

2 PETER STUDY NOTES

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## 2 Peter 1

**1:1—“Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:”**

Peter uses his Hebrew name given him at birth, Simon (meaning to hear intelligently), and the name given to him by Jesus, Peter (meaning a rock). There is in this combination a representation of who he had been and who he became in Christ. Whether intentionally or not it provides a summary of the precious nature of faith in Christ and serves as a reminder of the work of reclamation that faith can bring about in an ordinary life. Peter refers to himself as an apostle and a bondservant of Jesus. He could have cited his friendship with Jesus since he, along with James and John were likely closer to Him than any other human beings. Instead, he calls himself a bondservant and an apostle. He clearly saw Christ as the master, the head of that which Peter's own life was given to. He also saw the fact that he himself occupied an official role in the movement of Christ. He was an apostle of Christ, chosen by Christ Himself as an official representative of His kingdom.

Peter's words in this letter would bear authority. The fact is that they were not his own but were those of his master. They were also authoritative because he had been officially designated and commissioned as a spokesman for Christ in the world. The words are not addressed to those in a particular geographical location as many of the apostle's letters were, but simply to those who had received the same kind of faith. Peter represents faith as being “received.” Paul had referred to our faith as being a gift of God (Ephesians 2:10). This was the teaching of Jesus that our faith is sourced in God (John 6:37, 44, 65, 8:47). It begins with Him working in us. But it is likely that here Peter is referring primarily to what we would call “the faith,” meaning the way of life and tradition established by Jesus along with the principles of doctrine that under-gird it. Already the apostles were seeing the need to delineate clearly that this way of interpreting Scripture, of understanding Christ, and of seeing the future had a mainstream, and that diversions and alterations were not considered by them to be permissible. Peter says of his target audience that they have received faith of the same kind. Literally the word used is “of equal value.” He is speaking about the faith's value both in this life and with respect to eternity. The faith, as the apostles practiced it and set it forth, has the power to make men right with God and to bring about change in their lives. The potential is that they are not only made right with God in the judicial sense, but they can enter into relationship with Him and experience His wisdom and power brought to bear in the practical matters of their lives. When this happens their lives can bear fruit that is of great eternal worth.

There is in these words, “like-precious faith,” the affirmation of the value of every member of the body of Christ. There is no special faith delivered to one as compared to another. Each of them has a faith as valuable as Peter's and every other believer. Healthy spiritual leadership bears this in mind. The faith as lived by each individual believer is expressed in a way that has value to the whole and this dynamic is such that the most mature believer can be ministered to by the most recent convert. True spiritual leaders do not view themselves as a cut above the rest. They are leaders, yet in their own way submissive to the body of Christ. This precious faith that all believers possess comes about only because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Our sin was credited to His account and His sinlessness was credited to our account. The result is that God can fellowship with us and where there is fellowship with Him there comes to be understanding of truth, and a changed life follows (1 John 1:5-10). But the blessing

of a changed life is not a given. That is why this and every other epistle that is a part of our New Testament was written. The goal of the apostles was to help their hearers enter into continual life change.

There is in this verse an important affirmation of Jesus Christ that should shape our theology. The Holy Spirit working through the human author, calls Jesus the Christ, affirming Him as the promised Messiah. He also calls Him our savior, affirming the sufficiency of His mission. He also refers to Him as our God, and so affirms His divinity. How the apostles understood Jesus and what the Holy Spirit affirms about Jesus are very clear in this verse.

**1:2—“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”**

The force of the language of this verse is that grace and peace are multiplied to us THROUGH the knowledge of God and Jesus. The word knowledge is *ἐπιγνώσει*, which is used of things that come to be understood and perceived for their significance, not just known in the sense of recognition. It involves a cognitive experience of learning data, and then a more subjective understanding as one applies that data and experiences the results, perceives the subtleties, and re-learns what was thought to be known. In the case of spiritual things, it includes knowing about God, understanding the significance of the truth of Him, and being intimate with Him on a personal level. It is in this that grace and peace explode in our lives, and we come to experience their fullest measure. There is no greater need in the human soul than for grace, God’s favor, and for peace, tranquility. They are often pursued in and of themselves. The truth is that they are by-products of what we come to know about God and how deeply we come to know Him on a personal level. In the experience of pursuing the Christian life it is impossible to overstate the importance of maintaining a grip on both these ideas. Our goal is to be intimate with God, but that is laid hold of by us taking time to ponder the truth about who He is. It is through us learning how He thinks, what He values, what violates Him, what turns Him away, that we can say that we come to know Him. It is taking the facts recorded in black and white and through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, pondering them, along with the feelings and thought processes behind them. It is then living those things ourselves by the power of the Holy Spirit and experiencing what goes with them and it is seeking as God does, to bring them about in the lives of others. This is the process of knowing God and it brings great increase in terms of our experience of His grace and peace. It involves learning and ministry. Starting people in this process and moving them along in it is the goal of all apostolic teaching and is the goal of this letter from Peter. This journey of change is the precious faith we have received.

**1:3—“seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence,”**

It is critical to understand that this verse is grammatically connected to the previous verse. It is an explanation of how we dare dream that grace and peace can be multiplied in us. The grammatical connection is somewhat complex, but even a slight understanding of the Greek grammar adds deeper meaning to Peter’s words. The first word in this verse is *ὥς*, meaning “as.” This word often can be understood as “since,” or “even as.” It is a signal that a complimentary idea is following. In this case it is a statement of another truth that will strengthen the idea that grace and peace can abound in us. The word *ὥς*, meaning “since,” is followed by the words *παντα ἡμιν*.

These words mean, “all things to you.” So thus far in this verse we have the following idea: “since all things to you . . .” The phrase that follows is a genitive absolute which is to be rendered adverbially as a statement of time regarding this other action that makes grace and peace available continually to us. So, reaching back to the previous verse we have this thought being expressed; “Grace and peace be multiplied in you through knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord, since all things to you when . . .” That reading as it stands does not make sense because the last phrase lacks a verbal idea. Grace and peace can be multiplied to us since something involving all things happened to us. The question is, what happened to us in relationship to all things? It is common in the Greek of the New Testament to leave the verbal idea unwritten, to allow the reader to supply it on the basis of the context. Due to the conjunction that begins and governs this short phrase, the most logical verbal idea to supply is the verbal idea found in verse 2, “multiplied.” If we supply this idea, this phrase can be rendered in this way: “since all things have been multiplied to you when . . .” What follows is the genitive absolute which describes when all things were multiplied to us. All things were multiplied to us when “His divine power freely gave to us all the things of life and godliness. The remainder of the verse reads, “through the knowledge of the one who called you because of His own glory and excellence.” So, the entire thought which began in verse 2 is this: “Grace and peace be multiplied in you through knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord since all things were multiplied to you when His divine power freely gave all the things of life and godliness to you through the knowledge of the one who called you because of His own glory and excellence.”

Peter’s vision for the readers, that grace and peace be multiplied in them was a very realistic one, because these things and much more had already been made available to them by God. The process of our laying hold of an ever-increasing understanding of God and Jesus, resulting in a richer and fuller experience of grace and peace is possible, attainable, and is a logical outcome because of what God has already done. His intention regarding our lives is clear. It is to multiply every good thing in us and He is so committed to this that He has made all things that pertain to life and godliness available to us. Everything! There is nothing we lack. There are many things ranging from the material to the spiritual wrapped up in this statement. Whatever is necessary for our growth in godliness is available to us. We can be certain of that. We do not know how or through whom He will provide it, but it is available. We should look for it immediately, though we should be prepared to give of ourselves to receive, for that is the greater law involved in obtaining something from God’s storehouse. We appropriate for ourselves that which we seek to minister to others. This opening of the storehouse of God has come about, Peter says, through the true knowledge of God. He is referring to the more complete unveiling of God brought about when He became a man and dispelled so many myths and lies that existed regarding divinity. Our experience will only get richer as our understanding of the truth about Him grows. This agrees with what Peter stated in verse two, that grace and peace are multiplied through the knowledge of God and Christ. Increase someone’s knowledge of God and you will add to their quality of life. It is that simple. We can only rise to the level of what we know to be true. Ignorance, whether unintentional or willful is usually the great wall between the have’s and the have not’s.

Peter adds an observation that makes this projected experience even more sure. He notes that God has called us and that He has done so in accordance with His own glory and excellence. Our progress is made even more certain because of whose idea this is and because of His character. God initiated this life in us by summoning us to it. He would not summon us to do that which was not His will. We can be certain that it is His will that we make progress in the faith.

God's design for our lives relates to what the NASB says is "His own glory and excellence." This idea that His calling of us is based on His character has already been stated by Peter in verse 2 and is clearly taught throughout Scripture. It is a thought that strengthens the idea that our increased experience of grace and peace is God's will and plan for us. However, there is a matter of peripheral interest to most, but of some significance to serious Bible Students. The text of the Greek New Testament is in doubt at this point. Two renderings are possible. Some manuscripts indicate that the text is *ἰδία δόξη και ἀρετῇ*, "His own glory and excellence." Other manuscripts indicate that the text is *διὰ δόξης και ἀρετῆς*, "because of glory and excellence." The editing committee of the UBS Greek New Testament has chosen the former reading but note that this reading which they have chosen and with which the NASB concurs, has a very high degree of doubt. Supposing for the moment that though doubtful, it is correct, the phrase is an instrumental case indicating the cause of our calling. More importantly the word *ἰδία*, meaning "His own" is present, indicating that it was not our own glory or excellence but God's that led to our calling. If this rendering is correct, Peter is saying we have been called because of God's own glory and excellence. This rendering has the appeal of fitting a theology that emphasizes God's sovereignty and the absolute unconditional nature of His calling.

The other rendering, *διὰ δόξης και ἀρετῆς*, would mean that the phrase is an ablative, indicating the cause of our calling, and should be rendered "because of glory and excellence." The idea of "His own" is noticeably missing and so this is a rendering that is more unclear in terms of whose glory and excellence led to His call. Some might construe this to mean that He called those who demonstrated moral excellence, an idea that runs counter to sound doctrine. It should be noted however that such an interpretation moves beyond the actual words used and the thought of the context. The former reading, as reflected by the NASB, would be the clearer reading and the instrumental case would be the more customary way of expressing cause. But it is likely that the latter was the original. The text was likely altered, and the word for "His own" added to make a desired interpretation clearer. Usually when the texts of early manuscripts of the New Testament were altered it was to make the text clearer and to provide more airtight protection of doctrinal ideas. Because of this tendency a generally accepted rule to use in cases where the text is uncertain is to choose the less clear text over the clearer. However, the idea that our calling is produced by God's own character and that it depends only on that can easily be established in the context (see verse 2). It is likely best to do so because of the incongruity between this reading and that of many other early manuscripts. The lesson when all of this is said and done is this, don't build the case for our calling being based purely on God's glory and excellence out of this verse! It can easily be done from other texts.

**1:4—"For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."**

"Because of which," those are the first words of this verse. They refer to God's glory and His excellencies. Simply because of who He is, we can become who He is. Because of whom He is He has made promises to us. This is a reference to the covenants that progressively brought us along to the era in which the so-called New Covenant became the rule. That New Covenant provided that our sins be forgiven, and that God's laws be somehow written on our hearts and minds (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Heb 8:8-13). This was of course brought about by means of the death of Christ as a substitute, so that our sins were paid for and by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit who came to reside in each believer. We were given the divine nature through these acts and so can

escape the normal course of humanity, that downward spiral we are all in because of our lusts. Our lusts are that whole series of desires that spring to life because of our desire to be our own master and to disregard any and every claim our Creator has on our lives. This spiral of death we are able to escape because of God's character which led to a whole series of promises, beginning on the occasion of man's first sin. As the first man and woman stood naked before God in horrible realization of the consequences of their willfulness, God met them with a promise of redemption (Genesis 3:15). The series of redemptive promises that came from God in the wake of this event are precious and magnificent. The first of these two words that describe these promises convey the value of them. "What will a man give in exchange for His soul" (Matthew 16:26). That which saves one's soul is his most valued treasure. The second word conveys the beauty of the promises. There is a majesty to acts of grace that takes the breath away. There is more to the promises than their significant and important practical value. There is that in them that not only saves our souls, but it also moves and touches them so that every capacity we must sense beauty and blessing is overwhelmed. The promises have this magnificence about them that lies beyond our power to express. There are times when every thinking believer is blessed by their value and other times when we are simply overwhelmed by their magnificence.

**1:5—"Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence knowledge,"**

Verses 5-7 are all linked together not just in thought but grammatically. The phrase "Now for this very reason" introduces them and links them to what has been stated. Because since the start of the letter all the thoughts have been logically connected, this little phrase requires us to reach back further than the thought of verse 4. Verse 2 stated a prayer, or we could call it a prayerful wish, or a blessing that Peter desired for the future of the readers. His desire for them was that through the knowledge of God and Christ grace and peace would be multiplied in them. Verses 3 and 4 reiterate a history that made such a goal reasonable, logical and obtainable. That history can be summarized in this way; God's character and excellencies have been brought to bear on our behalf so that we can escape the normal human trend of moral deterioration. The promises He has made avail us of everything we need to experience this growth of grace and peace in our lives.

Verse 5 begins by capturing this history with the words *και αυτο τουτο*, rendered in English by the NASB, "Now for this very reason." We might have said, "Because of this that is yours as a result of His glory and excellence . . ." In the words that follow in the next two verses we are given a description of specific elements of the precious faith that mark the path along the way as we journey toward this filling up with grace and peace. The journey toward greater grace and peace is one that follows a certain path in which we seek to multiply the things that foster greater knowledge of and intimacy with God. These are things which Peter calls on us to supply. This summons given by Him to us does not mean that we are the source of these virtues. It is not a call to summon these things from within ourselves. A quick read of them reminds us that they do not reside in us. They are found in God and according to verse 3, He has granted them to us, meaning they are available to us. They are actually in us because God is in us, in the person of the Holy Spirit. We supply them in the sense that there is a choice we must make to pursue them. If we ask for them, they will be given to us. If we seek them, we will find them. If we knock, the door to these will be opened to us. Peter adds that we must apply diligence in this matter. To supply these things requires a choice and then diligence or discipline on our part. There is a prayerful routine

regarding knowing and applying the Scripture, fellowshiping with other believers, practicing sound doctrine, listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, responding to reproof, all of which help us to know and discern God's heart and help us begin to think like Him. As we look at the list of things Peter gives us to supply, things like moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance and the like, we find that they are things which are part of God's own makeup and character. They come to us only because He has made us partakers of His own nature (verse 4), and we have to some degree been obedient to the prodding of His Spirit that now resides within us. This list represents the completeness, or perfection of God. It is to be our new ambition in terms of the shaping of our own character. In any analysis of God's character, it is quickly observed that each element has its perfect complement, another quality which holds it in perfect balance.

So, we see that His justice is perfectly executed because of the presence of His love. His power is perfectly applied because He is good, and so on. Among humanity we see that this sort of equilibrium is missing. We observe that a weakness is often the result of a strength overdone. For example, a person might exude great mercy but at the expense of justice. Such things do not happen with God because of the tensions that are present within His character that allow Him to behave in just the right way, always. It is why He is perfect, and He alone is perfect. The need within our beings for this "moral equilibrium" is perhaps present in Peter's mind. It could explain the presence of the conjunction "καί" which connects the elements in this list of virtues. That conjunction can be rendered "and" or "but." It is different from the conjunction most often used to express "and," in that it is often used to express contrast. The contrast is not necessarily an abrupt one. It is the perfect word to use when the writer wishes to express a different but complimentary idea. There just may have been then, to the original readers, a reminder that in each element of Christian character there is a need for another complimentary force so that we move closer always to completeness, which is godliness. Each of the qualities about to be spoken of is to be supplied. The word rendered "supply" is the main verb. It is a verb which means "to choreograph." There is an intentionality associated with it. The things we are told to "supply" are to be orchestrated by us in a very deliberate way so that they bring a completeness and complementary influence on what previously existed. This is affirmed by the fact that each is to be supplied "in the sphere of" the previous one. That thought is embodied in the particular use in each case of the preposition "ἐν," rendered in the NASB by the word "in." This too expresses the thought that in the sphere of the influence of each Christian virtue there should be supplied that which works alongside it, perhaps to strengthen it, to hold it in balance, to moderate it, or in some other way compliment it.

We are urged first to supply moral excellence in the sphere of our faith. Faith is that which exists in the inner being, and moral excellence is its reflection in the outer being. Moral excellence makes faith visible. It is everywhere projected in Scripture as the logical outcome of faith, not necessarily the inevitable outcome, but the only logical one. Here we see that such moral excellence is not necessarily a given. It must be supplied through our diligence in taking hold of God's grace. This moral excellence however is not to be the sole end of our journey of faith. To the sphere of moral excellence, we are to supply knowledge. Zeal without knowledge is not good (Romans 10:2). Our faith must have the proper object and it is strengthened by our knowledge. Our moral excellence can only become such through knowledge, for it is impossible to do what we do not know. Morality is only excellent if it is shaped by the standard of truth. The moral standard of false gods and false religions may be admirable from a distance, but it is not excellent unless it is scrutinized and shaped by what we know to be true. The word for knowledge here is a different one than Peter has used two previous times. That word was ἐπιγινώσκω, here he simply uses the word γινώσκω. The

word previously used refers more to the entire body of knowledge we strive to lay hold of concerning Christ. The word presently used is chosen likely because Peter is referring to the process of adding elements of this grand body of knowledge to our understanding a little at a time. We cannot lay hold of the sum of knowledge about Christ in one motion. But we can lay hold of an element at a time of that knowledge. Again, this knowledge of Christ we are developing is not just a matter of acquiring and understanding cognitive facts. It involves the more subjective understanding of all that is related to those facts. Someone who knows Christ in this way can not only recite right doctrine and other factual data about Him. They have come to know Him intimately as one would a dear friend. We have all witnessed those who have great moral excellence, but their faith is stuffy and stale. There seems to be no real vibrancy about it. It consists of the observation of rules as one might strictly adhere to a code of conduct in an organization. This knowledge that Peter is referring to colors the sphere of one's morality, so that the high standard is held to humbly, as an act of personal devotion, as a friend might personally own and embrace the values of one, they wished to please. It is the subjective quality of knowing someone well enough to know what would please them without them ever having defined it. Such knowledge brings perfection and completeness to moral excellence, and we should be continually supplying ourselves with a deeper experience of Christ.

**1:6—"and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness;"**

For knowledge to be of value it must be allowed to reshape our behavior. This requires self-control. Self-control is the ability to rise above instinct. It involves intentionally taking a course of action. It is useless apart from knowledge, but knowledge is of little practical value apart from it. The ability to take oneself in a different direction, to break habits, to prevent excess, to delay or forgo pleasure, to push one's limits, all of this is a matter of self-control. It makes our journey one of progress, by enabling us to shape our behavior rather than it being shaped randomly. Self-control produces its greatest return when it is repeated. That is perseverance. Perseverance is the ability, after setting a course of action, to repeat that course of action, continuing it until the objective is achieved. Everything from material success to spiritual success is associated in Scripture with perseverance. Fruitfulness can only occur to the degree that there is perseverance. In the sphere of our self-control, we must supply perseverance so that we do more than just dabble in good things. We must develop skill in them, come to thoroughly understand them and come to model them well for others. And within the sphere of our perseverance, we must supply godliness. It is of little value to persist in things if they do not reflect God's will and heart for us. So, for perseverance to have its greatest value it must be exercised regarding the things that are God's heart and soul. The word for godliness is a compound formed from the word for "good" and the word for "worshipper." Interestingly, the word for god is not a part of this word. It likely came to be the meaning of the word because a good worshipper, or a worshipper of good, develops a proper reverence. There are those that fall into legalism and whose reverence is not governed by truth and healthy doctrine. There are others who have no reverence and to whom nothing is sacred. The likely idea is that a godly person has the right perspective on what matters to God and what does not matter, and as a result they are marked by an appropriate reverence. The Holy Spirit lives within us to convict us concerning what is true and good. His activity is energized and enhanced as our knowledge of His great work, written revelation, grows. Godliness is therefore within our grasp by His grace as we grow in knowledge of the Word. To become godly is to



discern the things the Holy Spirit is leading us to do in each moment in front of us, and to persist in the pursuit of those things.

**1:7—“and in your godliness brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.”**

It is impossible to speak specifically to the area of godliness without speaking about God’s great treasure that He so dearly loves, people. To the sphere of godliness, we must supply brotherly kindness, because it is easy for us to view godliness as being a matter only of our relationship with God. But when Jesus spoke of the greatest commandment, He revealed something very important. He said that the greatest commandment was that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind. But then He added that the second is “like it,” you shall love your neighbor as yourself. In saying that the second is “like it,” he was saying not simply that it was like it in terms of importance. He was saying that the practice of loving God is inseparable from the practice of loving people. It is “like it” in that the two are shown in the same way. This is made crystal clear in passages of Scripture like Matthew 26:31-46. We show love for God when we show love for his people. So, our godliness is not complete until we add to it brotherly kindness. To this practical quality of brotherly kindness, we are to supply love. It is the great under-girder that makes everything right and gives it its proper proportion. Peter has worked his way around to that quality which is the ultimate demonstration and illustration that the divine nature is in us (John 13:35). When the quality of love is supplied to brotherly kindness, you have that which gives brotherly kindness substance and shelf life. It takes it from the realm of favors and being nice, to the realm of trust, sacrifice, and commitment. The person who learns to love, who embraces love’s urgency and who learns love’s various faces and subtleties, lays hold of that which changes people and alters hopeless situations. They have laid hold of that which brings eternal reward, which is the next great idea Peter will tie to his command.

**1:8—“For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

This verse builds on the idea that Peter has a dream for the faith-journey of these Christians. This verse implies that one can have a full understanding and perception of Christ (the word for knowledge is *ἐπιγνώσιν*, which is used of true or full perception), and yet be useless and unfruitful. That is an interesting thought. Would Peter warn of a danger that was not possible? Knowledge, even on the experiential level does not guarantee fruitfulness in the faith, and we must always remember this danger and guard against it. For our faith to have its intended impact, our knowledge of God must be practically applied in a way that changes our character and behavior. Grace and peace are multiplied in us only as our knowledge of Christ grows and is allowed to produce a certain character-building process in us. So, verse 2 recorded Peter’s dream for those in his charge. Verses 3-4 supported the idea that this dream was reasonable, attainable, and in line with God’s revealed purposes for them. Verses 5-7 describe what their focus had to be by God’s grace. Verses 8-9 describe what will happen if they maintain or do not maintain such a focus. It is important to see in verse 8 that it is a process that we wish to lay hold of, not some single experience or even a series of isolated experiences. We want to lay hold of these character elements, but just as important is that fact that we want them to be always increasing. It is that pursuit of increase in these specific virtues that yields the fruit and makes us useful with respect to the things we have come to understand and perceive as truth. So, if we care about the only things worth caring about, we will engage in the pursuit described in verses

5-7. And as these things increase in us, we discover a usefulness and fruitfulness with respect to all we have come to know and embrace.

**1:9—“For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.”**

These qualities, when present, bestow the ability to have perspective and to see things correctly, particularly evil, to no longer be deceived by it. When one has not supplied, or carefully cultivated the love, the self-discipline, the moral excellence, the godliness and the other things Peter has spoken of, the memory of the pain of their slavery to sin dissipates. Like the Israelites memory of Egypt their memory of their past soon becomes distorted. The result is that the short-term comfort or pleasure provided by sin deceives them once again. They forget how bad things were. The person who is working to supply by the grace of God these virtues, is growing in their understanding of the enormous impact of evil each day and the enormity of their former slavery. As they get more freedom, they become more deeply aware of the extent of sin’s danger to them. They see far beyond its immediate attraction. They cherish their freedom too much to wander into rebellion. The process of supplying to our faith concrete elements of character is, as seen in the previous verse, of immense value. There is so much gained along the way in this journey, and so very much discarded. It is discarded naturally, with little reluctance in the interest of making better progress toward a far greater treasure.

**1:10—“Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.”**

These words can have a far different meaning when lifted out of the context they are in. Like any discourse, the words and thoughts derive their meaning from the thoughts they are logically and grammatically connected to. Both previous thoughts and those that follow help us determine their meaning in the mind of the one who spoke them. These words are connected to the previous ones by the word “therefore.” Here Peter urges us to be diligent about rising to the calling and selection of God that has clearly marked us out. Apart from the previous thoughts, this could be conceived as a command to perform at a moral level that assures that our selection will be finalized or confirmed. Many have taught such an idea from this and other verses. But an examination of what Peter has already said to his readers makes such an interpretation of this verse a stretch at best. Peter began the letter by expressing his wish that the readers experience increases in their journey of faith, that grace and peace be multiplied in them (verse 2). Then he spoke to them about how this was a reasonable vision for them. God had made such a journey as this possible for them by the things He had promised to them and by imparting to them His very nature. Everything for such a journey had been made readily available to them. Would this be true if they were not the elect, if they were not called? Next, he told them that since this was true they should apply diligence, every and all diligence (verse 5), and supply out of the storehouse of God’s own character specific elements of character for themselves. These were to be added to their faith. Their faith would act as the starting point or foundation upon which this structure would be added. This was God’s vision for them. It was why He had made truth and the knowledge of Himself available, and why He had made himself available. What started out as a tiny seed in one corner of their lives, could become a tree that permeated their entire being. This is His desire for His chosen ones. He has chosen us for this experience, not simply for forgiveness. But the relationship is a partnership. To the degree that we are faithful, what Peter calls diligent, we will enter into this growth and maturation experience. It is not that

through a lack of diligence our calling and election can become doubtful. It is that the purpose of our calling and election may never be realized in this life if we make a minimal investment in the things of God. When the virtues of verses 5-7, made available to us from within by God's Spirit, are cultivated and embraced by us, we provide certainty as to the outcome of our faith. Through our diligence there comes to be a certainty to our experience, a predictability to who we are and who we are becoming. The second half of this verse shows that this is the main idea that Peter has in mind here. He was one who knew what it was to stumble. He speaks here of these things strengthening us and stabilizing us so that we rise to our calling rather than slipping back into what is instinctive. God's calling and election are unalterable facts (Romans 11:29). Our pursuit of character ensures our continued progress toward that which God desires to make of us. It stabilizes us in that great journey. It is not that we need to somehow by our performance rise to being among the elect and chosen. It is that for the life and purpose for which we are chosen to become sure and certain in us, we must exercise diligence.

**1:11—"for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you."**

By living the kind of life Peter has advocated, a life of diligence regarding the pursuit of all God has provided for us, an important blessing will be ours. As we supply from God's storehouse character to add to our faith, He will supply to us abundant entrance into His kingdom. The word rendered "supplied" is the same one used in verse 5. It is made up of three words; upon, to lead, and to dance. It is a word from which we derive our word choreograph. It came to be used of that which is orchestrated or supplied for someone. This can be speaking about nothing else than reward and celebration that accompanies a life well lived. It is not that entrance will merely be granted; it will be richly choreographed. Such people will enter in triumph with celebration. We would say "with honors." Through living such a life, the commendation spoken of by Jesus in the parable of the talents is attained (Matthew 25:14ff).

**1:12—"Therefore I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you."**

In the verses that Peter has written thus far in this letter we can surmise that it must be possible to be negligent regarding the truth. To use his words, it must be possible not to be diligent and not to supply to our faith the character God's grace allows us to pursue. It is difficult to imagine why Peter would command such diligence if there was no possibility of negligence. This verse reinforces that possibility. Even though his readers have the truth present in them and even though they have been established in it (these are two very strong statements), they still need to be reminded to apply diligence in spiritual matters. The danger is so great that he says that he will always be ready to remind them of these things. In these words, we have the purpose of most of the ministry that God orchestrates. Its purpose is to stir us into action, to cause us to gird our minds for action (1 Peter 1:13), to spur us on to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24). We need to be reminded of what we already know. There is a danger in always seeking out the "deeper teaching" of the faith. It is usually not something new that we need, but a reminder to implement and rededicate ourselves to something we already know. If we look at the words Peter has already written in this letter, the "these things" refers to what God has done for us, what He will yet do, what we need to do, and why doing it is worthwhile. These are the things we need to have a steady diet of.

**1:13—“And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder,”**

Peter never retired from the work of God. He considered it his calling and his responsibility to be a force for the spiritual health of the Church as long as he had breath. He sought to fan people's spiritual flame so that it would burn brighter, that is the imagery of the English translation. “Stirs up” is an English rendering of *διεγερειν*, which is a compound word meaning to raise up. It almost always refers to awakening someone from sleep. That is the way it is understood when used in the plain-literal sense. Peter viewed Christians as being prone to a state of lethargy which leaders have to shake them out of. That is indeed likely to be the reason why meeting together became the norm they established. We are more naturally spiritually lethargic than spiritually alert and active. There was in Peter's mind no backing away from this activity of “stirring up.” This was not a matter of the Church and Christians being bad. It was a simple matter of reality, and this was Peter's charge from God as a spiritual leader.

**1:14—“knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.”**

Jesus had warned Peter that his life would end at the hands of other men (John 21:18-19). Jesus' words were highly accurate and supported by our tradition. Peter by all counts died as Jesus had, by crucifixion. There was the one difference, that Peter desired to be crucified upside down, because he was not worthy to die as Jesus had. Peter had time to ponder his death, many years in fact. He knew it was imminent. The word imminent is the rendering of *ταχινη*, meaning fleet or swift. Peter by this time could see that his time on earth was ebbing away. The imagery of “laying aside my earthly dwelling” is rich. The phrase could be rendered “put aside my tent.” In our world it is folding up a tent and putting it away after a camping trip. Our stay on earth is like that, temporary and short. Life when viewed eternally is very significant, yet in another sense should not be clung to as that valuable in itself. It is made to be laid aside, and it is rightly understood as not being the thing that fills our cups. Deferring to the life that lies ahead is always the wise course to travel every minute of our stay.

**1:15—“And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind.”**

Thus far the word diligence has appeared in various forms three times (vs. 5,10, 15), in Peter's letter. He is calling us to exercise that to which he has given himself. Whatever our level of understanding of the truth we must be diligent regarding what we know. If we are not, we put ourselves at risk in every way. This diligence must be with respect to obeying the truth but also with respect to the personal work to which we have been called, whatever that might be. Peter was careful to do that work while he was alive, but here he says he wants to be diligent and provide for that work in a way that will help it continue after he is gone. Writing down his words and writing down the kinds of words that would instruct, stimulate, and convey God's heart was one of the ways he did that. But we will see in the following verses that he also wanted to write down words that would draw his readers to Scripture because it is revelation. It is that which we can visit and continually return to so that our course becomes clear and precise. All that Peter would say in this letter was rooted in the Scriptures, and this was as he and the Holy Spirit wanted it. The point was to create something that would draw the readers into a more complete, ongoing, and thorough interaction with the truth. So, as he writes he will speak of his experience with Christ, and so draw us to the Gospels. He

will speak of the prophets, and so draw us to the Old Testament. He will speak of the writings of Paul, and so draw us to much of the New Testament. This was all because he wished to be diligent, to provide a process that would outlive him that would bring us to a level of obedience and submission to the truth.

**1:16—“For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”**

Peter has spoken of the fact that he wishes to do those things that will remind the readers of the truth they have been established in. Christianity in this sense is backward looking. It is based on the person and work of Christ, accomplished in past time. It is also forward looking. It embraces a hope based on Christ's second coming. But here Peter wishes to reinforce the foundation of the faith, and that it is important for that to remain as it is. Christianity to be Christianity, must not alter the teaching of Christ. That which Peter had taught was not another scheme of men. The ancient world was full of man's theories about gods and goddesses, along with the stories of their visits to earth (Acts 17:16ff). The apostles always presented Christ's teaching as distinct from those. Christianity was based on a life and on the power of that life. They did not add anything to what that person, Christ, had disclosed. They simply reported what they saw and heard. What they reported that God had become a man, died to provide salvation, and proved its truth by being raised from the dead was believable to them because of the great majesty of the things that had for three years been seen. The truth was believable because of the power of the one who spoke and lived it.

**1:17—“For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased.’”**

To support his claim that his teaching was no mere human scheme, Peter offers the evidence from one of three occasions when the audible voice of God confirmed who Jesus was. One occasion was at Jesus' Baptism (Matthew 3:17). The Holy Spirit descended on Him and then the sound of the voice came uttering the words Peter reports here. The second occasion came as he made His final public statements before the passion (John 12:28-32). The third occasion was at what we have called the Mount of Transfiguration. This was when, in response to Peter's testimony about Jesus, that He was the Christ the son of the living God, Jesus said that some of them would see the glory of Christ's kingdom (Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:1-13, Luke 9:26-36). Six days later they went up with Him onto a mountain for a time of extended prayer. On the second day (since Luke says eight days after he had made the proclamation), Peter, James, and John saw Him transfigured before them. By this term we mean that they saw the glory of God come to rest on Him so that His appearance took on a bright, glowing form. They saw Moses and Elijah there with Him. So, they saw with their eyes God's kingdom in its glory. The experience was overwhelming. They heard a voice from heaven that spoke to them confirming the identity of Jesus as God's son. The gospel accounts say they became as dead men, and that Peter spoke unknowingly due to the overwhelming nature of what he had seen and heard. But the voice from God was important to Peter. It showed that this body of truth Jesus spoke and represented was not another theory about God. It was a statement from God Himself, the Word made flesh.

**1:18—“and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.”**

Peter, James and John had not just heard a story about this heavenly voice. They heard the voice when they were with Jesus on the mountain. They were, as he had said in verse 16, eyewitnesses of His majesty. Their own senses of sight and hearing had experienced His divinity. This was important to the apostles. John would write of their ministry that they were bearing witness to what they had seen and examined and touched and heard concerning Jesus (1 John 1:1). They had been allowed to see Him for who He really was, in at least some of His pre-incarnate glory. They had a peek beyond the veil, and they never forgot it.

**1:19—“And so we have the prophetic word *made* surer, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.”**

The words “so” and “made” are italicized in the NASB because they do not appear in the original text. The word rendered “more certain” is βεβαιωτερον. It is a comparative adjective from βεβαιος, likely formed from the perfect form of βαινω. Its meaning is sureness and certainty, and its presence defines something as established. It is a comparative, meaning that in this usage it is expressing the greater certainness of the prophetic word compared to the voice heard by Peter and the others on the mountain. This is a watershed idea. To restate it, the prophetic word is more certain than the audible voice, the sensory experience of Peter, James and John on the mountain with Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. This is clearly the point Peter wishes to make here.

Now, what is this prophetic word that is so sure and certain? The verses which follow, and in particular verse 20, indicate that Peter is referring to the written revelation of Scripture. The apostles view of Scripture, which view they got from their own culture, and which was reinforced by Jesus, was very high. They viewed its utterances as “more certain” than the experience of their own senses. We would do well in this 21<sup>st</sup> century to embrace this same reverent view. If this was true of the apostle’s experience with the incarnate Christ, then the testimony of Scripture is certainly more reliable than our own veiled spiritual experiences. This is exactly what Peter exhorts us to in the second part of this verse.

We do well to pay attention to this certain testimony of revelation. It has capacity to bring blessing, safety, and wellness to our lives. It is prophetic, meaning it speaks directly to the practical details of our life circumstances, bringing the truth of God to bear on them. We can be certain that God has spoken into our lives through the words of Scripture as we arrive at an understanding of their meaning and as the Holy Spirit illumines their significance and application. The words of revelation deserve our deepest diligence.

The words of Scripture are like a lamp shining in a dark place. This is frequently the imagery employed by the writers of Scripture to explain the significance of truth. Truth, like light in a dark room, helps us define our surroundings and know what they really are. It leads us to define with precision reality. Living in light is making choices that the truth affirms. John describes this as “walking in the light.” It is something Christians must be diligent to do, because it is possible at any moment to leave the boundaries of truth. When sin entered the human race, darkness enveloped it. That is always what occurs when we stray outside the boundaries of truth, we are enveloped

by darkness and lose perspective. Written revelation is God's gracious provision for life in this dark place. We must be diligent in paying attention to it.

The last phrase in this verse describes a time we are being guided toward by the light of revelation, when the darkness it guides us through will be dealt with in a decisive and final way. It is the time of the complete fulfillment of the new covenant when God's laws are inscribed on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34). We experience the beginnings of that era today through the Holy Spirit as he indwells us and enlightens us as to the application of revelation. But the full impact of that promise of God lies ahead when, in the twinkling of an eye we are changed, and are raised imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:51-58). That is when the day dawns and the morning star shines in our hearts.

**1:20—"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation."**

This is a matter of first importance. It is to be something we embrace first, as a precedent before approaching the prophetic word of Scripture. It is a presupposition that is to guide our handling of its words. Since Adam lost his connection to God man's knowledge of God has been steadily shrinking. While more and more explanations of divinity have appeared, real knowledge of God was steadily lost. It would have disappeared entirely but for God revealing Himself. This verse and the one that follows speak to that process of revelation. Scripture is different from all the other thought developed and books written about divinity. All of them have been "private interpretations," men and women thinking through what their own senses and experiences might be indicating about God or the gods, and then expressing that in words. The result is a myriad of theories that further obscure the truth. Typically, they blur distinctions between the processes of natural law and God. These are all the result of what Peter is referring to by the term private interpretations.

The word rendered interpretation is *ἐπιλυσεως* and it occurs only here in Scripture. When it is used in other literature it is used to express the idea of solution or of discharge of debt. A related word is used in Mark 4:34, where it can mean to disclose. It is used again in Acts 19:39, where it means to decide. The normal word for interpretation would be *ἐρμηνεία* (in 1 Corinthians 12:10, 14:26). The reason for the presence of this word is likely this; Peter is wishing to make a specific point about the source of the prophetic writings, not about their interpretation. This is born out in the following verse where he is clearly talking about how the thoughts came to be in the minds of the writers. Peter is saying that those thoughts were not put forward as those writer's personal "solutions" or "explanations" for observable events and phenomena. Scripture is not another in a long line of interpretations of life based on human experience. It is this that distinguishes the Bible from all other literature. Though it is the work of human authors it is also authored by God Himself. It does not take its place as mere human speculation. It is the unveiling of reality, the disclosure by God of the mystery of many portions of the human experience. This is a matter of first importance in our approach to everything in life. We do well to understand that the information contained in the Scripture is truth and so can lead us to properly interpret the rest of our experience.

**1:21—“for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”**

We have assurance here given of the source of what is written in Scripture. When Peter says “no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will” he is referring to the prophecies of Scripture. It will be obvious in Peter’s next statement that many prophecies have been made purely by act of the human will, and so there have always been and will always be false prophets. But the prophetic word of Scripture is pure. God has superintended the process of writing and canonization so that the books of Scripture can be trusted as being sourced in God. Peter describes here the process by which the human authors came to write in their own language and style the words that expressed the exact mind of God.

The miracle of a book that has a divine author and many human authors came about in this way. Men, many different ones, were moved by the Holy Spirit. The word rendered “moved” is *φερομενοι*. It comes from *φερω*, which means to bring or to carry. Its usage developed many subtleties, such as to sustain and support (Hebrews 1:3). Here it means to move along or to bear along. Though the word occurs many times in the New Testament, this is the only time it occurs to describe the moving of the Holy Spirit in men. These are the same words used earlier in Peter’s letter to describe the voice from heaven that made an utterance regarding Christ (1:18). That voice was said to have been “borne along” from heaven. It traveled somehow through whatever space and time barriers exist between heaven and earth to reach the ears of humans on earth. Now in this verse Peter says Scripture was written by men being “borne along” by the Holy Spirit so that in Scripture we have not mere human theory, but disclosure by God of His thought for and about man.

This “bearing along” of men, orchestrated by God and carried out by the Holy Spirit, we have called inspiration. It is a work of the Spirit experienced only by those who have authored Scripture. Elsewhere the Scriptures are said to be “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16), and this is a reference to the same activity of the Spirit. Our term “inspiration” is in some ways unfortunate because it focuses more on the human side of the process, the inhaling of the God-expired words. The term as it appears in 2 Timothy 3:16 is literally “God-breathed,” and so means exhaled. The Scripture flowed out of God and who He is. Its words are sourced in Him. On that breath or wind, men were borne along by the Holy Spirit so that God’s exact thought for humankind was conveyed through the vocabulary and style of the human writers and was recorded by them without error in the original documents. Thus, we have the miracle of Scripture, God’s written word.

Peter’s point in this whole section of his letter is that the Scripture is a more reliable and trustworthy source of truth than even voices we might hear from heaven, and so we should pay attention to it and exercise diligence regarding it. He continues his thinking on the need for diligence with respect to the truth into the next chapter, so that the reader should not stop at this verse.



## 2 Peter 2

**2:1—“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teacher among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.”**

There has always been ample motivation among God’s people for those individuals seeking to gratify fleshly desires to set themselves up as teachers and authorities and so enjoy having a following. And so, throughout the period of time reported in the Old Testament false prophets would ply their wares alongside those who spoke God’s word. That continues to the present day.

Their counterpart in the Church is false teachers who have propagated systems of thought that are contrary to the apostle’s teaching and that go beyond what is written. Several words Peter uses to describe their MO are instructive. They “secretly introduce” their doctrines. They are not straight-forward. They mingle truth and error, they manipulate. They are quite intentional and devious in their approach. Their heresies are destructive. We can imagine them being so in a number of ways because wrong thinking leads to all kinds of destructive and bizarre behavior. Faith is destroyed which has deep eternal consequences. Character is destroyed with the same results. Churches are harmed, ministries are thwarted, resource is wasted, all due to faulty thinking. So, it is always destructive when heresy takes root in a life and spreads to others.

Peter speaks of one of the great ironies of life when he speaks of heresies that involve a denial of Christ. How is it logically possible to embrace Christianity and deny Christ? Yet from within Christianity there were by Peter’s time those who did so. Interestingly enough these earliest heresies seemed to attack Christ’s humanity (1 John 4:2-3). The apostles viewed this as critical ground, the fact that He was fully human as well as fully divine. They demanded doctrine of Christ that embraced both. Peter says here that such false teachers bring swift destruction on themselves. They will be dealt with by God very decisively. In many cases we see the destruction that they bring on themselves and it is abrupt and conclusive. In other cases, it is a destruction that is not readily apparent to observers but just as devastating. The point of the words Peter uses here is not necessarily that their destruction will come about after only a little time has elapsed. It is that when it does happen the judgment against them will be swift and decisive. We should not necessarily think that we will live to see the day when various cults run their course and are decisively judged by God. We see this in some cases, but not always. But He does have a day when He will judge all such error.

**2:2—“And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be maligned.”**

The way of false teachers usually has some great sensual appeal. Paul described it as that which “tickles the ear” (2 Timothy 4:3). It is not uncommon for such teachers to have great charisma that draws many along. Their words meet some need or gratify some desire. Now the teaching that is of the Spirit meets needs as well. But that which is fleshly appeals to some desire of the flesh. It may do so by justifying some behavior that we love to engage in, or it may do so simply by invoking some pleasurable emotion we love to experience. Either way it is sensual and has long been the specialty of false teachers. It is also common for false teachers themselves to be pursuing a sensual lifestyle, as the next verse will speak of, so that their lives

contradict the truth as revealed in Christ. It is interesting that they themselves in many such cases are not maligned. They continue to attract a following. But the truth is maligned. This is the real damage they do, yet the truth survives and has survived the perversions of many such persons. Their end however is certain.

**2:3—“and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”**

One of the great motivators of false teachers is given here. It is greed. Greed is not always the hunger for money. It is often a hunger for power, control, or acclaim. But in their desire to have more of the particular thing they hunger for, false prophets employ false words.

The most important tool to employ in evaluating the source of someone’s message is their actual words. If the matters relating to personality can be set aside and the words themselves evaluated by the standard of Scripture, false prophets can be exposed rather quickly. To do this it is essential to know the words of Scripture and how to use them. From a human perspective we are often deceived by the “success” of false prophets. They often have more charisma than godly leaders. Their movements often grow quickly and have significant momentum, while more genuine movements are trying to overcome the inertia of spiritual lethargy. We can be deceived by the apparent success of the movement. That is why it is so important to make careful examination of the actual words.

God will often let such false teachers go and allow them to “succeed.” This does not mean He doesn’t care or that he has lost control. Here Peter says that their judgment is not idle nor is their destruction asleep. That is because they are accountable to God who is neither idle nor asleep. For some their destruction comes in a way that is visible for all to see. This is most often the case, but not always. For reasons known only to Him, God allows some to continue their deception and He allows their movements to persist beyond their years. Perhaps in some cases it is that the faith of genuine believers would be damaged if God uprooted them (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). But their judgment has been decreed from long ago. Their progress is allowed only because God, for His own reason, has allowed it so. We can know that as sure as their presence, is their eventual destruction and judgment.

**2:4—“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;”**

The words of Peter in verses 4-22 closely parallel those of Jude (see Jude 15-16). Both writers were apparently attacking a group of false prophets who, if not the same, had a similar *modus operandi*. There follows here a series of scriptural examples of situations in which God separated evil beings from the mainstream and carried out judgment on them. At the same time, He preserves from judgment those in whom He sees faith.

This practice of His began before He created human beings, when Satan apparently led a group of angels into rebellion against God. God approached this rebellion in various ways. Some of these beings were allowed a measure of freedom. And so, we see Scripture speaking of Satan and demons operating in the affairs of men. Other spiritual beings were not allowed that freedom but are confined in various ways. This verse speaks of that confinement and this practice of God is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture (Jude 6, Revelation 9:1-15, Revelation 20:1-2). There are apparently spiritual

beings kept by God in spiritual prisons of some sort. Whatever the bonds are that keep such beings confined (perhaps these bonds are as simple as the word of the Almighty), they are held by those bonds awaiting their judgment.

Subjects like these have fueled a great deal of speculation. Evil angels, demons, Satan, the realm of evil are all of great interest, but little is written about the origins, roots, and inner workings of darkness in the Scripture. The writings that bear Peter's name and Jude's name contain some of the more curious texts. Our understanding is as much from what is implicit rather than what is explicit in the text of Scripture. Paul wrote that we should be simple concerning what is evil (Romans 16:19). This does not demand that we be ignorant, only inexperienced. But this may reflect God's general strategy to equip us to resist evil. He seems in general to be concerned with revealing truth rather than the intricacies of those who have abandoned it and their elaborate schemes. His strategy for our safety is for us to become well-versed in the truth and so to resist. If we resist Satan, he will flee from us (James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:9). This was the strategy of Jesus in His own temptation (Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13).

God's imprisonment of evil angels shows that though He has allowed evil, he does not allow all evil that could possibly come about. There are limits to the type and extent of evil that He will allow to come about.

**2:5—"and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;"**

There are three references to Noah in the New Testament (Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5). Two of those are in Peter's epistles, and this is the last reference to Noah in the Bible. In all cases the story of the flood, the ark, the great loss of life, are viewed as an actual historical event. If such an event happened, then all the peoples of earth could trace their ancestry to Noah, and we would expect that accounts of such an event might be present in other religions and cultures. Such a dramatic story would have been passed along orally and perhaps eventually recorded in writing. We have observed that this is true. The ancient writing known as "The Epic of Gilgamesh" is an example of such an account. Christians have always embraced as true this story of Noah which to skeptics and critics seems absurd. Belief persists because of the testimony of Scripture, not only the Genesis account but passages like this that clearly attest to its historicity.

Peter's point however in citing this event is to use it as evidence that false prophets do not get away with anything. Their judgment is certain, and the survival of truth is certain. God's grace allowed for His mercy to be extended to an imperfect man so that Noah had faith. His faith inspired him to follow God's direction in building the ark. In this providence of God and response of man, humanity and animal life were preserved even as God brought an end to much of His previous creation. God is able and willing to sort the good and the bad. We await only His time.

Noah is referred to here as a “preacher of righteousness.” He was one who made continuous proclamation of the truth to a world that wholly embraced the lie. The world God had created had become the world of the ungodly. It was not however that they now owned or controlled it. They had been trapped by the earth’s pseudo-ruler, Satan. Society was being shaped by the lie to the great detriment of its members. This is always a dangerous situation, and God in His grace moves according to the plan He has made in eternity past so that His will for the redemption of creation can progress. So, this world, that had become the world of the ungodly, was taken back by its creator. Noah and the people of his day became Peter’s second case in point to demonstrate that God will certainly deal with all who resist the truth, and especially with those who lead movements away from the truth. Peter will continue and offer another example of this.

**2:6—“and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter;”**

Peter cites another incident from the account in Genesis (Genesis 18:16-19:29), that demonstrates God’s ability to deal with evil and His faithfulness to justice and His own promises in taking decisive action against evil. The story of these two ancient cities is a sordid one, so much so that it is easy to view the case of Sodom and Gomorrah as an exceptional one. Peter’s words here show that it was not. In fact, there is a normalcy to their journey of moral decline. God allowed the normal downward spiral of immorality to run its full course in their case. It is only His gracious restraint that keeps us from seeing the warped and abusive conditions of Sodom and Gomorrah become normative. They were not exceptionally evil. God simply allowed their evil to come to full bloom so that all who followed would be warned of the disastrous and painful consequences of living in darkness.

This permissive act of God is what Peter is referring to in this verse when he says that God “made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter.” It is not just their destruction by an act of God that is to be instructive. It is their self-destruction before that is to be an example. This is the end that those who lead us away from truth point us to. We will be punished by our sins, and then again for our sins. This is certain and sure, and God cared enough to allow test cases that make full disclosure of the destructive and abusive nature of life lived outside the boundaries of truth. The physical destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah make a very dramatic statement to the attentive of the truth about evil. It is destructive and so leads to destruction.

**2:7—“and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men;”**

Literally, “righteous Lot was rescued while worn down under the conduct of the unprincipled in their incontinence.” Peter’s words on Lot give us great insight into some matters of theological significance. The statement is about the “unprincipled” and their impact on Lot. “Unprincipled” is the rendering of *αθεσμον*, which is derived from the *α* privative and *τιθημι*, meaning to place. *τιθημι* generally, means to place in a passive posture as opposed to an active or upright posture (*ιστημι*), or a prostrate one (*κειμαι*). The *α* privative of course, reverses the meaning so that *αθεσμον* means unplaced. These persons are without position, hence the idea of unprincipled.

Now it is possible for the unprincipled to feign morality and conviction for the sake of manipulation, as verse 2 suggested. But these had moved beyond all such restraint. They were behaving with no control or restraint; God having willed it so in order to demonstrate the end to which evil moves humanity. It is a dismal end to which humanity arrives apart from God's grace. Even Lot, who was himself a righteous man, was impacted by the atmosphere he lived in so that his own conduct toward his daughters in offering them to the men of the city was despicable. But that is more the subject of the next verse. This verse cites God's ability and willingness to rescue Lot, separating him away from such an atmosphere where depravity had been allowed to run its course. Lot was not destroyed by it or with it but was rescued by God both in it and eventually from it.

**2:8—"for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds."**

For the second time Peter refers to Lot as righteous. In our theological jargon we would have to concede that Lot was part of the elect. That seems certain. We see several things about Lot that were less than exemplary. When he chose the well-watered valley of Jordon for himself and left for Abram the less desirable land of Canaan, he was certainly not taking the high road (Genesis 13:8-13). When that choice led him to settle in Sodom, he made a choice that we could say got him into several messes. When he offered his two virgin daughters to the men of the city, it was certainly not the thinking of what we would call a righteous man (Genesis 19:8). The final mention of Lot is a story of drunkenness and incest (Genesis 19:30-38). His legacy was the Moabites and the Ammonites (Genesis 19:37-38), both of whom became a thorn in the side of Israel. The Ammonites became a people rejected by the Lord who would eventually be annihilated by Him in His wrath (Ezekiel 21:28-32). Both people groups were excluded from entering the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). The notable exception was a Moabite named Ruth, whose story is told in the book named after her, who was the great grandmother of David and so is in the genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:5).

It has been popular among a group of Christian thinkers, and in particular Calvinists, to teach that not only is the justification of the elect predestined, but their sanctification as well is predestined. They do this rather dogmatically so that many Christians conclude that those who fail to rise morally to the level God summons us to, prove by this failure of theirs that they are not among the elect. They develop a whole system of thought that speaks of "professors versus possessors," making distinctions that are very clear to themselves about those who profess Christianity but who do not possess it. They believe that all who are truly justified will be sanctified in a way that is visible for all to behold. Now if we say that this is true in the sense that we look for the great eschatological act by which God will, in the twinkling of an eye, bestow new bodies on His family and render them perfect and unable to sin, who can deny that this is our future (1 Corinthians 15:51-58). But if we mean that in this present life we will gradually, by God's sovereign grace, become holy to the exact degree God desires, then we negate any role of the human will, we remove the variable of our faithfulness, and we have a number of biblical contradictions including the story of this man, righteous Lot. Lot would be a prime candidate for the label of "professor not possessor," except for the clear testimony of this passage that he was righteous.

This verse provides an explanation of how it is possible that Christians fail to rise to the level of holiness God would have them rise to. Peter, one who was acquainted with the failures produced by his own will, makes a parenthetical explanation of what was happening within the soul of this righteous man. It is a packed statement. The process that was going on inside Lot was a daily one. Verse 7 describes it as one that wore him down. So, it was continual and very persistent. There was no let up. It was a process that tortured his soul. This reveals that something was impacting in a painful way Lot's inner being. His inner being, though he was one of God's elect, was not composed and at peace. Something traumatic was happening in that part of his being that shapes patterns of behavior. This torment of his soul was brought about by what he saw and heard, namely lawless deeds. The NASB has added the word "their," indicating that it was the lawless deeds of others that tormented him. This leaves the reader with the impression that the sins he saw and observed in others in some sense tortured his soul. This makes Lot out to be a very noble man. However, we must consider the fact that it is possible that lawless deeds tormented his soul in the sense that he was inwardly drawn to them because he saw and heard them. Therefore, his soul, though belonging to God was continually unhealthy because of his own compromises. This does not demand that Lot was as depraved as the average citizen of Sodom, only that his environment led him to make unhealthy compromises. Such compromises seem evident in the Genesis account.

Now if this interpretation is correct, Peter's point is made even stronger, namely that God's grace was strong enough to rescue even a compromised man from judgment, and that God's faithfulness guaranteed that such a rescue would happen. It would happen in the sense that a compromised child of God would not experience the full blow of God's judgment against such sin. Lot did suffer loss, the personal loss of his wife and his personal property. He fell a long way from the blessed state he had and the increase he had enjoyed in Genesis 13:5-7. But his life was spared in very dramatic fashion. The lesson of Lot is that it is possible to fail as a child of God and to fall short of the holiness that God has called us to. Even to such a disobedient child, God is faithful, and His power toward them is not limited, nor curtailed due to their unfaithfulness to Him.

**2:9—"then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment."**

Since God condemns and successfully confines powerful evil beings, and since He intervened in His own creation and destroyed humanity except for Noah and seven others, and since he judged Sodom and Gomorrah, but spared Lot, then we can observe a pattern in His behavior and make two observations that will prove reliable. That is the thrust of Peter's logic in verses 4 through 9. Here then, he will make those two observations.

First, the Lord rescues godly people from temptation. This is an important word choice by Peter. We might expect the word "judgment." Instead, we see that the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation. Peter leaps backward past the rescue from judgment to the rescue from temptation that allowed there to be godly ones to rescue from judgment. Were it not for this rescue, all would be trapped in godless disbelief. There would be no godly to rescue from judgment. God preserves a remnant among those swept along by temptation and so such a remnant exists who then are rescued from judgment.

At the same time the unrighteous are kept “under punishment.” This is Peter’s second observation. Thus, like the angels who are bound and so punished as they await judgment, evil people become enslaved to their sins and so are punished while they wait for their final judgment. They are punished by their sins as they wait to be punished for their sins. Since God has demonstrated the pattern of rescuing His own and punishing those who rebel against His rule, we can rely on that pattern to continue uninterrupted.

**2:10—“and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they reviled angelic majesties,”**

Peter singles out a particular strain of false prophets. We do not know who he is referring to here. But some group of individuals known to the readers are singled out as those believers should separate from. That will be the purpose of the words that follow in this section of his letter.

The first part of the verse identifies those who indulge the flesh and despise authority. While all humanity engages in this, there are those that do so to an abnormal and intense degree. They stand out as particularly excessive and uncontrollable. They seem to have less of a conscience. Paul might have had this human tendency in mind when he spoke of some people as being “without natural affection”(Romans 1:31; Colossians 3:5). Their indulgence of the flesh is blatant. This always leads to problems with authority, any authority. They fight any regulation except the dictates of their own desires. Anything or any person that blocks their desires they despise. They are dangerous both to the Church and to society. Their own depravity spreads like a disease and destroys all that is dear to the human experience.

With the prophetic gift and ministry comes certain personality factors that can degenerate into brashness. Under the Spirit’s control they become an admirable boldness and courage. Under the influence of the flesh, it is just brashness and foolishness. Those two words describe perfectly what the prophetic gift becomes when it is used outside the boundaries of the Spirit’s control. But anything bold can be compelling. So, the readers had to be alert so as not to be taken by these who were simply daring and self-willed.

The group Peter is concerned about were apparently demonstrating their brashness against spiritual beings whom Peter calls “angelic majesties.” We do not know specifically whom they were attacking, but these false prophets were apparently known for their “reviling” of these spiritual beings. “Reviling” is the NASB rendering of βλασφημοῦντες, which means to vilify and in particular to speak impiously of. It involves going beyond appropriate boundaries of speech. Verse 12 will speak of them “reviling where they have no knowledge.” We can simply speculate that these false prophets were likely claiming some special power over spiritual beings that in reality they knew little about. They may have claimed power over evil beings or good beings, but in any case, they were imagining their spiritual strength. What they were passing off as power and boldness was in reality a brash ignorance. There is likely a parallel, a tendency among many false or fleshly prophets to suppose that they have more spiritual clout than they do. This is observable in the case of many questionable movements and allows the false prophet to gain quite a following among the unsuspecting.

**2:11—“whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord.”**

These statements closely parallel those made by Jude (see Jude 9-10). Peter’s testimony of the angelic world agrees with Jude’s. Jude actually cites an incident in the apocryphal writings as an example of the boundaries observed by good angels in their exchanges with evil angels. This does not mean these apocryphal writings are inerrant. It simply means they were either correct on this point, or that they provided a known illustration of the point from the literature of the day. We suspect that this must have been affirmed by Christ to these men for them both to have spoken as they do to this issue. Zechariah 3:2 references an incident where the angel of Yahweh, whom we believe to be the pre-incarnate Christ, rebukes Satan, but does so by saying “Yahweh who has chosen Jerusalem rebukes you.” This respect for the power of all spiritual authority is an important indicator to Peter, which he wants his readers to embrace as part of the grid by which movements and teachers are evaluated. Once we have determined the source of a movement, we should continue to observe this boundary. At no time should our speech regarding the unseen forces of the spiritual realm become brash and presumptuous as if we have great and full understanding of it. Not even angels engage in such bantering, and not even Christ does so.

**2:12—“But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed.”**

Peter compares these false teachers with “unreasoning animals” and as “creatures of instinct.” They are driven by desire rather than by rational interaction with the truth and by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Their brash actions toward the spiritual realm prove that they are not behaving in accord with knowledge of the truth.

Peter compares them not to domestic beasts, but to wild animals that are dangerous and must be captured and killed. It is not that he advocates the believer capturing and killing. He is simply making a statement about how dangerous wild animals are handled to illustrate the importance of separating ourselves from what is false. There is an appointed time when God will deal with such individuals finally and decisively. In the meantime, we are to recognize them and avoid them because their instincts make them dangerous.

**2:13—“suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you.”**

Literally these false teachers are said to be “being unrighteous.” They become victims of the very standard they embrace and teach to others. Their own wages are of the same stuff as that which they give others. They are paid in like kind, and this is something God has built into the universe. We reap what we sow.

This section of Scripture is full of figures of speech and here the figure of earning wages serves well to demonstrate that these workers of evil are not getting away with anything. Though such individuals are working hard at grabbing things for themselves, their satisfaction eludes their grasp. They tend to be continually frustrated and unable to lay hold of that which they crave. No matter how much they get, there is always more they want. Bad things tend to come their way in terms of the things that really matter.



The word rendered “revel” is τρυφήν, a word that refers to delicate living. It is indulging and seeking to indulge in what we often refer to as the “former things.” It includes food, clothes, entertainment and the like that constitute pleasure. The reference to engaging in this pursuit in the daytime is meant to convey two things. First, the daytime is when we should be gainfully employed, working through legitimate channels to provide for our needs. When they should be pursuing legitimate things, these individuals are pursuing pleasure. Second, the reference to the daytime shows that their pursuit of pleasure is blatant. It is neither concealed nor is it a simple vice or weakness. It rules them. It is in plain sight.

The sentence that follows adds more to this idea. It refers to these teachers as stains and blemishes. They are visible and they stand out as not belonging. They are “living luxuriously in their delusions.” In some way their deluded ideas were making them money that enabled them to indulge themselves, which they were freely doing. Theirs was a particularly offensive sinfulness to Peter and the legitimate spiritual leaders of the day who had suffered the loss of so much for the sake of the truth. They were undoing much of what Peter and the others had worked to build. Here Peter refers to them as “carousing with” the believers. The word he uses is συνεσθούμενοι, which means to feast together. Apparently, some of their excessiveness was finding its way into the Church so that Peter describes them as being excessive together with his readers. This may have been a reference to a perversion of the Communion service as in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11), and as appears to be referenced by Jude in similar words as Peter’s (Jude 12). Whatever the exact situation, Peter clearly labels their activity as being shamefully out of character with the true practice of the faith.

**2:14—“having eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children;”**

Part of the human experience is understanding both our own and other’s ability to lead double lives. There is no limit to the evil that our inner being can ponder, and what we allow ourselves to ponder finds its way into our experience. Judging the naked truth regarding our thoughts is critical to giving ourselves moral direction.

These false teachers must have had a side to them that made them believable. But with these words Peter speaks of who they really are when the veneer is stripped away. Their eyes are full of adultery and never cease from sin. They continually allowed their eyes to look and linger. In fact, their eyes served the cravings of their inner being so that they searched continually for stimuli and opportunity. Because they are driven in this way they continually search for and capture victims, people who have no value to them except to be used as a means to gain some selfish end. They prey on the weak, the unstable, or unsteady. Among these they find those driven along by their own needs and who are thus easier to ensnare and take advantage of.

Peter says the hearts of these false teachers are trained in greed. He uses a perfect tense, describing a condition they have arrived at through action taken in the past. It is where they now live, in the state of skilled and intentional greed. They have uncontrolled appetites that can never be satisfied. Because they have never dealt with the truth of their own condition, that condition has shaped them and defined them. It is so much a part of who they are that they are now fully conditioned by it. The curse has enveloped them fully.

When Peter says that they are accursed children, he is speaking of something that the verses that follow will explain more fully. Opinions vary on these verses. Some would say they are accursed children meaning they were part of God’s family but have now

been cast out of it. Others would say they never were part of His family, they were professors but not possessors. Others would say they were and are part of God's family but because of their own choices they are experiencing the curse instead of the blessing. Ultimately all of these positions can find support in the context, but all positions also encounter a problem in the context. What we believe Scripture says in more clear passages drives how we interpret this passage. It would seem that they are children, but because of choices they have made they are experiencing the curse, the pain and turmoil the enemy can bring to bear in the life of one who is disobedient.

**2:15—"forsaking the right way they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of righteousness."**

When we turn away from what is true, all that is left to turn to is lies. It is the greatest of blessings to know the truth about oneself, about God, and about the things and situations that compose life. When we accept truth, we are blessed with discovering more. When we reject it we are left with illusions, myths, mixtures of half-truths, and a load of data that cannot possibly come to have understandable meaning in our lives. It is truth that assigns meaning and significance to all that is. Therefore to live wisely we must seek the truth and then think and act in light of what is really true. We must not be seduced by what we wish to be true, or hope to be true, or want to be true. The Holy Spirit convicts us regarding truth and through Him God has enabled us to enter into the blessing that always accompanies truth.

As Peter continues to warn his readers about the false teachers of his day he does so with passion and urgency because he understands what is at stake and how hollow a life becomes when the truth is sacrificed. Balaam was a man who was attracted to the wages of unrighteousness. His story is recorded in Numbers 22-23. Peter's words here shed additional light on that story and allow us to see that somewhere in the whole process, something went wrong in Balaam's heart. The promise of wealth and acclaim eroded his initial commitment to be a blessing to those God had blessed. Though he observes the letter of the Lord's command to him and blesses Israel (Numbers 23-24), it is evident that he gave advice to Israel's enemy that allowed them to come between the Israelites and their God (Numbers 25:16-18; 31:16). The result was that the Israelites were drawn away from compliance with the truth and came under the judgment of God (Numbers 25:1-9). So Balaam left the boundaries of truth because he was attracted by the things the king of Moab could reward him with. The result was that his own error spread, and many lost out on blessing and inherited judgment instead.

Every false teacher becomes what they are due to this error. There is something attractive to them that draws them away from commitment to truth. They compromise in some way truth in order to lay hold of a temporal reward. This error is as old as history itself and is always tragic. We always err when we talk ourselves into something rather than listening to the voice of God.

**2:16—"but he received a rebuke for his own transgression; for a dumb donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet."**

God goes to extra-ordinary lengths to keep us on course with respect to what is true. This is demonstrated in the story of Balaam (Numbers 22-23). God allows a donkey to talk, an amazing event, to seek to keep Balaam on the course of truth.

When we study that story we see that God had given Balaam permission to accompany the men of Moab, but then got angry with Balaam for going. This seems

contradictory, but we can surmise that the reason for this change in God was that there was a change in Balaam's heart. Somewhere his heart began to set itself on gain. This is what Peter is referring to when he speaks of the prophet's madness. As his inner being is beginning to leave the boundaries of truth and fall for the illusion of riches, God miraculously gets his attention through the animal he was riding on, a donkey. Through this experience God seeks to keep Balaam on the pathway of truth. Again, it is successful to a degree, but Balaam does make some well-covered and subtle compromises and so brings damage to God's people. God had gone to great lengths to remind Balaam of the truth about the whole situation. When we fly in the face of reality, it is always with grave results.

**2:17—"these are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness is reserved."**

Peter leaves the story of Balaam to speak regarding the false teachers that would arise in the church. Peter makes three figurative statements about them that describe their spiritual state. First he says they are "springs without water." They appear to be a source of understanding and wisdom and spiritual sustenance. But they have nothing to offer in this regard. Those who go to them will get nothing because there is nothing there. Second, he says they are mists driven by a storm. Again this figure involves the appearance of water. The false teachers appear to be clouds that will bring growth causing rain, but the reality is that they are like fog that is just drifting through. They deliver nothing of value. They only restrict sight and vision. Thirdly, Peter says that black darkness is reserved for them. Literally, "for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved." Darkness in Scripture is a figure of existence apart from truth. Whether Peter is speaking of the eternal place they will occupy or of the life they live in this world apart from truth can be debated. Both ideas are true. When we leave the boundaries of God's truth, we "walk in darkness" (1 John 1:5-7).

It is a horrible life that is experienced by non-believers and believers who are disobedience. All that goes with darkness they feel. On the other hand, we cannot deny that even in that state the nature of the present world allows them to experience God's presence and grace (Acts 14:16-17; 17:24-30). There is a time and place where those who reject the truth and substitute their own conjectures and imaginings will exist apart from the grace and favor of God. They will know beyond a shadow of doubt what the truth is but be denied access to the realm in which it is the rule. "Black darkness" is the perfect description of that place.

There are teachers that arise in the Church that are devoid of the Spirit. They lead many among the weak astray. But their reality is that those they have chosen to follow do not themselves belong. The fact that the black darkness is said to be "reserved" for them argues strongly for it describing their eternal destiny.

**2:18—"For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error."**

It is an amazing thing that no matter how great the error of the false teacher and how blatantly their life conflicts with the truth, he or she is able to attract to themselves a following. This verse speaks to how this comes about.

The false message is driven along by arrogance and vanity. By these words we can surmise that because their teaching reflects their own arrogance and vanity, it has appeal to the arrogance and vanity that is in others. There is no shortage of these in

the heart of any person. There is a strong desire to know, to be right, and to be seen in a certain light. False teachers are themselves motivated by such things and they traffic in them. In this way they entice others. Their words and their persona are appealing to those given to such things or who have not yet come to discern the difference between these and genuine spiritual power and boldness. Their power comes through weaknesses they share with their hearers, namely their own arrogance and vanity and the fleshly desires and sensuality of their hearers. The wonder is that deception does not happen more, given the preponderance of these factors among humanity.

The followers of false teachers Peter notes are made up of weak Christians. They are described as barely escaping error. The word for escape is to flee. The imagery is comparable to Lot's escape from Sodom. Peter's words describe those who are believers, but because of a lack of discipline or experience they have made very little movement toward maturity. They are just over the line. These are very vulnerable in one sense. They simply do not have what they need in themselves to sort out truth from error. On the other hand, they should know it. Their submission to authority can save them if they allow it. They become victims because of their own fleshliness, a desire to be more than what they are. In this they fall victim to those who are themselves trying to be what they are not and together they move away from the protective shield of true spiritual authority. Both teachers and students are willing participants of that point. In the purest sense it is not a case of victims and perpetrators. All are victims of their own willfulness, their refusal to submit to those God has placed in authority within His family.

Much of what follows in this chapter concerns itself with these followers, Christians who have said "No!" to the truth and so have been deceived by lies.

**2:19—"Promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved."**

Freedom is found in submission to God and His truth. If we could be perfectly submissive, we would know all we need to know and we would be perfectly free. We would re-enter Eden. In Eden, Adam and Eve first began to seek freedom in autonomy, independence from God. This makes no logical sense for created beings, but since then this has been the error of all of us. We sense that we are enslaved and that is correct. Instead of moving back to Eden we duplicate the error of Eden. Ultimately therefore false teachers can always gain a following.

Freedom has always been a felt need, a passionate desire among fallen humanity. False teachers knowingly and unknowingly push this 'hot button.' Their words appeal to this hunger for freedom. Power and self-determination have always been the illusions that humanity pursues in search of meeting this inner hunger. In pursuing these we live out a strange scenario. We are running away from the very thing we are seeking and toward the very thing that robs us of freedom. Imagining this scenario helps us see that false teachers are always in the right place at the right time, promising freedom and doing so apart from truth.

False teachers model insubordination and practice self-determination. The reality is that they themselves are not free. Peter says they are slaves of corruption. By this he means that they are themselves still victims of the sin that originally corrupted humanity, that desire for self-determination. Their life is being dictated by that pursuit and they are using their hearers and followers to meet their need for power and influence. They are being driven by this insatiable need. At the same time they are passing themselves off as experts in the freedom quest.

Peter rightly points out that whatever controls a man is ultimately his master. As long as this corruption controls a man, he will experience the symptoms of spiritual death. He will not enter into freedom. We must always remember this definition Peter gives to slavery. We are born into slavery and we experience that slavery each instant something other than God and His truth controls our lives. Our enslavement then, always starts with our thoughts, and it is deepened as those thoughts lead to actions. There are myriads of thoughts and things that can enslave us. It is the truth that sets us free.

False teachers, by definition, rob us of freedom. They do not experience or dispense it because they do not deal in truth.

**2:20—“For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.”**

The critical thing in processing this verse is to understand who the pronoun “they” refers to. Whoever “they” is, they are being described as having passed through three different stages. They have been living in a state in which they had been defiled by the world. Then they lived in a state in which they had escaped those defilements. Then they live in a state that comes about when they get entangled in them again.

Does this verse describe the false teachers or their followers? A rather strong case can be made either way. Some strong terms describe the false teachers so that it is difficult to imagine them being straying Christians. On the other hand, verse 14 describes them as “accursed children.” Verse 15 has described them as “forsaking the right way they have gone astray . . .” Though it seems absurd and so unholy, it is possible the false teachers were fallen Christians. Their followers have been described in verse 18 as having been “enticed” from among those who barely escape from those who live in error. They are young or marginal Christians. Likely we should consider the pronoun “they” as describing the followers, and this and the ensuing verses as describing the results of the movement as it shapes the lives of those involved in it.

Here then we have a description of a course that people can follow. Through knowledge of Christ, they can escape the defilements of the world. The word for escape is the same word that appeared in verse 18 and means to run away from. So, these are people who once successfully distanced themselves from what is described as the defilement or pollution of the world. They did so through the knowledge of Christ.

Many believe that our sanctification is predestined. They would say that if someone had saving knowledge of Christ, they would not only escape the defilement of the world, but they would never become entangled in them again, and this through the sovereign intervention of God. Those who hold to this theology, and there are many committed to Calvinism that do, say that the “knowledge of Christ” referred to in this verse is not saving knowledge. It is kind of a sensory experience they go through with the people of Christ, a kind of religious period when through exposure to truth their perspective on certain sins changes. Through normal human means like self-discipline, they gain some victory over such things and so appear to be moving along in the sanctification process. But it is a kind of religious self-help that they eventually lose interest in.

While this is a scenario we have all observed and been frustrated by, we cannot leap to the conclusion that all who fail at the Christian life do so because in reality they don't have Christ. The simple words Peter uses indicate that there are those who do escape the downward course of the world's way of living through knowledge of Christ only to allow themselves to be deceived and so slip backward into their old ways. The truth is that we all slip back, and since that is true it makes sense that Scripture would warn us repeatedly of the danger of lingering in what we slip into. In the words of this verse, it is one thing to be entangled and another thing to be overcome. If we do not admit our sin and apply diligence toward returning to the light of truth, sin can trap us and make us slaves to it all over again. This is the plain reality of the matter and is why Scripture is filled with warnings and specific directions on how to deal with sin.

The people Peter is speaking of have knowledge of Christ as Lord and Savior the text says. They are simply, through a lack of diligence (remember that is what Peter is calling his readers to), entangled and overcome by sin. The compromise involved in allowing sin in our lives extends into spiritual realms and offers demons great power in our lives. The result is that we can do the unheard of, even though we have at one point embraced the truth genuinely. Peter goes on to say that it is possible to fall to a state that is worse than our original state. He heard this from Christ (Matthew 12:43-45; Luke 11:24-26).

So, all in all we have a verse here that has historically been explained in three different ways. Some would say it is describing the journey of one who was really never saved, a professor but not a possessor. Others would say it is describing one who is saved, but through disobedience lost their salvation. Others would say it is describing one who is saved but through a lack of diligence toward the truth has become enslaved all over again to sin. I would say that the last option expresses my opinion on this matter.

**2:21—"For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them."**

This verse shows that the followers who are being attracted through the sensual appeal of the false teachers can be said to have become knowledgeable at some point regarding what Peter refers to as "the way of righteousness." Then in the next phrase he refers to this as "the holy commandment delivered to them."

Considering all that we know of Peter and his fellow apostles from Acts, this would seem to be a reference to all that pertains to life in the Spirit. It is in being born again and living in the Spirit that righteousness is conveyed to us from God. These are said to have known this. The word used for known in both cases in this verse is *ἐπιγινώσκω*, a word used to describe what is both understood and grasped fully. So, they have known and they have correctly perceived the truth but have turned from it.

Peter calls it a holy commandment. There is something very sacred and treasured about the things of the Spirit. We have only to look at how God dealt with those who violated their types and representations in the Old Testament worship system to understand how holy God views them.

**2:22—“It has happened to them according to the true proverb, ‘A dog returns to its own vomit’ and ‘A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.’”**

These were sayings that were present in the culture of the day. The first is referenced in Proverbs 26:11. The second does not appear elsewhere in Scripture but was apparently known to the readers.

The demise of people when they turn away from truth and good counsel has long been noted in the sayings and homey wisdom that develop in the various cultures of the world. These particular sayings, in all likelihood, have their numberless equivalents in cultures that have had no contact with Hebrew culture. It is generally observable that people’s excesses become greater as time passes and as restrictions are removed. The result is a moral entropy that is quite distinct.

## 2 Peter 3

**3:1—“This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder,”**

Peter was confident of the sincerity of his readers. He did not doubt what they wanted to do or what they intended to do. He did have doubts about what they would remember to do. It is likely not just doubt in their ability to remember facts, although he is clearly concerned about the precision of the facts. He understood the human tendency to set aside the urgency of that which we frequently hear. There is a callousness to our passions which can set in and cause us to become “dull in hearing” (Hebrews 5:11-14). And so we easily become people who are not applying a truth because it is old news to us. Peter realized that an important part of his role as a spiritual leader was to call people to the basic life of submission to and dependence on Christ. He also knew how important it was to continually hold up the standard of sound doctrine so as to keep our doctrinal and moral compasses calibrated right (1:12-14). These are the things that surround the context of these words. He saw his letters as serving both purposes, to stir up hearts and minds so that the truth had new clarity and urgency in the lives and hearts of the Christians.

**3:2—“that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.”**

There is linkage between the words of the Old Testament prophets, the teachings of Christ and the words spoken by the apostles. The words of them all are to be authoritative. This implies that they all spoke with one voice and that there is a unity to Scripture. We must remember that it is we who have created the idea of the Old and New Testament. While it is true that these represent the old and new covenants and there are distinctions that characterize these covenants, we must remember there is much more that unites them. The apostles viewed what we term the Old Testament as being authoritative and therefore profitable (1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:17-17). Christ viewed the Scriptures as such that they could not be broken (John 10:35). So, while we must remember that we are dead to the Law and are released from obligation to its ceremony, it is holy by its nature and so is profitable with respect to our understanding (Romans 7). These words spoken in this verse are key ones also in that they equate the writings of the apostles with Scripture. They reflect the apostles and early church’s understanding that the apostles were just what the name implies, the official spokesmen of Christ. We look to them and their words for understanding of the message of Christ, and we are right in doing so. For this they were chosen and commissioned (Mark 3:13-19).



**3:3—“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts,”**

There is something that Peter views to be of first importance for his readers that he states in this verse. The apostles viewed the times before Christ as the former times. They viewed the times after Christ as the last days. Peter speaks here of a particular characteristic of the times that have followed Christ. They would he said, be marked by the advent of mockers or scoffers. These are those who belittle and berate matters of the faith. The verses that follow will speak to the specific focus of their ridicule.

But first, in this verse a clue is given that helps explain how one becomes a mocker. It is in the phrase, “following after their own lusts.” In choosing to follow after one’s own lusts, intellectual objectivity can be lost. It happens this way. There is a way of living based on certain desires that one wishes to embrace and pursue. It only makes sense if certain things are NOT true about life and not true about life’s creator and sustainer. At that point the individual has arrived at a crossroad, and most often they jettison any beliefs that would mitigate their pursuit of their own desires. When they do so they have arrived at the point where their desires shape their view of truth.

The greatest challenge of all who are not omniscient is that we must decide what is and is not true. Our great dilemma is that we very often choose the option that will best justify moral and practical choices we wish to make. Our theology and philosophy in this way become shaped by our own desires, which may or may not be true. It is a terrible trap to fall into that absolutely blinds us in terms of our truth search. We become impaired at that point and our ability to discern and so embrace truth is frozen at the level it is and may even recede. This we see is a principle that God has built into the nature of truth itself. Those who are willing to embrace its implications discover it and their understanding of it deepens. Those unwilling to respond to its implications not only fail to experience truth in the specific matter they are pondering, but they lose ability to discover and process it in all of life’s various endeavors (Matthew 13:10-17; Luke 8:16-18; Luke 19:26). This is true about spiritual truth but is also true in terms of the truth about themselves. It is a miserable existence that leads them into many empty pursuits for which they themselves are not equipped for success. They almost always seek to function at a level outside of their own ability and so bring much heartache and frustration upon themselves.

**3:4—“and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.’”**

The coming of Christ to earth as its judge has enormous moral and ethical implications. If it is true that there is a judge, then it is also true that there is a standard which he will enforce. If on the other hand there is no judge, then there is no accountability, and we may live by our own standard. The only consequences we must manage are those related to civil authority. We must be concerned only about what is detected by such authorities. So, it can be quickly seen that life is shaped in completely different ways depending on what we decide is true about Christ’s coming. Peter says that the times since Christ are marked by those who openly berate the idea that He will return. They do so because they are following their own desires and so must jettison thought that promotes the disconcerting idea of accountability. Nothing implies more accountability than a visit from God and so that idea is among the first to go.

Peter gives the words of such “thinkers”, and they ring with the tone of someone who is talking themselves into something. Their logic is simply stated. Christ’s coming has not happened, therefore it will not happen. In no other area of life would such logic be considered acceptable. There were many who believed that because man had never walked on the moon he would not. It was mistaken logic. Imagine saying “I have not had an auto accident therefore I will not.” In all of life we force ourselves to insure against events that are eventualities or potentialities. But in eternal matters we allow ourselves to say, “It hasn’t happened therefore it will not happen.” The steady progress of time and the passing of generations without interruption should not lull us to sleep so that we imagine things of eternity differently than God has revealed. Creation’s uniformity should not be mistaken as evidence that it is the paramount force.

**3:5—“For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and by water.”**

When people misread what they have termed “nature,” and ascribe to it power independent of God they are laying a faulty foundation. The reality is that they have looked past what God has plainly revealed. The phrase “when they maintain this,” is the NASB rendering of θελοντας, a word that describes the act of willing or wishing. This is a verbal adjective which modifies the phrase “it escapes their notice.” The idea is that their ignorance is willful, the result of their desire to eliminate God and follow after their own desires.

Peter’s statement of the creation of the heavens and earth appears to be carefully formed here, but there is considerable room for movement in terms of its translation and interpretation. It is not precisely worded to the degree that it can be used to prove a method of creation, only that creation came about by the decree of God. That is the ultimate explanation for why there is something instead of nothing. It is the message of Scripture from its beginning to its end, that things begin and end with God. We must remember in absorbing ourselves with what this verse says that what it states is offered as proof that what Christ has said will come about. So, the primary idea here is that the word of God shapes reality. Therefore since Christ has spoken a promise, to return to the earth, we can be certain that it will become a reality.

There are several observations that are of interest in terms of the language and grammar of this verse. The word “heavens” is plural. The explanation for this is that it is always plural in the Hebrew language, and so this is carried over into the Greek. This plural then is reflecting the word’s usage as describing multiple things such as the earth’s atmosphere, the place of the sun, moon, and stars, and the place of the abode of God. Ancient Jewish literature in fact, identifies seven heavens. It is best to see this plural simply as a Hebraism, a cultural influence that affected word choice. We can observe as well that no definite articles govern either the term for heavens or the term for earth. The words are simply “heavens” and “an earth.” The word used for “earth” can be used not just of what we would term the planet, but of the dry land as opposed to the water. The word rendered “was formed” means “to stand together.”

There are some ambiguities in the verse. The phrase “by the word of God” can be legitimately seen as referring to the formation of both the heavens and the earth, or as just governing the statement on the formation of the earth. The phrase “out of water and through water” can be seen in light of what we know scientifically today about basic elements, or as a simple affirmation of the record of Genesis 1. Punctuation can be varied so that the verse could be read in the following way: “. . . the heavens existed and long ago the earth was formed out of water and by water by the word of God.” The phrase “long ago” can thus be assigned significance in several different ways.

Again, the important thing to Peter is that when God speaks, what He has spoken stands. He wants his readers to not waiver in their belief that Christ will again stand on the earth because God has spoken it. It will become reality just as sure as the earth itself is a reality.

Having said all that, it seems that Peter is using creation to give assurance to the promise of Christ’s return. By the decree of God, meaning His command, the heavens existed of old, or from ancient time. By the decree of God the dry land separated itself from the waters that covered it, so they now stand together as separate. These things all were brought about and are sustained by God’s word. His word can change them as the next verse will show. His word can encounter no obstacle so great that it is thwarted or hindered. His word explains the existence of all that is because it is the ultimate cause of all that is. Christ’s coming should never be viewed as somehow altered because it has not yet occurred. It has been decreed by God. We await only its time. This verse shows that what seems normal and set and eternal is really dependent on His wish. The next verse shows that what is cataclysmic is the same, it depends on His word.

### **3:6—“through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded by water.”**

There is varied opinion on what the pronoun “which” refers to. Some say it means “which water.” Others believe it means “which word,” meaning specifically the decree of God. I believe the latter is the best way of understanding it. Peter is wishing to make a point about the Word of God. Since God has decreed that Christ would rule the earth, we can be certain it will come about, even as He decreed that water would cover the earth and it came about in His time. There were those who laughed at the warning of God that was delivered through Noah. But His word came about the former earth was destroyed. The coming of Christ will happen because it is the decree of God. Nothing is more certain. Things have not continued just as they were since creation by some order inherent in nature itself. There has only been predictability and order due to the fact that they were decreed by God. The fact is that we live on a planet that has gone through cataclysmic change (the root of the word rendered flooded here is that from which we get the word cataclysmic), as a result of the word of God. The present world can change very rapidly at any moment, and it will. The verses that follow describe those changes.

### **3:7—“But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”**

The key phrase in this verse is the phrase “by His word.” Again, Peter’s point is that the decree of God is what shapes reality. The world we live in that we view as so permanent is actually something that has come and will go at God’s word. It has a role to play in God’s plan, but His plan is the thing that will stand. It is the plan not the

props and the sets that is the thing. Peter says that the present earth and its atmosphere are being reserved for fire, to be burnt up. That means that much of what we see and strive to get a piece of is really just fuel. Scripture reveals that God has a day marked out when He will intervene directly in earth's affairs, rule over them, and then bring all its evil to judgment. That will include the final judgment of the evil one, evil men, and the earth that has been corrupted by evil (Revelation 20-21). This final judgment is called in Scripture, "the Day of the Lord." (Isaiah 2:12-22, Joel 2:28-32, Matthew 24:1-31, Luke 21:25-28, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11) This "day" will be roughly 1,000 years in length (Revelation 20:2 establishes the primary block of time involved). History is in the story of the earth as it moves along toward this appointed destiny. But in the meantime God continues in His grace to do His work of preserving and sustaining life. Even as God was longsuffering before the judgment of the flood, so He is longsuffering presently, seeking the repentance of all and awaiting the repentance of all He has called. In saying that the present earth is reserved for fire, we need not necessarily understand the Spirit as saying that for this the earth was made. This has become its destiny, and this destiny was known to God before time, and allowed by Him in time. But that is a different matter than saying that He created it to destroy it. While that would certainly be within His rights, it would not seem necessarily to be within the boundaries of His character.

**3:8—"But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."**

God is bound by things like His own character, his own word, and His purposes. He is bound by nothing outside of Himself. Since He is eternal there is no date by which He must accomplish something. Since He is eternally self-sufficient there is no other being or force, He must coordinate with. Since He is all powerful, there is no degree of difficulty in tasks that cause some to take longer. So, He is not constrained in any sense by time. Therefore the length of time it takes for His promised coming to materialize is irrelevant. Its apparent slowness to come about is meaningless. The meaning of this verse is that length of time or shortness of time are not ideas that help us understand or interpret the dealings of God. He is a timeless being. This does not mean that He is unable to relate to time, or that He has not concerned for what happens in time, or that He makes no reliable statement of time. He did after all, create time, and it serves Him. What it does mean is that as the eternal, self-sufficient one there is no rush to finish a phase of a plan. He has no need to facilitate a schedule or to coordinate with someone else, nor is their inability with regard to a plan to where it could not be executed in one day. Therefore any scenario regarding time with respect to accomplishing a certain goal is possible with God. A thousand years are like on day and one day like a thousand years in that both provide sufficient opportunity for God to do whatever He pleases regardless of the magnitude of the objective. The next verse will affirm that it is not inability that delays his coming, or degree of difficulty with respect to His various objectives. The timing relates strictly to His desire and the pace he has chosen to move along His work. What He desires comes about as all His desires are met, and this can happen as easily in one day as it can in a thousand years to one with limitless power.

**3:9—“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish but for all to come to repentance.”**

Some equate slowness with a lack of competency or outright inability. Some equate slowness with a lack of character or integrity. Tardiness among people is one of the most self-centered acts. This is true with respect to the behavior of humanity towards each other. Peter warns that we should not reach such conclusions about the Lord due to the fact that we have not yet seen the coming of the Day of the Lord. The fact is that it has not been delayed in the sense of the schedule having to be altered. It will happen according to the exact course of events in the realm of time that God has predetermined. Anything that from our perspective looks like a delay is explained by some element within the objectives God wishes to achieve by His plan. Peter points out here His long-suffering with respect to the evil of men. That is why His plan provides for a very prolonged period of time to elapse before He returns to rule the earth. There are complex elements to God's plan for human life on this earth. We do not know the number of individual lives He has appointed to be lived out on earth before His coming. We don't know the "why" of those lives. We certainly do not know why it is so essential to have those lives completely lived out. But somehow each of those lives must appear on earth and each must have opportunity with respect to truth, so that if they prove responsive to truth they will be led to the truth, the specific knowledge of truth that saves. Why God doesn't simply terminate the plan and return, we do not know, but it relates to His long-suffering, or patience as spoken of here. The "opportunity with respect to truth" mentioned earlier is important to reflect on and come to terms with. Many have thought this through and reached the conclusion that the salvation of individual human souls is a work that is entirely of God and that humanity has no role or choice in the matter. Those God has chosen, the elect, will be saved in the course of time. Nothing can keep them from this destiny. Human will in this system, of though called Calvinism, is completely and thoroughly subjugated to the will of God. There is much Scripture that supports this idea. At the other end of the spectrum of theological thought is Arminianism. This system of thought portrays man as having almost complete free will in the matter. An individual's choice with respect to truth is not predetermined. Humanity can legitimately be said to have free will. Verses like this one are marshaled in support of this system of thought. It is a most compelling argument for the idea of human choice when the words specifically state that the Lord is "not wishing that any should perish but for all to come to repentance." The words "not wishing," and "all," are very significant. Yet there are other places in Scripture where a powerful statement is made regarding the sovereignty of God (Romans 9:6-29, John 10:25-30). This mystery is best left as that, a mystery. We must live as stewards of choice ourselves and guard our hearts well (Proverbs 4:23). We must approach others as though they can be led to a decision and convince of the truth. We must do all this with a confidence in God's sovereign power to bring about what He chooses and be comfortable with the tension that exists in this particular sphere of our understanding. It seems that when anyone seeks to resolve this tension by moving to either end of the spectrum, faulty thinking and a lack of spiritual health tend to creep into the movement. An over-emphasis on God's sovereignty seems to produce a smugness, and indifference and an apathy. An over-emphasis on man's free will seems to produce an anxiety on the one hand and an arrogance on the other. We must take from this verse that God is in the repentance business, seeking to draw the worst of men along to the point where it can be said that they had an opportunity with respect to truth and an opportunity to change their minds with respect to what they believe about themselves, life and God.

**3:10—“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”**

Verse 9 spoke of the long suffering of God with respect to humanity, and His giving them much opportunity for repentance. But that should not be construed as tolerance or proof that God does not have an absolute standard by which man's behavior and submission to Him is judged. Passages such as Isaiah 2:12-22 make it clear that God has appointed a time of reckoning and declaring the true nature of things. The thoughts and motives of hearts will be revealed and deeds will be manifested for what they really are. The term “day” is likely used in its more loose sense of a period of time. It appears that God's “day” of reckoning includes at least a portion of what we refer to often as the tribulation. It also includes a 1,000-year period in which Christ will rule the nations with a rod of iron and judge them rightly. It extends through the final rebellion of Satan when all evil is finally judged, and the earth is destroyed. Peter states what will be characteristic of the beginning of that period of time, namely that it will come like a thief. It will surprise those who have set aside the truth, most of the earth's population. This metaphor of the thief was first used by Jesus (Matthew 24:43-44). It was also used by Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:2). The point of it seems to be that conditions will be such on earth when that time arrives that earth's inhabitants will be feeling quite secure. There will not be any widespread sense of concern or impending danger. This abrupt change and the accompanying events that transpire mark the beginning of the final phase of God's plan for the earth. Peter's next phrase describes the end of the planet which will occur some thousand years later. This end is spoken of by John in Revelation 20:11 along with an accounting of the judgment and the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1-8), and a new order of things (Revelation 21:9-27). There is a question regarding what Peter was describing when he speaks of the elements melting. Elsewhere in Scripture the word is used of the basic philosophical principles upon which godless philosophy is built (Colossians 2:8). Therefore, some see in these words Peter referring specifically to the destruction of the world system as the planet itself is being destroyed. To others, Peter's description has been observed to resemble the description of some great atomic catastrophe, and so they believe he is speaking of the destruction of the physical elements that compose the physical earth. In this case his comments would compliment the figurative language used by John, when he described God as being the one “from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them” (Revelation 20:11). If Peter's words are describing the melting of the physical elements, they remind us of the immense knowledge of God and the power available to Him. If we know how to destroy the planet with our crude understanding of natural law, how much more power must the creator and designer of natural law have? In Peter's day we know that a crude understanding of matter existed. The idea of it being composed of building blocks of basic elements had emerged. His language allows for the great advancement of the understanding of matter that has come about in our day. It is easy to see in his words an allusion to some process by which the fundamental nature of the matter that composes the earth is interrupted, which generates a great amount of energy in the form of heat and leads to a complete and utter destruction of the planet and likely its surrounding atmosphere.

In either case, the destruction of the earth according to these words of Peter will be complete and final and the present earth has been designated by God for destruction in this way (3:7).

**3:11—“Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,”**

The end that God has planned for this world and the things in it should impact how we conduct ourselves during our stay. There is a very real sense in which all but human life itself and God’s word are fuel for the fire (Habakkuk 2:13). Even in the case of human life, it is individual souls that survive beyond the grave. Though we live this life and are called to live it well, we must avoid the temptation of hanging on to it too tightly or investing in it too deeply. But there are extreme forms of reaction to this truth of the world’s passing that we must avoid. Historically it has led to excessive pursuit of pleasure. The idea that life is short and so should be filled with pleasure has been expressed in countless colloquialisms over the centuries. Peter’s question dismisses this notion that because it’s all temporary we should live without restraint. The truth of the resurrection demands that we live for what lies beyond this life and this world. Because this world is temporary, Christians can become unconcerned about issues related to its environment. To do so is to suppose that one has knowledge of when the Day of the Lord is and so is presumptuous. Peter is arguing here for controlled and intentional living. The Creator has the right to destroy the earth, we do not. Our responsibility is to care for it as that which belongs to someone else (Genesis 1:26-31). So there are these extremes which must be avoided. Peter singles out two things that are to characterize our lives, holy conduct and godliness. Holy conduct describes decisions and courses of action that are distinct from normal or instinctive actions. The way we live should stand out and be noticeable as a calculated series of choices. Holy also describes that which is separated for specific use. Our lives should be focused and as we live them it should be with an increasing understanding of the specific way God uses us. We should be dedicated to that avenue of service that corresponds to our giftedness, our calling and our anointing. Godliness defines the way in which our lives are to stand out, for there are many ways in which we could be different. Our behavior is to reflect God’s character and behavior. We are to be distinct because our inner being is joined to Him and so his character flows from our inner man and becomes visible through our choices in our actions. Because the world and all that attaches itself to it is destined to be destroyed, this is the kind of lifestyle we who know this truth should pursue. Each day we are confronted with the shortness of it all. We should by this be drawn away from it not more deeply drawn into it.

**3:12—“looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat.”**

These words speak of the time referred to in Revelation 20:11 when the earth that we know ends. This will come at the end of a period of time when God intervenes very directly in the affairs of mankind. This period of time is referred to as the Day of the Lord, or in this verse as the Day of God. It begins with a series of judgments against an earthly regime that is the epitome of Satan Himself and all that he represents. It is led by a man who is Satan’s answer to God’s chosen ruler, the Messiah, or the Christ, and so we refer to him as the Antichrist. The spirit that makes such a ruler come to power has existed for many years in the world, that maverick, unbelieving and rebellious bent that mankind has that make them take pleasure in acts of rebellion, defiance and blasphemy against God. After this man comes to power God will begin a series of judgments against him. For three and a half years this man will have brought trouble to earth. Then God will begin to intervene on behalf of His people and His name and for three and a half years there will be all manner of judgment poured out against the

rulers of earth by its Creator. This is the beginning of the day of God's great intervention on earth. After those three and a half years God's chosen ruler, Jesus Christ will return to stand on the earth. He will rule it for a 1,000-year period. This will be an era in which humanity will experience prosperity and peace. Many generations will be born on earth that will never have experienced anything else. In the end these, like other generations who arise that do not know the dangers of evil (perhaps similar to the problem described in Judges 2:10). These will fall for the temptation of the evil one and attempt to cast off God's rule. This rebellion will bring about God's final judgment that will result in the isolation and confinement of evil men and beings and the destruction of the present earth (Revelation 20:11-15). This particular event is what Peter is describing in this verse. His wording is very similar to that of verse 10, in which he speaks of the destruction of earth's atmosphere and the very matter which makes up its mass. The most striking thing however about this verse is Peter's teaching that our actions can hasten the day of God. This can only mean that there are objectives God is waiting to achieve until the right actions are taken and the right prayers prayed by His church. There is some sense in which our behavior facilitates the plan of God, and our wills are entwined with His in bringing His great work to completion. This is a mystery. It is tied here in this context to our becoming people of holy conduct and godliness, so that this needs to be our focus. Our faithfulness in this journey facilitates the movement of God's plan because this is His plan. But the precise detail of this interdependency eludes us. We know that God is independent, and any obligation He has to human will is of His own choosing and is ultimately controlled by Him. This discussion is one which takes us into the issue of God's sovereignty and man's free will and so involves accepting an irresolvable tension. Peter here teaches that our faithfulness matters. It has real and significant impact on the plan of God.

**3:13—"But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."**

Our hope is not of our own fabrication. It is based on the promises of God. Proverbs 10:2 says, "When the whirlwind passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous has an everlasting foundation." That has been the hope of the people of God of the millenniums of time that is based on the covenant promises of God to redeem man from the curse of sin. The hope of a life with God, not simply in his field of view, but in His physical company, has always been the heartbeat of those who understood His truth (Psalm 17:15; 23:6; 49:13-20). That place has always been seen as a shelter from the destructive and oppressive effects of evil (Psalm 15). So, characteristic has this hope been of the faith that we surmise it has always been present since the time of the fall. The writer to the Hebrews states that the earliest of the saints were spurred along by this hope (Hebrews 11:13-16). The cry of creation would be satisfied in righteousness. Before evil was present that cry was not heard. When all was in harmony between creature and creator there was no cry. Since the entry of evil, man has sought to fill the void left by his separation from God, and under man's rule of futility creation has groaned. The new heaven and earth will be a place of righteousness (Revelation 21:1-8), with all that goes with sin absent. This is because the dwelling of God will be with man (Revelation 21:3). It will be good because of this. Where God is all is right and where all is right all is well. Man was made to rule, but cannot do so apart from the intelligence, wisdom and power of God. The result of evil has been that creation's rulers have been improperly ruled, and in response to that void they have ruled more harshly and self-centeredly, which has made their lives in this world more painful. We who have come to understand the truth are looking for a new place where we will live with the righteous one.



**3:14—“Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,”**

Since we know the truth of our dependency on God, we should be living that way now. God has made that kind of life available to us to a degree. By fellowship with Him and submission to Him there should be a developing distance between ourselves and sin with its trappings. Peter says we are to be diligent in these matters. That has been the theme of his letter, that we are to exercise diligence in the matters of God. Though God has extended much grace toward us, our diligence is still required for our progress in matters of the Spirit. The idea of a sudden arrival of God is present in this statement, so that we will be in the middle of courses of action when he arrives. The idea of unexpectedness and suddenness always surrounds the teaching of the day of the Lord. We are to be always ready, for we cannot get ready for an event that has not definitive start time. Peter mentions three things that are to characterize our lives. We are to be in peace. We are to settle matters to whatever degree lies within the boundaries of truth and good conscience toward God. We are not to hold to the truth in a quarrelsome way, but in a gracious way. We are to be spotless, not living in the way of compromise and not secretly indulging ourselves. Though we live among those whose life choices breed trouble, we are to be without blame in terms of propagating evil or facilitating anything but the truth in the lives of others. Spotless refers to our own integrity, blamelessness to our role in the lives of others. What we believe about the future of this earth should impact our conduct on it, and this is the point Peter, like the Lord (Matthew 24:26-25:46), presses home.

**3:15—“and regard the patience of the Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,”**

The patience of the Lord is easy to misinterpret. Many have considered the delay in His coming as proof that the hope is a false one. Peter has warned against this danger (verse 9). The “slowness” of His coming is because He is patient, and His patience is our salvation. If God were not patient none would be saved. This patience of His results in people responding to the light of truth, some to the initial news of forgiveness and redemption resulting in their justification, others to those truths which result in their sanctification. In both cases it is salvation. Peter refers to Paul’s writings, knowing that he was very familiar to the people of Asia minor and his writings widely circulated. We don’t know which particular letter of Paul’s that Peter’s readers would have been acquainted with. But Peter makes it clear in the next verse that all of Paul’s letters spoke with one voice. His comments on Paul give us valuable insight into how the words Paul had written were regarded by the rest of the Apostles.

**3:16—“as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of Scriptures, to their own destruction.”**

There is recognition by Peter in these words of three things that he says directly and then two important implied ideas. First, he says that some things in Paul’s letters are hard to understand. There is recognition in this statement that Paul is articulating doctrinal matters that were complex. All who are students of Scripture would say, “AMEN!” There is recognition in this statement of Paul’s intellect and the ‘weightiness’ of the matters that his letters address. Some of the concepts are ‘hard to understand.’ Second, there is recognition that Paul’s words were being distorted. We surmise this from the writings themselves and from Paul’s defense of himself (See 2 Corinthians 10-13). Peter recognizes the presence of those in the movement who were untaught and

unstable. These distorted Scripture and the writings of Paul. So, there were spurious movements that were springing up within Christianity from the opening bell. Third, Peter states that the consequences of distorting the message were severe. Those who were doing so were doing so to their own destruction. There is a personal penalty paid by those who re-shape truth to their own advantage. They self-destruct. Their end may not be immediately known, but it is certain. There are two significant ideas implied in this verse. First, that learning and stability are important for an accurate understanding of Scripture. The presence of the ‘Spirit of truth’ (John 16:13), does not guarantee immediate understanding of all the complexities of spiritual truth. That is a process that requires learning and obedience. The second implication of this verse is that Paul’s writings were to be viewed as Scripture. Peter reveals his own opinion of Paul’s writings when he states that the unlearned and unstable distort them just as they do “the REST of Scripture.” That is a very important statement, though indirect, because it gives us insight into how the apostles themselves viewed their words. We have in this statement the affirmation from the core of Christ’s commissioned representatives that we are right in including Paul’s writings with the rest of Scripture. This verse then, which comes at the end of Peter’s letter is of tremendous practical value to the church and also of tremendous apologetical value to our core beliefs about Christ and His church.

**3:17—“You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness,”**

There is so much that the Christian who is attentive and diligent toward revelation knows. In the previous verses Peter has reminded the readers that they know what the future of this earth is. They also know the mistake many individuals make with respect to this truth and where that mistake leads for those individuals. But they still need to be on guard. Being on guard is something those who realize there is danger can do. So, knowing is the prerequisite. Being on guard is a matter of taking precautions based on that knowledge. It involves preparedness and more specifically implementing practices that neutralize the danger. The danger specifically identified here by Peter is that we can fall from our own steadfastness. We can be standing firm in terms of our faith, living in the light of truth consistently. But we can lose our spiritual equilibrium and fall. Peter knew what it was to fall. He knew that it could happen to anyone. He knew that this act of falling happened as a result of a series of events that happen within. We can easily get “carried away.” Even today that expression is used. We use it to describe a course of action that becomes extreme—in some way out of control. Peter is likely using the word to describe the subtlety of a process that happens in our minds that leads to a spiritual fall. Our mental position on something, that is, our moral and common-sense judgment of it, can be eroded and shifted by those who do not embrace our moral principles. They of course, have a distinct and different valuation of most everything. We can slowly adopt their values and when we do it is only a matter of a short time before we adopt in some way their course of living. Once we adopt their thinking we can be tipped over with the slightest push. Therefore we must guard our thinking... Unprincipled individuals are numerous. We are around them constantly. We can and must be around them and we must work to win them over. But to do so we must be on guard, or the process will be reversed, and it is us who will be won over. When that happens, our loss is an enormous one. The final verse in this letter will speak of the process which if it is fostered in our lives will insure us against this tragedy.

**3:18—“but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is a standing and a day-to-day experience. The moment we believe in Him we become people upon whom He lavishes favor (Ephesian 1:7-8). Everything that is in Christ is accessible to us. Some things by their very nature we instantly have, such as forgiveness. Other things, such as ability to speak His truth, we grow at through experience with Him, day in and day out sensing His leading and absorbing what the written word says about Him, that Peter wishes his readers to gain. This leads to an increased experience of His grace, so that our lives become and increasing expression of Him working alongside us. This is the grace experience that awaits all who with diligence seek to add to their faith (1:5-8). When Peter asks us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, he is summarizing his entire letter. This is the aim of all of revelation. As we come to know more of the truth and as we apply that truth, we enter into all that His grace has for us, and so ensure that our lives will be what He desires them to be. This was referenced in Peter's greeting when he spoke of grace and peace being multiplied THROUGH the knowledge of Christ (1:2). Peter ends as all who have come to understand God's heart would end any statement of instruction. To Him be the glory. This is God's vision, the goal of His plan. We often speak of the vision of an organization and the importance of it being plainly and frequently articulated. In God's book which He used many human authors to compose, this grand vision is clearly and frequently articulated. This is His vision and is the object of his plan, the end to which all things are being worked by Him (Psalm 46:10, Isaiah 45:4ff, Habakkuk 2:13-14, 1 Corinthians 15:28, Ephesians 3:10). And when this is done, all will be well, because all things were created for Him (Colossians 1:15-17). In Him they realize their highest good, and through Him all things become a blessing.