:1-2; *Barn.* 15:9). Early Christians associated this symbolism with Sunday, the 'eighth day' (*Barn.* 15:9; Justin, *Dial.* 24.1: 41.4; 138.1). Sunday was the eighth day because it was the day of Christ's resurrection in

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Annotated Bible*, 4:2:111. See my comments on 1 Peter 3:19-20, and Lenski, pp. 309-10.

<sup>2</sup>Strachan, 5:135.

<sup>3</sup>See Kraftchick, p. 128.

which the new creation was begun ... Noah, preserved from the old world to be the beginning of the new world after the Flood, is a type of faithful Christians who will be preserved from the present world to inherit the new world after the judgment."<sup>1</sup>

Many Bible students believe that the pattern of Noah's deliverance before the Flood prefigures the pretribulation Rapture of Christians. While it does, Peter did not make this comparison.

2:6 Peter's third example was the people of "Sodom and Gomorrah." God first demonstrated that He would judge ungodly sinners with fire when He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. "The ungodly" from then on should not expect to escape the same fate. They too will be subject to fiery judgment. God delivered Lot and his family before He brought fiery judgment on his world (cf. the pretribulation rapture; 1 Thess. 5:9-10).

"Undoubtedly the author sees the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire as a pattern for the fiery judgment of the ungodly at the Parousia (3:7)."<sup>2</sup>

"It has well been said that if God spares today's cities from judgment, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah."<sup>3</sup>

All three of Peter's examples (vv. 4-6) deal with unbelievers. These were the primary focus of Peter's warning. If there were some believers among the false teachers, Peter undoubtedly intended that they should take these warnings to heart even though they would not suffer the same eternal judgment as unbelievers.

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<sup>1</sup>Bauckham, p. 250. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, 2:451.

2:7-9 The reminder of "Lot" shows that God will not only punish the wicked but will at the same time rescue the godly from the judgment that He sends on the ungodly. This example, as well as the example of Noah (v. 5), assured Peter's faithful readers that God would not lose them in the mass of sinners whom He would judge. The destruction of Jerusalem was going to destroy the unbelieving Jews living there in A.D. 70.<sup>1</sup> However, the primary warning deals with eschatological deliverance and punishment at the return of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Another view is that the trials in view are all those challenges to faith that Christians experience in this world.<sup>3</sup>

Of course many righteous people have died along with the ungodly in what have appeared to be God's judgments. One example of this is the faithful remnant in Israel who died in the wars that resulted in Israel's and Judah's captivities. Note that Peter said that God is able (He "knows how to" and has the power to) "rescue the godly" (v. 9) He did not say that He would do so in every case. This is still a basis for comfort in that, if the will of God is such, the righteous will not suffer with the wicked. In the end God will separate these two groups eternally, and no righteous person will suffer eternal judgment (cf. Matt. 13:30).

Had Peter not told us that Lot was a "righteous" man we might have concluded otherwise. Lot's righteousness strengthens Peter's illustration.

"'Righteous' is a relative term; and in this case we must look at Lot both in comparison with the defective morality of the age and also with the licentiousness of those with whom he is here contrasted. Moreover, in the midst of this

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<sup>1</sup>See J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Apostles' Use of Jesus' Predictions of Judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup>Bauckham, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup>Moo, p. 106.

corruption he preserves some of the brighter features of his purer nomad life."<sup>1</sup>

"Lot ... is the father of all those men whose righteous souls are vexed with the life they are leading, but who keep on enduring the vexation."<sup>2</sup>

We cannot always tell who the righteous are, but God knows (cf. Matt. 13:24-30). How a person behaves may be misleading. Not only may some unbelievers appear to be Christians, but some believers, such as Lot, appear to be unsaved. If every genuine believer gives evidence of his salvation by his good works, as some theologians assert, then Lot was the exception to the rule. It seems more likely that Lot was what the New Testament calls a "carnal" believer.

"It is possible for a Christian to live close to sin, but he may barely escape with his life."<sup>3</sup>

2:10a Here is another indication that the false teachers that Peter warned about indulged their fleshly passions (v. 2). To do so they had to despise the "authority" of the apostles, the teaching of their Bibles, and God. However Peter's reference to authority is probably a general one, indicating the principle of authority.<sup>4</sup>

"Those who subject themselves to the flesh cannot be subject to the Lord."<sup>5</sup>

"False teaching and false behaviour ultimately always produce suffering and disaster, be it in Lot's day, in Peter's, or in our own."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Plummer, "The Second Epistle General of Peter," in *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 8:453.

<sup>2</sup>Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, p. 87.

<sup>3</sup>Barbieri, p. 111.

<sup>4</sup>Moo, p. 108.

<sup>5</sup>Bauckham, p. 255. Cf. Matt. 6:24.

<sup>6</sup>Green, p. 100. See also James E. Allman, "Suffering in the Non-Pauline Epistles," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and Church*, pp. 198, 201, 204-5.

"The main idea in these verses comes across clearly: God judges those who obstinately disregard his commands while he protects those who stay faithful to him."<sup>1</sup>

### C. THE CONDUCT OF FALSE TEACHERS 2:10B-19

Peter next emphasized the conduct of false teachers in order to motivate his readers to turn away from them.

"The fact that the author devotes over one third of his letter to their denunciation underscores the depth of his disdain."<sup>2</sup>

2:10b "Reckless" means bold to the point of being presumptuous, and "self-centered" means arrogant.

"They are concerned about doing their own thing as opposed to doing God's will. Their theme song is 'I Did It My Way!'"<sup>3</sup>

"Angelic majesties" is literally angelic "glories" (Gr. *doxas*). "Angelic" has been added by the translators. The Greek text has only "glories" ("majesties"). This is undoubtedly a reference to the "angels" (cf. v. 11).

2:11 Even though "angels" are "greater in might and power" than human beings, they "do not bring a demeaning judgment against them before the Lord." Who is the "them" in view here? Some commentators believed that they are angels,<sup>4</sup> or, more particularly, evil angels.<sup>5</sup> But the antecedent of "them" is "the unrighteous" (v. 9), specifically, the false teachers.<sup>6</sup> The behavior of the false teachers was totally inappropriate.

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<sup>1</sup>Moo, p. 108. See also his helpful discussion of how and to what extent books that are not in the Bible influenced what the New Testament writers believed and wrote (pp. 108-13).

<sup>2</sup>Kraftchick, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup>Cedar, p. 222.

<sup>4</sup>Barbieri, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup>Kelly, p. 338; Moo, p. 121; Bauckham, p. 261; Kraftchick, p. 136; Blum, p.280; Gangel, p. 872; Jamieson, et al., p. 1490; Paine, p. 1460.

<sup>6</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter* ..., pp.112-13; Lenski, pp. 319-20; Wiersbe, 2:452; Henry, p. 1951.

"The angels are reviled by the apostates, but the apostates are not reviled by the angels!"<sup>1</sup>

Even though Satan (and presumably his angels) accuse the righteous before God (Job 1—2), angels evidently do not accuse the unrighteous before God but leave their judgment to Him.

"Let us imitate the angels. If we complain of wicked men, let it be to God, and that not with rage and reviling, but with compassion, that may evidence that we belong to him who is meek and merciful."<sup>2</sup>

2:12 Rather than behaving like angels do, the false teachers that Peter warned is readers about ("these") would act like "unreasoning animals." They would follow their lower instincts, their natural desires, instead of their reasons. Animals live mainly by "instinct." Peter therefore implied that the false teachers deserved treatment similar to animals ("be captured and killed"). The last clause ("will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed") involves a play on words in Greek. The idea is that they will perish like beasts since they behaved like beasts (cf. Jude 10). Peter did not mean that they would escape eternal condemnation, as animals will.

"According to ancient thought, wild animals were in the world in order to be 'captured and killed.' The teachers have a similarly predetermined destiny."<sup>3</sup>

"As animals are trapped through their eagerness to satisfy their appetite, so self-indulgence betrays these men to their ruin."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 2:452.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, p. 1951.

<sup>3</sup>Kraftchick, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup>W. H. Bennett, "The General Epistles, James, Peter, John, and Jude," in *The Century Bible: A Modern Commentary*, p. 274.

2:13 God will give them punishment in keeping with their crimes (Rom. 6:23; Gal. 6:7). Rather than concealing their carousing under the cover of darkness, they shamelessly practice immorality in broad daylight. The pagans did this in their worship of false gods. Pagan worship often involved sexual prostitution.

These ungodly practices were similar to "stains" on the clean fabric of the church and "blemishes" on its countenance (reputation), since the practitioners evidently professed to be Christians ("they feast with you"; cf. Eph. 5:27). The faithful Christians did not carouse. The false teachers did the carousing, but they did it as members of the Christian community. Peter could say that they reveled "in their deceptions" since they extravagantly practiced immoral carousing while claiming to be followers of Christ.

"Like the blemishes on an animal not fit for sacrifice (Lev 1:3) or on a man not fit for priestly service (Lev 21:21), these immoral people were frustrating the church's aim of holiness and could make the church unfit to be presented as a sacrifice to God."<sup>1</sup>

2:14 The person who has "eyes full of adultery" is one who thinks only of sexual immorality when he or she sees members of the opposite (or the same) sex (cf. Matt. 5:28). The false teachers sinned without restraint. Furthermore they lured people not firmly committed to Jesus Christ to join them, like a fisherman lures his prey. Baxter considered Peter's use of the Greek word translated "enticing" here, and in verse 18 (*deleazovtes*): "a relic from Peter's fishing days."<sup>2</sup>

These false teachers had considerable experience lusting and practicing greed, always angling for more wealth, power, and illicit pleasures. They were experts in feeding their "greed."

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<sup>1</sup>Bauckham, pp. 265-66.

<sup>2</sup>Baxter, 6:312.

They behaved like undisciplined and self-centered "children" and were under God's judgment ("accursed").

- 2:15 The false prophet "Balaam" counseled Balak, the king of Moab, to invite the Israelites to participate with his people in a feast to honor Moab's gods (Num. 31:16). The best textual evidence suggests that Peter wrote, "Balaam, the son of Bosor," Bosor being a play on the Hebrew word *basar*, "flesh." Thus Peter indicated Balaam's immoral character by calling him the son of flesh.<sup>1</sup> The Moabite worship included cultic prostitution (prostitution being a part of the worship of their god; cf. Num. 25:1-3). Balaam is "the classic example of the false teacher who leads people astray for his own personal gain."<sup>2</sup>

The false teachers that Peter referred to were likewise trying to get the Christians to participate in idolatry and immoral practices. Forsaking "the right way" themselves ("they have gone astray"), they urged the faithful to turn away from the narrow path of righteousness back onto the broad way that leads to destruction (cf. Isa. 53:6; Rev. 2:14). Balaam's motive was greed. He "loved the reward of unrighteousness," namely, "the earthly gain to be gotten by 'unrighteousness'"<sup>3</sup> This was also the motive of the false teachers. By advocating "unrighteousness" the false teachers gained followers and profited personally.

- 2:16 Whenever a person rejects God's Word and His will, he or she begins to act irrationally, because God's Word reveals true reality. Eventually right becomes wrong, and wrong becomes right for him or her. That is what happened to Balaam. He became so insensitive that God had to use "a mute donkey" to rebuke him. The ancients regarded animals as mute because they did not speak human language.<sup>4</sup> That donkey (a

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<sup>1</sup>Bauckham, pp. 267-68.

<sup>2</sup>David H. Wheaton, "2 Peter," in *The New Bible Commentary, Revised*, p. 1256. Cf. McGee, 5:740; and Charles H. Savelle, "Canonical and Extra canonical Portraits of Balaam," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:664 (October-December 2009):387-404.

<sup>3</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 1491. Italics omitted.

<sup>4</sup>Bauckham, p. 268.

proverbially obstinate animal) "restrained" the prophet's madness ("insanity") and was wiser than Balaam (cf. Jude 11).

"It is sufficient to say to one who believes at all in miracles, that it was no more difficult for God to utter thought through the mouth of the ass in the words of men, than to stop men, as he once did, from talking in a given language and cause them to talk in another."<sup>1</sup>

2:17 Like the dry "springs" and cloudy "mists" that Peter described, the false teachers failed to deliver what they promised.

"Heterodoxy is all very novel in the classroom; it is extremely unsatisfying in the parish."<sup>2</sup>

These teachers were hypocrites (cf. Jude 12). They would spend eternity in "the black darkness" that symbolizes separation from Him who is the Light (cf. Matt. 25:30; 1 John 1:6; Jude 13). The reason is that they turned from the light of God (1 John 1:5). It seems clear from what Peter said about the final destination of these false teachers that at least some of them were unbelievers.

Elsewhere another figure of the final destiny of the lost is the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14-15). Since fire also gives light, we should probably understand both figures, darkness and fire, to represent two aspects of eternal judgment, namely, separation from God and torment. The figures do not contradict each other if understood this way.

2:18 The false teachers appealed to their audiences with "arrogant" (lit. "swollen") words promising more than they could deliver. Their appeal was to "fleshly desires" and "indecent behavior."

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<sup>1</sup>Nathaniel M. Williams, "Commentary on the Epistles of Peter," in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 114.

"Grandiose sophistry is the hook, filthy lust is the bait, with which these men catch those whom the Lord had delivered or was delivering."<sup>1</sup>

"It is unlikely that the false teachers told their listeners to indulge in carnal passions. The teachers more probably were confusing their listeners about what moral conduct was appropriate to Christian believers. The author has cast their teaching in the most negative terms in order to distinguish clearly between the moral conduct of the believing community and the behavior of the outside world. But the fact that he was attempting to do so shows how unclear this distinction had actually been."<sup>2</sup>

The false teachers appealed to people who were "barely" escaping from those "who live in error." This group probably included new Christians and/or older carnal ones who were still in the process of making a final break with their pagan past.<sup>3</sup>

"The average person does not know how to listen to and analyze the kind of propaganda that pours out of the mouths and printing presses of the apostates. Many people cannot tell the difference between a religious huckster and a sincere servant of Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup>

2:19 By "promising ... freedom" from eschatological judgment to their hearers, "while they themselves" were the "slaves of corruption," the false teachers were "... like a 300-pound man selling diet books."<sup>5</sup> Slavery, after all, occurs whenever one is under the control of some influence, not just some other person.

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<sup>1</sup>Bigg, p. 285.

<sup>2</sup>Kraftchick, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup>Kelly, p. 345; Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 126.

<sup>4</sup>Wiersbe, 2:458.

<sup>5</sup>Gangel, p. 873.

"The false teachers reveal the futility of their promise of freedom from moral requirements by living lives enslaved to immorality themselves."<sup>1</sup>

"Seneca [the Greek Stoic philosopher] said, 'To be enslaved to oneself is the heaviest of all servitudes.'"<sup>2</sup>

"Just as a gifted musician finds freedom and fulfillment putting himself or herself under the discipline of a great artist, or an athlete under the discipline of a great coach, so the believer finds true freedom and fulfillment under the authority of Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

#### D. THE CONDEMNATION OF FALSE TEACHERS 2:20-22

Next Peter focused his discussion on the false teachers' final doom in order to warn his readers of the serious results of following their instruction.

2:20 To whom does "they" refer? Some interpreters believe the antecedent is the new Christians that Peter mentioned at the end of verse 18.<sup>4</sup> Others think that they are the unstable unsaved people who were listening to the gospel.<sup>5</sup> Still others believe that they are more mature Christians who have fallen into false teaching and sinful practices.<sup>6</sup> Many of the commentators have concluded, however, that they are the false teachers who have been the main subject of Peter's warning throughout this chapter and in the immediately preceding verses (vv. 18-19). What Peter said of them in verses 20 through 22 seems to bear this out.

"If the allusions in vv. 20-22 are to recent converts whom they lead astray, the description

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<sup>1</sup>Moo, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup>William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, p. 396.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, 2:454.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Duane A. Dunham, "An Exegetical Study of 2 Peter 2:18-22," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:557 (January-March 1983):40-54.

<sup>5</sup>Gangel, p. 874.

<sup>6</sup>Hodges, "The Second ...," 2:1182.

of hopelessness and ruin seems almost incredible. In the case of the teachers ... such a description of utter ruin is entirely appropriate."<sup>1</sup>

How could Peter say the false teachers had "escaped the defilements of the world by the [full] knowledge [Gr. *epignosei*] of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"? One answer is that they did not. In this view Peter's "if" introduces a hypothetical possibility that is not possible. However his other uses of "if" in this chapter (vv. 4, 6, and 7) all introduce situations that really took place. The situation he described in verse 20 seems to be a real situation too.

Another answer is that Peter was referring to false teachers who were Christians.<sup>2</sup> But Peter's other descriptions of the false teachers in this epistle, especially in chapter 2, seem to portray unbelievers. It seems very unlikely that now, at the climax of his exhortation, he would focus on the few false teachers that might have been genuine Christians.

I think it is more likely that the false teachers in view here, as in the rest of the chapter, were unsaved.<sup>3</sup> They had evidently heard the gospel preached and had fully understood the apostles' teaching that Jesus Christ was both Lord and Savior. But they had rejected it. They had "escaped the defilements of the world" in the sense that they had understood the gospel, acceptance of which liberates the sinner. In other words, the gospel is the key to escape. Their escape was possible because they had heard the gospel. To illustrate, suppose I have the cure for cancer in a pill, and you have cancer. If I give you the pill, one could say that you have escaped your disease—even though you choose not to swallow the pill.

The false teachers had thrown their key to deliverance away—they had rejected the gospel—and had thereby become "entangled" and "overcome" again by "the defilements of the

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup>Alford, 4:2:411; *The Nelson ...*, pp. 2134-35.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Gaebelein, 4:2:113-14; Blum, p. 282.

world" (cf. v. 19b). Their "first" state was eternal damnation without having heard the gospel, but their "last state" was worse: eternal damnation having rejected the gospel. Greater privilege results in greater responsibility—and greater punishment if one rejects the privilege (cf. Matt. 12:45). Scripture teaches degrees of punishment as well as differences in rewards (cf. v. 21; Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 16:24; 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7).

If new Christians are in view here, their earlier worldly life contrasts with their later worldly life under God's discipline. It is then their condition in this mortal life, and at the judgment seat of Christ, that is in view, not their eternal damnation.<sup>1</sup> If more experienced Christians are in view, their earlier godly life contrasts with their later worldly life.

Those who believe that loss of salvation is what Peter was talking about, in this verse and in verses 21 and 22, have to deal with an insuperable problem. The problem is that such an interpretation makes Scripture contradict Scripture (cf. John 3:16; 5:24; 10:28-29; et al.).

"This passage [2:20-22] is often quoted to prove the 'possibility of falling from grace, and from a very high degree of it too.' But it is one of the last passages in the Bible that should be addressed to prove that doctrine. The true point of this passage is to show that the persons referred to never were changed; that whatever external reformation might have occurred, their nature remained the same; and that when they apostatized from their outward profession, they merely acted out their nature, and showed in fact there had been no real change."<sup>2</sup>

2:21 "Them" seems to continue to refer to the unsaved false teachers. However this verse also makes sense if "them" refers

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<sup>1</sup>Dillow, p. 468.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, p. 1454.

to misled Christians. This verse amplifies the last statement in verse 20.

"It would have been better" for the false teachers never to have gained full knowledge of God's commandment regarding holy behavior (the "way of righteousness") than having gained it to reject it. Turning from the light results in going into greater darkness (cf. Matt. 12:43-45). Even for a believer, more light brings more responsibility and consequently more severe judgment (cf. James 3:1).<sup>1</sup>

"Ignorance can be a very bad thing, but disobedience is always worse."<sup>2</sup>

2:22 Peter compared the false teachers to unclean dogs and pigs (cf. Matt. 7:6; Prov. 26:11). Conduct betrays nature, generally speaking. Dogs return to corruption that comes from within them: "vomit." Pigs return to filth that they find outside themselves ("mire"), even though their handlers may clean them up occasionally.<sup>3</sup> This second analogy may come from the old Syrian story of Ahikar.<sup>4</sup> The false teachers in view do both things.

"The sense is, not that the creature has washed itself clean in water ... still less that it has been washed clean ... and then returns to the mud; but that having once bathed in filth it never ceases to delight in it."<sup>5</sup>

"Instead of being sheep, they were pigs and dogs ..."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Green, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup>J. Nieboer, *Practical Exposition of 2 Peter Verse by Verse*, p. 193.

<sup>3</sup>See McGee, 5:741-44, for his "parable of the prodigal pig."

<sup>4</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 2135.

<sup>5</sup>Bigg, p. 287.

<sup>6</sup>Wiersbe, 2:460.

Peter's statement about the false teachers in this verse is his most derogatory description of them, and it brings his warning to avoid these heretics to its climax.

"When easy-going kindness lounges in the place of righteous indignation, and allows Christ-dishonouring false doctrine to play havoc inside the Church, kindness has ceased to be Christian, it has become disguised disloyalty, camouflaged cowardice, or a moral wasting-disease."<sup>1</sup>

Peter's primary concern was the characteristics, consequences, conduct, and condemnation of false teachers, not their condition (saved or unsaved). He could have said: These teachers are unsaved. Most of the false teachers in view seem to be non-Christians, but Christians have become false teachers too (e.g., cultists). In reading chapter 2, I believe that we should concentrate on what Peter stressed in evaluating the false teachers rather than focusing mainly on their saved or lost condition. Ask: Is what this teacher is saying contrary to Scripture? rather than: Is he or she unsaved?

One writer argued that, "Gnosticism, in whatever stage or form, had little or nothing to do with these communities."<sup>2</sup> However another scholar wrote that he saw some Gnostic influence.<sup>3</sup> Gnosticism exercised its major influence on Christianity in the second century. Gnostics were an elitist group that believed they only they had higher knowledge.

## V. THE PROSPECT FOR THE CHRISTIAN 3:1-16

Peter turned from a negative warning against false teachers to make a positive declaration of the apostles' message in order to help his readers understand why he wrote this letter. His language had been strong and confrontational, but now he spoke with love and encouragement in gentle and endearing terms.

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, 6:312.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Desjardins, "The Portrayal of the Dissidents in 2 Peter and Jude: Does It Tell Us More About the 'Godly' Than the 'Ungodly'?" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30 (June 1987):95.

<sup>3</sup>Kelly, pp. 338 and 349.

"While in chapter 2 the writer delivered a fervid denunciation of the false teachers and their immorality, in this section he renews his pastoral concern to fortify his readers in regard to another aspect of the danger facing them, namely, the heretical denial of Christ's return."<sup>1</sup>

"In the third chapter Peter refutes the mockers' denial of Christ's return (vv. 1-7), presents the correct view concerning Christ's return (vv. 8-13), and concludes with timely exhortations to his readers in view of the dark and dangerous days facing them (vv. 14-18)."<sup>2</sup>

"False teaching which denies the power of Christ issues in false thinking which denies the Coming of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

I like to think of the Book of 2 Peter as a bologna sandwich. Chapters 1 and 3 are the bread, the positive pastoral exhortations, and the middle chapter, 2, is the bologna (i.e., baloney) of the false teachers.

#### A. THE PURPOSE OF THIS EPISTLE 3:1-2

3:1 Peter's first letter was most likely 1 Peter. Of course Peter may have written many epistles, so we cannot be sure that 1 Peter is in view.<sup>4</sup> Lenski believed that Peter's first letter has been lost and that Peter wrote 2 Peter before 1 Peter:

"These two epistles [1 and 2 Peter] are not addressed to the same readers, are not the same kind of a reminder of the prophecies of the Parousia."<sup>5</sup>

The apostle implied that he wrote this present ("second") letter soon after the earlier one. This second epistle, he said, went to the same audience in northern Asia Minor (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1), which was primarily Gentile but also Jewish Christians. His

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup>Idem, "Directives for Living in Dangerous Days," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:564 (October-December 1984):330-31.

<sup>3</sup>Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 526.

<sup>4</sup>Bigg, p. 289.

<sup>5</sup>Lenski, p. 336. See also pp. 237-42.

purpose in writing the second letter was to refresh his readers' memories (cf. 1:13). "Sincere" means unflawed by evil. Peter gave his readers credit for not yet having embraced the teaching of the heretics.

"An effective antidote to false doctrine is to recall and dwell on the teaching already perceived."<sup>1</sup>

"The English 'sincere' is from the Latin words *sine cera*, 'without wax.' Some pottery salesmen would use wax to cover cracks and weak places in pottery. Such a cover-up could be detected only by holding the jug up to the sun to see if any weaknesses were visible. Such a vase was 'sun-judged' (the lit. meaning of the Gr. *eilikrines*). God wants His people to have sun-judged minds, not those in which their sin spots have been covered over."<sup>2</sup>

3:2 Again Peter put the teaching of the "apostles," which these men received from Jesus Christ, on a level of authority equal with the writings of the Old Testament "prophets" (cf. 1:12-21; 3:16; Acts 1:16; Rom. 9:29; Heb. 4:7).

"The 'commandment' is used here in the same way as in 2:21 ... it emphasizes the ethical aspect of the Christian message because it is on this, along with the eschatological expectation, that the author wishes to insist, in opposition to the false teachers."<sup>3</sup>

### **B. SCOFFING IN THE LAST DAYS 3:3-6**

Peter warned his readers about the activity of mockers that would deny the Lord's return in order to enable them to deal with this test of their faith.

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew McNab, "The General Epistles of Peter," in *The New Bible Commentary*, p. 1149.

<sup>2</sup>Gangel, p. 875.

<sup>3</sup>Bauckham, p. 288.

"Peter finally brings together two of the most important issues in the letter: the false teachers' skepticism about the return of Christ in glory (see 1:16-21) and their disdain for holiness (chap. 2)."<sup>1</sup>

3:3 "First of all" means of primary importance (cf. 1:20). "The last days" that Peter referred to here are the days before Jesus Christ's return. This is the same way that other writers of Scripture used the phrase "last days" (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 1 John 2:18-19). What the "mockers" would be mocking follows in verse 4. Here the emphasis is on their attitude of intellectual superiority compared to humble submission to biblical revelation. This attitude led them to immoral conduct ("following after their own lusts").

"A scoffer is someone who treats lightly that which ought to be taken seriously."<sup>2</sup>

"The adversaries who denied the Parousia were themselves a proof of its imminence."<sup>3</sup>

3:4 One could hardly find a better summary anywhere of the philosophy of naturalism, which so thoroughly permeates contemporary western civilization, than what this verse contains. Peter referred to the mockers' denial of supernaturalism and their assertion of uniformitarianism. In particular, the scoffers denied "the promise of" the Lord Jesus that He would return ("His coming"; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; et al.). They assumed that God does not intervene in the world.

"Presumptuous skepticism and lawless lust, setting nature and its so-called laws above the God of nature and revelation, and arguing from the past continuity of nature's phenomena that there can be no future interruption to them, was the sin of the antediluvians [the people who lived before

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<sup>1</sup>Moo, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, 2:463.

<sup>3</sup>T. Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society: A Study of 2 Peter*, p. 61.

the Flood], and shall be that of the scoffers in the last days."<sup>1</sup>

"Those who give way to their own lusts will always mock at any incentive to noble living."<sup>2</sup>

"The fathers" that Peter mentioned are probably physical forefathers, more likely the Old Testament patriarchs, rather than the first generation of Christians. This is the normal use of the word in the New Testament.

Peter proceeded to answer the second statement in this verse in verses 5 through 7, and then he responded to the first statement of verse 4, the scoffers' rhetorical question, in verses 8 through 10. So this section has a somewhat chiasmic structure.<sup>3</sup>

3:5 The verbal form of the Greek word translated "escapes" (*lanthano*) means "to be hidden from." The implication is that God hid the truth from these scoffers. Having rejected biblical revelation, God hid truth from them. Whenever a person rejects biblical revelation it becomes harder for him or her to see the truth.

Peter cited two events in the creation of the cosmos that show that things have not always been as they are. God did intervene in the world in the past. When God spoke the universe came into existence ("by the word of God"; Gen. 1:6-8; cf. Heb. 11:3). God spoke again and the dry land separated from the waters (Gen. 1:9-10). Thus God used "water" to form the dry land ("the earth was formed out of water and by water"). God brought the whole universe into existence by His "word," and He also brought planet earth into existence "by water." Peter proceeded to say that He also used both means to destroy it (in Noah's day, v. 6), and He will use two means to destroy it in the future: His word and fire (v. 7).

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 1492.

<sup>2</sup>Wheaton, p. 1257.

<sup>3</sup>A chiasmus is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form.

"St. Peter says nothing that a simple Jew could not have gathered from his own reading of Genesis."<sup>1</sup>

3:6 The flood in Noah's day was Peter's third example of God's intervention in history. God spoke again and "the world" flooded. "Through which" (a plural relative pronoun in Greek, *di on*) probably refers to the Word of God and water (v. 5).

"... the author apparently takes the account of the Flood to imply a complete destruction of the created world by water [as opposed to a local flood or to the destruction of human beings only]."<sup>2</sup>

"... in 3:6 his [Peter's] emphasis is on the Flood as a universal judgment on sinful men and women. But he evidently conceives this judgment as having been executed by means of a cosmic catastrophe which affected the heavens as well as the earth."<sup>3</sup>

This catastrophe involved the opening up of the heavens and the earth to deluge the earth with rain (Gen. 7:11-12). Peter spoke of world history in three periods divided by two cataclysms: the world before the Flood (v. 6), the present world (v. 7), and the future world (v. 13).

### C. END-TIME EVENTS 3:7-10

Peter next outlined what will surely happen so that his readers would understand what will take place and would respond appropriately.

3:7 God has given orders that "the present heavens and earth" (vv. 5-6) will experience another judgment yet future. Then God will, "by His word," destroy them by "fire" rather than by water (cf. vv. 10, 12). This will evidently take place after the

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<sup>1</sup>Bigg, p. 293.

<sup>2</sup>Sidebottom, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup>Bauckham, p. 299.

Great White Throne judgment and before the creation of the new heavens and new earth (cf. Rev. 20:11-15; 21:1).<sup>1</sup> The world is presently "reserved for fire" in the sense that this is its inevitable destiny (cf. Deut. 32:22; Isa. 34:4 LXX; 66:15-16; Zeph. 1:18; Mal. 4:1).<sup>2</sup>

3:8 Again Peter reminded his Christian readers ("beloved") to remember what they had learned previously (v. 1) and not to forget it, like the scoffers did (v. 5). As far as God's faithfulness to His promises is concerned, it does not matter if He gave His promise yesterday or "a thousand years" ago. He will still remain faithful and will fulfill every promise (cf. Ps. 90:4). The passage of a thousand years should not lead us to conclude that God will not fulfill what He has promised. The passing of time does not cause God to forget His promises.

C. S. Lewis was right when he wrote that Aslan, the lion (who represents Christ in *The Chronicles of Narnia*), said to Lucy:

"Do not look so sad. We shall meet soon again.'  
Please, Aslan,' said Lucy, 'what do you call soon?'  
'I call all times soon,' said Aslan ..."<sup>3</sup>

By saying that with the Lord "one day is like a thousand years" Peter was not meaning that the day of judgment will last 1,000 years. This would contribute nothing to Peter's argument against the scoffers. Neither does this statement mean that God operates in a timeless state. Time is simply the way He and we measure the relationship of events to one another. The idea of a timeless existence is Platonic, not biblical. God's relationship to time is different from ours since He is eternal, but this does not mean that eternity will be timeless. Eternity is endless time. The common biblical phrase "forever and ever" is another way of saying "time without end."

"Peter did not say that to God 'one day *is* a thousand years, and a thousand years *are* one

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<sup>1</sup>See Gangel, p. 876.

<sup>2</sup>LXX refers to the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Old Testament that was made in the third century B.C.

<sup>3</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Book 5, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, p. 174.

day.' The point is not that time has no meaning for God but rather that His use of time is such that we cannot confine Him to our time schedules. His use of time is extensive, so that He may use a thousand years to do what we might feel should be done in a day, as well as intensive, doing in a day what we might feel could only be done in a thousand years."<sup>1</sup>

This statement does not negate the hope of the imminent return of the Lord either. Peter, like the other New Testament writers, spoke as though his readers might be alive at His return (1:19; 3:14). This was an indisputable hope of the early Christians.<sup>2</sup>

3:9 The fact that the fulfillment of the Lord Jesus' "promise" to return for His own (John 14:2-3) has not yet come to pass does not mean that God has forgotten His promise, was lying, or cannot fulfill it. "The Lord" seems to be a reference to Jesus Christ (cf. 3:15). "Is patient toward you" means that He is waiting to fulfill His promise—so that people will have time to repent. Unbelievers left on the earth will be able to repent after the Rapture, but it is better for them if they do so before that event. Multitudes will be saved during the seven-year Tribulation (Rev. 7:14), though it will be harder for them to be saved then than it is now (2 Thess. 2:11).

"In Greek the notion of repentance is of a change of outlook, in Hebrew thought a turning round and adopting a new way of life. The two are not incompatible."<sup>3</sup>

If God wants everyone to be saved (The Lord is not ... willing for any to perish"), will not all be saved?<sup>4</sup> The answer is "no,"

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 153. See also Bauckham, p. 310. See Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, pp. 106-7, for a good explanation of how Albert Einstein's special theory of relativity has introduced a new perspective on time that harmonizes with this verse.

<sup>2</sup>Fornberg, p. 68; Bauckham, p. 310.

<sup>3</sup>Sidebottom, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup>See Ramesh P. Richard, "Soteriological Inclusivism and Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):85-108.

because this desire of God's is not as strong as some other of His desires. For example, we know that God desires that everyone have enough freedom to believe or disbelieve the gospel. He desires this more strongly than He desires that everyone will be saved. Otherwise, everyone would end up believing in Christ. But that will not happen (v. 7; Matt. 25:46). Somehow it will result in God's greater glory for some to perish, than for all to be saved ("come to repentance"). Nevertheless God sincerely is "not willing" (He does not "desire," Gr. *boulomenos*, in contrast to the stronger *thelontes*, "determines") that "any" person should "perish."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, God also desires that everyone be holy, but not everyone will be holy.

It is more important to God, therefore, that people be free moral agents, and freely and willingly make the choice to accept or reject His grace, than that everyone accept it without the ability to make that choice. God is so sovereign and in control that His ultimate will still is accomplished even though He gives humans the ability to make choices. Our freedom is real but limited. We can choose some things but not others (e.g., to fly like birds).<sup>2</sup>

"Three aspects of the will of God may be observed in Scripture: (1) the sovereign will of God (Isa. 46:9-11; Dan. 4:17, 35; Heb. 2:4; Rev. 17:17); (2) the moral will of God, i.e. His moral law (Mk. 3:35; Eph. 6:6; Heb. 13:21); and (3) the desires of God coming from His heart of love (Ezek. 33:11; Mt. 23:37; 2 Pet. 3:9). The sovereign will of God is certain of complete fulfillment, but the moral law is disobeyed by men, and the desires of God are fulfilled only to the extent that they are included in His sovereign will. God does not desire

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<sup>1</sup>See my discussion of God's priorities in "What Prayer Will and Will Not Change," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, pp. 107-11; R. C. Sproul, *God's Will & the Christian*, and Charles R. Swindoll, *The Mystery of God's Will*, pp. 26-28.

<sup>2</sup>For Calvin's explanations of this and other similar verses, see 3:24:15-17.

that any should perish, but it is clear that many will not be saved (Rev. 21:8)."<sup>1</sup>

"No dispensationalist minimizes the importance of God's saving purpose in the world. But whether it is God's total purpose or even His principal purpose is open to question. The dispensationalist sees a broader purpose in God's program for the world than salvation, and that purpose is His own glory [Eph. 1:6, 12, 14]. For the dispensationalist the glory of God is the governing principle and overall purpose, and the soteriological program is one of the principal means employed in bringing to pass the greatest demonstration of His own glory. Salvation is part and parcel of God's program, but it cannot be equated with the entire purpose itself."<sup>2</sup>

"Soteriology ... is obviously a major theme of biblical theology, though it clearly is not *the* central motif. This is evident in that salvation implies deliverance *from* something *to* something and is thus a functional rather than a teleological concept. In other words, salvation leads to a purpose that has been frustrated or interrupted and is not a purpose in itself."<sup>3</sup>

"The final cause of all God's purposes is his own glory... (Rev. iv. 11) ... (Num. xiv. 21) ... (Is. xlvi)."

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<sup>1</sup> *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, pp. 1340-41.

<sup>2</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, p. 102. The same statement appears in idem, *Dispensationalism*, p. 93. See pp. 46-47 and 102-5 in *Dispensationalism Today*, or pp. 40-41 and 93-95 in *Dispensationalism*, for a full discussion of God's ultimate purpose being doxological rather than soteriological. Dispensationalists are distinctive among evangelical Christians in that they interpret references to Israel literally, whereas covenant theologians interpret them spiritually. See the books by Ryrie just cited for further explanation, and Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference*, for a comparison of covenant and dispensational theology.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 21-22.

11) ... (Ezek. xx. 9) ... (1 Cor. i. 26-31; Eph. ii. 8-10)."<sup>1</sup>

"The final end of both election and reprobation is the Divine glory, in the manifestation of certain attributes. ... Neither salvation nor damnation are ultimate ends, but means to an ultimate end: namely, the manifested glory of the triune God... 2 Cor. 3:7, 9."<sup>2</sup>

What Peter wrote about God "not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance," applies to the unsaved and the saved alike. Christians will not perish eternally, but we may be chastened by the Lord and possibly even die prematurely if we continue to rebel against God (1 John 5:16).

3:10 The phrase "the day of the Lord" refers to a specific time yet future, as it is used elsewhere in Scripture. This "day" will begin when Antichrist makes a covenant with Israel, and it will conclude with the burning up of the present heavens and earth (Dan. 9:27; 2 Pet. 3:12; et al.).

The clause "the earth and its works will be discovered [Gr. *eurethesetai*]" could mean that the earth and its works will be exposed for what they really are: worthless. "Its works" probably refer to all that has been done on the earth that has only temporal value.

This day "will come like a thief" in that its beginning will take those unbelievers who are living on the earth then by surprise (Matt. 24:37-39, 43-44; Luke 12:39-40; 1 Thess. 5:2; Rev. 3:3; 16:15).

The term "heavens" probably refers to both the earth's atmosphere and the physical universe in which the stars and other planetary bodies exist, but not to God's abode. The "elements" (Gr. *stoicheia*) apparently refer to the material building blocks of physical things (i.e., the atoms, molecules, and larger masses that are foundational to still larger things).

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:535-36.

<sup>2</sup>William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 1:448.

Other views are that they are the heavenly bodies or the angelic powers.

After the Flood God told Noah that He would never again destroy every living thing as He had just done (Gen. 8:21c-22). He meant that He would not do so with another flood. He went on to say that all flesh would never again be cut off by the waters of a flood (Gen. 9:11b; cf. v. 15). Peter's announcement of a worldwide judgment "with intense heat" does not, therefore, contradict God's promise in the Noahic Covenant.

When in the day of the Lord will this conflagration take place? Some believe that it will happen at the beginning of the millennial kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Many of these interpreters believe that this destruction will be only a limited renovation of the earth, as the Flood was.<sup>2</sup> It seems to others, however, that this holocaust will take place at the end of the Millennium. To some who hold this view this judgment will result in the renovation of the earth, but to others who hold this view it will result in the destruction of the universe as we know it—since the heavens, as well as the earth, will be changed then (Rev. 21:1; cf. Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33).<sup>3</sup> I believe that it will occur at the end of the Millennium, but whether it will result in the complete destruction of the present earth and heavens, or only a renovation of them, remains to be seen.<sup>4</sup>

"Peter clearly opposes those Christians who insisted that Christ had to return within a certain short period of time after his resurrection. But he

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 2:504-9.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Alford, 4:2:418; Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, p. 188; and Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 418.

<sup>3</sup>For answers to the arguments of Peters and Culver, see R. Larry Overstreet, "A Study of 2 Peter 3:10-13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:548 (October-December 1980):358-68.

<sup>4</sup>See Lenski, p. 350; Michael J. Svigel, "Extreme Makeover: Heaven and Earth Edition—Will God Annihilate the World and Re-create It *Ex Nihilo*?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:684 (October-December 2014):401-17; and Glenn R. Kreider, "The Flood Is as Bad as It Gets: Never Again Will God Destroy the Earth," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:684 (October-December 2014):418-39; for arguments favoring renovation rather than re-creation.

by no means opposes the idea of imminence [an any moment return] itself."<sup>1</sup>

"Only the book of Revelation in the New Testament speaks so directly about the cosmic effects of the day of the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

#### D. LIVING IN VIEW OF THE FUTURE 3:11-16

Peter drew the application of what he had just written to his readers and focused their attention on how they should live presently in view of the future.

3:11 Peter believed that an understanding of the future should motivate the believer to live a holy life now. His question is rhetorical (designed to produce an effect and to make a statement rather than to elicit information). "Holy conduct" refers to behavior that is separate from sin and set apart from the world in order to please God. "Godliness" is God likeness (1:3, 6-7; cf. 2:7, 10, 12-15, 18-20; 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:15-16).

3:12 The Greek participle translated "hastening" (*speudontes*) sometimes means "desiring earnestly" (RSV margin).<sup>3</sup> If Peter meant that here, the sense would be that believers not only are looking for "the day of God," but also desire earnestly to see it (cf. vv. 8-10; Matt. 24:42; 25:13).<sup>4</sup> The AV has "hastening unto" implying that Peter meant that believers are rapidly approaching "the day of God."<sup>5</sup> Yet the word "unto" needs to be supplied; it is not in the text.

Most of the translators and commentators, however, took *speudontes* in its usual sense of "hastening." They assumed that Peter was thinking that believers can hasten the day of God by their prayers (cf. Matt. 6:10) and their preaching (cf.

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<sup>1</sup>Moo, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup>Carson and Moo, p. 666.

<sup>3</sup>*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "speudo." RSV refers to *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>4</sup>Lenski, p. 348; Barbieri, p. 122.

<sup>5</sup>AV refers to *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*

Matt. 24:14; Acts 3:19-20).<sup>1</sup> Believers, according to this view, influence God's timetable by their witnessing and their praying, and as they bring people to Christ (cf. Josh. 10:12-14; 2 Kings 20:1-6; et al.).<sup>2</sup>

"Clearly this idea of hastening the End is the corollary of the explanation (v 9) that God defers the Parousia because he desires Christians to repent. Their repentance and holy living may therefore, from the human standpoint, hasten its coming. This does not detract from God's sovereignty in determining the time of the End ... but means only that his sovereign determination graciously takes human affairs into account."<sup>3</sup>

"The day of God" may be a reference to the time yet future in which God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28), namely, the eternal state.<sup>4</sup> This will follow the creation of the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21:1). "The day of God" in Revelation 16:14 refers to the time of the battle of Armageddon, which will be at the end of the Tribulation. Some take "the day of God" as another way of describing "the day of the Lord."<sup>5</sup> I lean toward taking "the day of God" as describing the end of "the day of the Lord," that is, the end of the Millennium. The antecedent of "because of which" is "the day of God." God will burn up the present heavens and earth ("elements") because of that day (i.e., because the day of the Lord has reached its end).

3:13 But Christians look forward to the "new heavens and a new earth," not the destruction of the present heavens and earth. The reason is that the new heavens and earth will be where "righteousness dwells." Unrighteousness characterizes the present world (cf. Jer. 23:5-7; 33:16; Dan. 9:24; Rev. 21:1, 8,

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 1493; Bigg, p. 298; Green, p. 140; Barclay, pp. 410-11; Kelly, p. 367; Blum, p. 287; Sidebottom, p. 123-24.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Constable, pp. 101-6.

<sup>3</sup>Bauckham, p. 325.

<sup>4</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 288; Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, p. 73; et al.

<sup>5</sup>Fanning, p. 470.

27). God's promise of the new heavens and new earth is in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22.

"Christians need to remember the ultimate, 'bottom-line,' purpose of biblical eschatology [the study of future end times things]: to make us better Christians here and now."<sup>1</sup>

"The purpose of prophetic truth is not speculation but motivation ..."<sup>2</sup>

3:14 "These things" that Christians anticipate probably refer to all of what Peter just finished saying in verses 10 through 13, rather than to just the new world in which righteousness dwells (v. 13; cf. the "these things" in v. 11). Peter again urged his readers to "diligent" action (cf. 1:5, 10). He wanted us to be at "peace" with God, and the implication is that he expected his readers might be alive when the Lord came.<sup>3</sup>

"Brethren, we are not here to play away our time, but to win souls for Jesus and eternal bliss."<sup>4</sup>

"Spotless" means without defect or defilement (as in a spotless sacrifice, cf. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:19), and "blameless" means without justifiable cause for reproach, without offense. The false teachers were stains and blemishes (2:13), but believers need to be spotless and blameless.

3:15 We should view the Lord's delay in returning as a manifestation of His longsuffering "patience" that leads people to repentance and "salvation," rather than as an indication that He is never coming back (v. 9).

"While God is waiting, He is both giving time for the unbeliever to be saved, and for the believer to

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<sup>1</sup>Moo, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, 2:466.

<sup>3</sup>Bauckham, p. 327.

<sup>4</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *An All Round Ministry*, p. 294.

be working out his salvation (cf. Phil. 2:12, 13) in terms of progress in sanctification."<sup>1</sup>

It has always been difficult for God's people to wait for Him to do what He has promised to do. For example, the Israelites who were camped in the wilderness could not wait for God to finish giving the Mosaic Law on Mt. Sinai. So they built a golden calf (Exod. 32).

Peter regarded "Paul" as a "beloved brother" who was united with him in his allegiance to God and His Word. Perhaps Peter had Romans 2:4 in mind when he said that Paul wrote the same thing that he had just written. Or Peter may have been referring to a letter that Paul wrote to this audience that has been lost. Or he may have meant another of Paul's writings.<sup>2</sup>

3:16 "These things" probably refers generally to future events (cf. vv. 11, 14) and the importance of Christians living godly lives in view of them (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 2:1-12).

"It is not only possible, but probable, that St. Peter received every one of St. Paul's Epistles within a month or two of its publication. We cannot imagine that one apostle should have remained in ignorance of what other apostles were doing, and it is quite inconceivable that St. Peter should not have read Galatians and I Corinthians."<sup>3</sup>

If Peter wrote this epistle in A.D. 67 or 68, it is possible that he could have read every one of Paul's 13 inspired epistles.

It is somewhat comforting to learn that even the Apostle Peter found some of what Paul wrote "hard to understand." Peter also wrote some things in his two epistles that tax our understanding. "The untaught" (Gr. *amatheis*) are those who had not received teaching concerning all that God had revealed. The "unstable" (Gr. *asteriktoi*) are those who were

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<sup>1</sup>Wheaton, p. 1258.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, p. 353.

<sup>3</sup>Bigg, pp. 300-1.

not always consistent in their allegiance to God or the world, namely, double-minded, fence-straddling compromisers. These types of people misunderstood and, in some cases, deliberately misrepresented the meaning of Paul's writings. However this only added to their own guilt before God.

"The verb 'distort' (*streblousin*), occurring only here in the New Testament, means 'to twist or wrench,' specifically, 'to stretch on the rack, to torture' [James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources*, p. 593]. They take Paul's statements and twist and torture them, like victims on the rack, to force them to say what they want them to say."<sup>1</sup>

"Scripture is too often the playground of those who seek proof texts to support their own view of doctrine."<sup>2</sup>

Note that Peter regarded Paul's writings as having equal authority with the Old Testament "Scriptures" (cf. 1:12-21; 3:2).

"That an Apostle should speak of the writings of a brother-Apostle in the same *terms* as the books of the Old Testament—viz., as *Scripture*—need not surprise us, especially when we remember the large claims made by St. Paul for his own words (1 Thess. ii. 13; 2 Thess. ii. 15; Eph. iii. 3-5. Comp. Acts xv. 28; Rev. xxii. 18, 19)."<sup>3</sup>

"In attempting to destroy the Bible men destroy themselves."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, "Directives for ...," p. 335.

<sup>2</sup>E. M. Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook of Bible Characters*, p. 605.

<sup>3</sup>Plummer, 8:462.

<sup>4</sup>Williams, p. 111.

## VI. CONCLUSION 3:17-18

Peter concluded his epistle with a summary of what he had said and a doxology. He did so in order to condense his teaching for his readers and to redirect their living to glorify God one final time.

"The twin themes of guarding the faith and growing are woven together throughout the epistle and highlighted at its conclusion (3:17-18)."<sup>1</sup>

3:17 Much of what Peter had written was warnings, which he summarized here. His appeal was tender throughout this epistle. This is the fourth and last time that Peter addressed his readers as "beloved" in this chapter (cf. vv. 1, 8, 14), and in each instance he gave them a challenge. He told them to remember (vv. 1-2), to be informed (v. 8), to be diligent (v. 14), and to be on their guard (v. 17).

The threat to Peter's readers was the teaching of false teachers ("the error of unscrupulous people"; ch. 2). Peter's mental picture was of a torrent of false teaching, knocking believers off their feet and sweeping them away ("carried away"). The possibility of loss of salvation is not in view, but loss of steadfastness is (cf. Heb. 2:1-4).

"... it is a remarkable coincidence, that St. Peter, well acquainted as he was with St. Paul's wirings, should have written this word [*sunapechthe*, "carried away"] which is the very one used by that Apostle (ref. Gal. [2:13]) of Barnabas, at Antioch, when he *sunapechthe* ["was carried away"] with the hypocrisy of Peter and the other Jews ..."<sup>2</sup>

3:18 Finally, Peter added a positive exhortation (cf. 1:5-10). Rather than being swept away by error, his audience should keep on growing ("grow," present imperative in Greek) in God's "grace." His readers could do so by consciously depending on God's resources (His power and promises, 1:3-4), and by growing in the "knowledge [Gr. *gnosei*] of our Lord and Savior

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<sup>1</sup>Hanna, p. 436.

<sup>2</sup>Alford, 4:2:420.

Jesus Christ" (cf. 1:2, 11; 2:20; 3:2). They could do the latter by getting more intimately acquainted with Him day by day (1:5-8).

"Christian knowledge fosters fellowship with God and deepens a consciousness of the believer's obligation to live a life worthy of His grace."<sup>1</sup>

"The command to grow is an appeal to the will. But growth, in the spiritual as in the physical realm, is not produced by an assertion of the will. Yet the human will plays a decisive part in the experience of spiritual growth. Believers must will to remove the hindrances to growth while actively fostering the conditions which promote growth. When the conditions for spiritual growth are maintained the divinely implanted life will assuredly grow and mature."<sup>2</sup>

"Growing knowledge fosters fellowship with God and deepens the consciousness of one's obligations to lead a life worthy of His grace."<sup>3</sup>

"One grows in grace and knowledge by assimilating more and more of the divine favor and of its gifts and of the divine truth."<sup>4</sup>

Continuing growth "... is the unfailing panacea for all spiritual ills."<sup>5</sup>

"We grow best in a loving family, and this is where the local church comes in. A baby needs a family for protection, provision, and affection. Tests prove that babies who are raised alone, without special love, tend to develop physical and emotional problems very early. The church is

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup>Idem, "Directives for ...," p. 338.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Lenski, p. 357.

<sup>5</sup>H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Epistles of Peter*, p. 102.

God's 'nursery' for the care and feeding of Christians, the God-ordained environment that encourages them to grow."<sup>1</sup>

We grow as we utilize the "means of grace," namely, things that channel God's grace (help) to us, such as reading the Bible, praying, meeting with other believers for fellowship and mutual encouragement, and obeying God.

The greatest goal for the Christian should be to glorify Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:31). Only four epistles end with a doxology, including this one (cf. Rom. 16:25-27; Phil. 4:20; Jude 24-25). Normally doxologies glorify God, but this one, and two others, glorify Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Tim. 4:18; Rev. 1:5-6). Peter's final words focused his readers' attention anew on the ultimate priority of glorifying Christ. "The day of eternity" is the time when we will be living on the new earth (v. 13).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 2:471.

<sup>2</sup>See also Craig A. Blasing, "The Day of the Lord Will Come: An Exposition of 2 Peter 3:1-18," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:676 (October-December 2012):387-401.

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