

## SECOND PETER

### I. THE AUTHORSHIP OF 2 PETER

Dr. E. M. B. Green, in introducing *Second Peter* in *The Tyndale Commentary*, writes: “2 Peter and Jude are a very obscure corner of the New Testament. They are hardly ever preached upon; commentaries and articles in learned journals rarely deal with them. ... The question may well be asked, have they any relevance for today? ...

We live in days when the contents of the Christian faith are widely questioned, when new and speculative theologies are widely disseminated, and when a new morality is being advocated which is capable of being misunderstood as ‘the old immorality writ large.’ Christianity is presented to us in terms of love, with the content of the faith and the hope for the future both strangely muted in deference to the contemporary intellectual climate. There is, moreover, an intellectualism about much of our Christianity which is not, perhaps, so far removed from that attacked in these letters – the knowledge that has little relation to holy living, growing spiritually and deepening love. We can hardly maintain that 2 Peter and Jude, written as they were to meet problems very like our own, have nothing to teach us. So long as sin needs to be exposed, so long as man needs to be reminded that persistent wrongdoing ends in ruin, that lust is self-defeating, that intellectualism devoid of love is a barren thing, and that Christian theology has no right to outrun the ‘faith once delivered to the saints,’ these Epistles will remain uncomfortably, burningly relevant.”

J. Sidlow Baxter, in *Explore the Book*, quotes John Calvin, who wrote about Second Peter: “The majesty of the Spirit of Christ exhibits itself in every part of the epistle.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* writes: “In considering the genuineness of this Epistle we are confronted at once with the well-known words of Eusebius. He says, in his ‘Ecclesiastical History,’ which seems to have been finished in A.D. 325, ‘One Epistle of Peter, which is called the first, is accepted; and this the presbyters of old have used in their writings as undoubted. But that which is circulated as his Second Epistle we have received to be not canonical. Nevertheless, as it appeared to many to be useful, it has been diligently read with the other Scriptures’ ... In the same chapter he says that he knows only one genuine Epistle among the writings attributed to St. Peter; and in book 3:25 he classes the Second Epistle with those of James and Jude, as ‘disputed, indeed, but known to most men.’

There are no direct quotations from this Epistle in the Christian writings of the first two centuries; there are, however, some scattered allusions which seem to imply acquaintance with it. Thus Clement of Rome, in his ‘Epistle to the

Corinthians,’ written about A.D. 100, says (chapter 23.), ‘Let that Scripture be far from us where it says, Wretched are the double-minded, ... who say, These things we heard even in the time of our fathers, and, behold, we have grown old, and none of these things has happened to us.’ The same passage is quoted with slight differences in the so-called second epistle of Clement, where it is introduced with the words, ‘For also the prophetic word ... says.’ Clement seems to have had in his mind recollections of chapter 3:4 and... James 1:8. The words of the second epistle (written, perhaps, about the middle of the second century) remind us also of ... 2 Peter 1:19 .... The remainder of the passage, as quoted in 1 Clement 23, and 2 Clement 11, is quite different from St. Peter. It is therefore possible that Clement may be quoting some apocryphal writing; but it is at least probable that he is mixing together reminiscences of ... James 1:8 and chapter 3:4, with additions derived from some unknown source. The early Fathers were accustomed to give the sense, not the exact words, of their citations, often, it seems, quoting from memory; but even if we suppose that the passage was borrowed immediately from some unknown writer, it remains probable that that writer, older than Clement or contemporary with him, was acquainted with this Epistle.”

*The Tyndale Commentary* writes about the authorship of Peter: “The Epistle has had a very rough passage down the centuries. Its entry into the Canon was precarious in the extreme. At the Reformation it was deemed second-class Scripture by Luther, rejected by Erasmus, and regarded with hesitancy by Calvin. The critical questions which it raises are most perplexing.

*a. The evidence of the Ancient Church*

The external evidence is inconclusive. No book in the Canon is so poorly attested among the Fathers, yet 2 Peter has incomparably better support for its inclusion than the best attested of the excluded books. It is not cited by name until Origen, at the beginning of the third century, who six times quotes it as Scripture. In short ‘Peter blows on the twin trumpets of his own Epistles.’ Yet it was used in Egypt long before this. Not only as it contained in the Sahidic and Bohairic versions of the New Testament, dating from (?) the late second and fourth centuries respectively, but we are told that Clement of Alexandria had it in his Bible and wrote a commentary on it. This takes us back at least to the middle of the second century. ...

By the fourth century, then, 2 Peter was accepted throughout most of the world. ... 2 Peter was recognized as canonical by the Councils of Hippo and Carthage in the fourth century, and this is more significant because these Councils rejected the *Epistle of Barnabas* and *1 Clement* (long read alongside Scripture in the churches), because they were not of apostolic origin. Thereafter its position was unchallenged until the Reformation. ...

*b. The contrast with 1 Peter.*

Is it conceivable that these two Epistles, 1 Peter and 2 Peter, should have come from the same hand? The language is different (strikingly so in the original), and the thought is also very different. ...

1. *The language.* There is a very great stylistic difference between these two letters. The Greek of 1 Peter is polished, cultured, dignified; it is among the best in the New Testament. The Greek of 2 Peter is grandiose; it is rather like baroque art, almost vulgar in its pretentiousness and effusiveness.<sup>1</sup> ... Something of the force of these objections can be met by supposing, with Jerome, that Peter used a different secretary, and that he allowed him a large say in the form of the composition. This appears to have been the case with 1 Peter, where the stylistic polish may well be due to Silvanus. We are specifically told that not only Mark but also Glaucias were among Peter's other secretarial assistants, so there is nothing improper in arguing that much of the stylistic differences may well be due to a change in scribe. ...

2. *The thought.* Another objection to the authenticity of the Epistle has been raised in modern, though not in ancient times. It is that the thought of 2 Peter is too different from that of 1 Peter for them both to have come from the same mind. Naturally the subject-matter of 1 and 2 Peter is quite different, for these Epistles are written to two entirely different situations. 'It is too often forgotten that these early Christian Epistles are missionary letters written to meet what was often a very urgent need, and not theological treatises penned with meticulous care in the quiet of the study.' 1 Peter envisages Christians facing persecution, 2 Peter Christians facing false teaching of a Gnostic flavor. The key-note of 1 Peter, is, accordingly, hope, of 2 Peter, true knowledge. 1 Peter directs the thoughts of the recipients to the great events of the life of Christ for their emulation and comfort; 2 Peter dwells on the great hope of the return of Christ, so as to warn the false teachers and challenge the waverers. The difference in tone may, perhaps, be reflected in the use of different words for the return of Christ, which is a prominent theme in both Epistles. In 1 Peter *apokalupsis* is used, the removal of the veil which hides from the sight of the faithful the Lord who is with them all the time. In 2 Peter *parousia* is used, the sudden appearance of the absent king among his disobedient servants. The one word breathes comfort for the afflicted; the other, warning for the scoffers. 1 Peter has much to say about the cross (not least as a principle to be followed by his hard-pressed readers); 2 Peter has much less, for his readers do not need the gentle encouragement to follow Jesus obediently, even, if need be, to martyrdom; they need the warning that Christ will come to judge those who deny the Lord who bought them (2:1). Thus in the Second Epistle the past judgment of God in Old Testament days and his future judgment at the parousia

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<sup>1</sup> Here Dr. Green gives several examples which we will not include.

support the moral challenge of the letter, where the *imitatio Christi* theme of 1 Peter would have been out of place and ineffective. ...

*c. The relationship with Jude*

This is a third factor relevant to the authorship of our Epistle. That there is a dependence either of 2 Peter on Jude or of Jude on 2 Peter, of both on some lost document, or that both share a common author, is certain. For of the twenty-five verses in Jude no less than fifteen appear, in whole or in part, in 2 Peter. Furthermore, many of the identical ideas, words and phrases occur in parallel in the two writings, and leave us no doubt that there is some sort of literary relationship between them. ... The only problem which concerns us here is whether apostolic authorship of 2 Peter must be ruled out if Jude was written first.

## II THE OCCASION AND DATE OF 2 PETER

We refer again to Dr. Michael Green's comments on Second Peter. He states about the reason for its writing and the date:

"We are almost completely in the dark about the place of origin of this letter. If it is a genuine letter of Peter, it was probably written from Rome shortly before his martyrdom (1:15). This remains the most likely place even if Peter was not the author ...

The destination of the letter is equally puzzling. The crux here is 3:1. If, as most commentators take it, this is a reference back to 1 Peter, then the recipients of the second letter are obviously meant to be the same people to whom 1 Peter was dispatched. ...

Much ink has been spilt on the question of whether the recipients were Jews or Gentiles. For the former can be urged the implied contrast between 'your apostles' (3:2) and the rest, and the affinities between some of the language of 2 Peter and the Qumran writings. But a Gentile, or at all events mixed community is much more likely. Not only is Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, a recognized authority, but the author is chary of pseudepigrapha which Jude is quite happy to adduce, and certain phrases such as 'a faith as precious as ours' (1:1) and 'that ... you may ... escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires' (1:4) suggest that the readers are Gentiles. ...

The date, again is widely contested, from AD 60-160. Whether or not 2 Peter used Jude, whether or not his letter is prior or subsequent to 1 Peter, there are certain pointers which help in determining the date of the Epistle. It cannot have been written until most, if not all, of the Paulines had been penned (3:16); thus it cannot precede the mid-sixties. If Peter wrote it, a date between AD 61 and his death (? 64, 66 or 68) would be indicated.

### III. THE FALSE TEACHING IN 2 PETER AND JUDE

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “There is wide agreement among commentators that the heresy envisaged is in both cases a primitive form of what in the second century became Gnosticism. The main characteristics that emerge are as follows. The lives and teaching of these men denied the Lordship of Jesus (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 4). They defiled the Agape (love-feast), were immoral themselves and infected others with their lascivious ways, through minimizing the place of law in the Christian life and emphasizing freedom (2 Pet. 2:10, 12ff., 18ff.; Jude 4, 12). In their teaching, which was very voluble, they were plausible and crafty, fond of rhetoric, out for gain, and obsequious to those from whom they hope to gain some advantage (2 Pet. 2:3, 12, 14-15, 18; Jude 16). Both writings represent them as arrogant and cynical, not only to the Lord, but to the church leaders and angelic powers as well (2 Pet. 2:1, 10-11; Jude 8). They appear to have posed as either visionaries or prophets, in support of their claims (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 9). They are self-willed and set up divisions, confident of their own superiority (2 Pet. 2:2, 10, 18; Jude 19). The errorists against whom 2 Peter writes scoff at the parousia (chapter 3), but there is no trace of this in Jude, although his antagonists, too, are mockers in a general sense (v. 18). Peter’s opponents twist the Old Testament prophets and Pauline writings to their own ends (1:18-2:1; 3:15-16), while Jude’s antagonists twist the (Pauline) doctrine of free grace into an excuse for license (v. 4). There are other indications in Jude that the recipients had a basically Pauline understanding of the gospel. The same distinction between spiritual and carnal Christians that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 2 appears in Jude 19. The false teachers described themselves as *pneumatikoi*, the ‘spiritual ones,’ though in fact they did not even possess the Spirit at all! Though 2 Peter does not use precisely the same language, much the same impression is given by the repeated use the author makes of the *gnōsis* and *epignōsis* roots. He is repudiating the claims of the heretics to a superior knowledge by showing them what true Christian knowledge comprises. Jude writes in haste to rectify the situation where this sort of heresy has arisen, Peter writes, partly at least, in order to have a preventative effect, for many of his verbs are in the future tense (though this may be a rhetorical device to show that what has happened is in accordance with prophecy; see 2 Pet. 2:1ff.; cf. Jude 4). The other difference in the treatment of the false teachers is that Peter avoids the explicit use of apocryphal material to enforce his points, while Jude has no such scruples.”

### IV. THE UNITY OF 2 PETER

*The Tyndale Commentary* states: “From time to time suggestions have been made that 2 Peter is made up of two or more sources.” The commentary quotes

several scholars to illustrate this. Some suggestions are that parts of the epistle circulated independently. The commentary observes: “This is quite an attractive hypotheses, and gives an excellent rapport between chapter 1 and 3 while recognizing the individuality of chapter 2 as document in its own right with strong affinities to Jude. The snag is the continuity of style throughout the Epistle which makes it certain that the whole work proceeds from the same man.”

Admittedly, this is a rather lengthy introduction to the epistle and it is time to begin to look at the actual text and see what the Holy Spirit has to say to us.

## V. OUTLINE OF 2 PETER

### CHAPTER ONE

- a. *Introduction and greeting* (1:1-2).
- b. *The Christian’s privileges* (1:3-4).
- c. *The ladder of faith* (1:5-7).
- d. *Barren and fruitful* (1:8-9).
- e. *A worthy goal* (1:10-11).
- f. *Truth will bear repetition* (1:12-15).
- g. *The truth is attested by apostolic eyewitnesses* (1:16-18).
- h. *The truth is attested by prophetic scriptures* (1:19-21).

### CHAPTER TWO

- a. *Beware of false teachers* (2:1-3).
- b. *Three examples of judgment and deliverance* (2:4-10a).
- c. *The insolence of the false teachers* (2:10b-11).
- d. *Their arrogance, lust and greed* (2:12-16).
- e. *The emptiness of the false teachers* (2:17-22).

### CHAPTER THREE

- a. *The purpose of the letter reiterated* (3:1-2).
- b. *The taunts of those who scoff at the second coming* (3:3-4).
- c. *Peter argues from history* (3:5-7).
- d. *Peter argues from Scripture* (3:8).
- e. *Peter argues from the character of God* (3:9).
- f. *Peter argues from the promise of Christ* (3:10).
- g. *The ethical implications of the second coming* (3:11-14).
- h. *Peter quotes Paul for support* (3:15-16).

- i. *Conclusion* (3:17-18).

## CHAPTER ONE

- a. *Introduction and greeting* (1:1-2).

### THE TEXT:

***1 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:***

***2 Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.***

As was usual in the time this letter was written, the author begins, not with the addressee, but with the sender. Peter introduces himself as “Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.” The Greek words used are *Sumeoón Pétros*. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* writes: “*Symeon* is the reading of almost all the versions, and of all the most important MSS. And this is the more remarkable, as the surname of Peter occurs upwards of seventy times in the New Testament, and is invariably read Simon, except here, and in Acts 15:14, where James gives him the name of Symeon. Of all the versions, only the Armenian and Vulgate have Simon. But the edit. princ., and several of my own MSS. of the Vulgate, write Symon; and Wycliffe has Symont.”

The name Simon is an abbreviation of Simeon, which means: “he that hears.” Peter is related to the Greek word for “rock,” *Petra*.

The Greek word for “servant” is *doulos*, which literally means “slave.” Jesus used the same word when He said to His disciples: “I no longer call you *servants*, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”<sup>2</sup>

A slave owes unconditional obedience to his master because his master bought him. A slave cannot expect compensation for work done. His master does not owe him anything. He will be fed and clothed, simply for the reason that he will not be able to perform his duties if he does not receive basic care.

Slavery has been abolished, and properly so. It is against human dignity to consider an individual to be the total property of another individual. It means that there is a failure of recognition of the image of God in a fellowman. But this abolition has taken away from us the proper understanding of what our relationship

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<sup>2</sup> John 15:15

of obedience to God ought to be like. We may not be the property of a fellow human being, but we owe the total obedience of an old-time slave to his master in our relationship with God who made our body and soul and who breathed His Spirit into us. The person, who denies this relationship, has cut the umbilical cord that keeps him alive and alert.

The Mosaic Law had an article about Hebrew slavery. Evidently, a person who owed money and was unable to pay back his debt could become a slave of his creditor. The law stated that a Hebrew slave ought to be set free after seven years of service. There was, however, a possibility for a man to choose service instead of freedom. We read: "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything. If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free. But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,' then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life."<sup>3</sup> That was the kind of slave Peter considered himself to be. He served his Lord as a slave, because he loved Him.

The addressees are identified as "those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours."

The first question to be considered is who are meant with the word "ours?" Since "ours" include Simon Peter, the meaning must be that the word refers to the Jews who recognized Jesus Christ as their Messiah. This indicates that the epistle is written to the Gentiles, people who are not of Jewish origin.

The Gentiles had become members of the body of Christ, which is His church, "through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ." This refers to God's method of reconciling sinners with Himself through the death of His Son, who took our sins upon Himself so that we would be clothed with His righteousness. Paul expresses this as follows: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."<sup>4</sup>

The words "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" have brought the pen of many Bible scholars in motion. *The Tyndale Commentary* observes: "The phrase *our God and Savior Jesus Christ* raises the question whether Peter is distinguishing God and Christ, or is in fact calling Jesus God. From the grammatical aspect, the two nouns are bound together in Greek by a single article, which strongly suggests

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<sup>3</sup> Ex. 21:2-6

<sup>4</sup> II Cor. 5:21



that a single Person is meant. As [One Bible scholar] points out, ‘It is hardly open for anyone to translate in 1 Peter 1:3 ...<sup>5</sup> by ‘the God and Father,’ and yet here decline to translate ... by ‘the God and Savior.’ Furthermore in the other four cases where Peter writes of our Lord and Savior (1:11; 2:20; 3:2, 18), it always clearly refers to Jesus.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “The word rendered ‘obtained’ ... means properly ‘to obtain by lot,’ as in ... Luke 1:9. It is noticeable that one of the few places in which it occurs in the New Testament is in a speech of St. Peter’s (... Acts 1:17); its use here implies that faith is a gift of God. The word for ‘like precious’ (equally precious) is found only here in the New Testament; it calls to our memory the *polùtimóteron*<sup>6</sup> of ... 1 Peter 1:7, and indicates a correspondence with the First Epistle. St. Peter addresses this Epistle simply to those who have obtained an equally precious faith ‘with us.’ By the last words he may mean himself only, or the apostles generally, or, possibly, all Jewish Christians. He is writing apparently to the same Churches to which his First Epistle was addressed (verse 16 and chapter 3:1); he says that their faith is equally precious with that of the apostles, or perhaps that the Gentiles have received the like precious gift with the chosen people. By ‘faith’ he may mean the truths believed, as Jude 3; or, more probably, faith in the subjective sense, the grace of faith, which receives those truths as a message from God (comp. 1 Peter. 1:7).”

The blessing Peter pronounces upon his readers is the same as the one in his First Epistle. In *First Peter*, however, he refers to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in applying the effect of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross to the daily life of the believer. In this epistle, the emphasis is on “the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” He may refer to Jesus’ prayer for His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion, when He said: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”<sup>7</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* comments on the words of Peter’s blessing: “*Grace and peace* were Paul’s constant prayer for his Christian friends (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2, *etc*), based, no doubt, upon the characteristic Greek and Hebrew greetings respectively. This is no barren formula to Peter, however, for he makes both the experience of God’s peace and the reception of his grace (or help) to be dependent upon the deep knowledge of God and Jesus. In so doing, he is at one with both John and Paul. John 17:3 states emphatically that eternal life consists in knowing *God and Jesus Christ* whom he has sent; while Paul, who had for many years enjoyed this knowledge of God in Christ, still cherished the longing to know

<sup>5</sup> At the ... appears the Greek text, which I have omitted.

<sup>6</sup> Meaning: “Much more precious”

<sup>7</sup> John 17:3

his Master better (Phil. 3:8, 10). For Christ's gifts, such as grace and peace, cannot be enjoyed in independence of himself.

No doubt the insertion of knowledge here (it is not used in the greeting in 1 Peter) has a polemical thrust. It occurs three other times in 2 Peter (1:3, 8; 2:20). Elsewhere, apart from a single reference in Hebrews (10:26), it appears only in the later Epistles of Paul where it comes fifteen times. Peter was writing to people who claimed a real knowledge of God and of Christ, but continued in immoral behavior. *Knowledge* may have been a catchphrase of theirs which Peter takes up and fills with authentic Christian content. True knowledge of God and Christ produces grace and peace in life; what is more, it produces holiness (v. 3). The whole New Testament unites in denouncing a profession of faith which makes no difference to behavior.”

b. *The Christian's privileges* (1:3-4).

***3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.***

***4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.***

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “The punctuation of these verses is a puzzle. Either, we may put a comma after verse 2, in which case verses 3 and 4 explain the greeting: grace and peace are multiplied in knowing him because God has given us all we need. Or we may put a full stop after verse 2. There is then no main verb in the sentence. Unless, therefore, the *that* (4) represents an old use of the imperative ‘see that you become,’ we should regard the sentence as an anacoluthon<sup>8</sup>; Peter began his sentence but never ended it grammatically. If so, NIV is correct in simply omitting the ‘*that*.’”

The “divine power” refers to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The presence of the Holy Spirit is guarantee that we can live a godly life. The knowledge of Jesus Christ refers to the responsibility of the believer. It is our effort to know Him in an ever increasing intimate manner that makes us desire to live a life that is consistent with God's call. The glory and goodness of Jesus Christ becomes the magnet that draws us to Him and transforms us to the likeness of His image.

God wants us to become partakers of His glory. When Satan tempted Eve, he said that if she would eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge “you will be like

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<sup>8</sup> Meaning: Inconsistent sentence structure.

God.”<sup>9</sup> The most dangerous lies are those that contain an element of truth. The issue of Satan’s lie was not that God did not want to share His glory with humans, but that Eve should take “a shortcut” to that which God was going to give her in due time. God had promised that Jacob would receive the blessing of the firstborn son. There was no need for Jacob to deceive his father in obtaining it. In the same way Eve lost what God wanted her to possess.

The way God wants us to acquire His glory is by concentrating on the glory and goodness of Jesus Christ. In the words of the Apostle John: “We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”<sup>10</sup>

The knowledge that God intends to share His glory with us ought to be the catalyst that keeps us from the corruption of evil desires.

*The Tyndale Commentary* comments: “The apostle is making their divine call the ground for his appeal for holy living. Christ has taken the initiative in calling them to himself (*cf.* Eph. 2:8). ... He does not give us all we might like, but all that we need for life and godliness (*cf.* 1 Thes. 4:7f.). These gifts are enshrined in Jesus Christ himself, and in getting to know him we enjoy the power to live a holy life. But what is it that attracts a man to Jesus? His own unique (*idiā*) ‘glory and excellence’ (RSV). Jesus Christ calls men by his moral excellence (*aretē*) and the total impact of his person (*doxā*). Perhaps Peter is looking back to the life of Jesus which made such an impression on him that he once cried, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man’ (Lk. 5:8), and that one of the major themes in the First Epistle was the imitation of Christ. No doubt he is thinking, too, of the glory of Jesus which shattered him at the transfiguration, to which he refers in verse 17. But it was not only the transfiguration which revealed the impact of Jesus’ Person. It was his whole life. That is why John was able to say ‘we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only [Son], who came from the Father’ (Jn. 1:14). It is not without significance that these two words *aretē* and *doxā*, belong to God in the Old Testament (Is. 42:8, 12, LXX); Peter claims them for Jesus, through whom the divine excellence and glory have been supremely manifested.”

The Greek text of v.4 reads literally: “Whereby precious and exceeding great promises are given unto us: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption [that is] in the world through lust.” The Greek word rendered “exceeding great” is *mégista*, which is only found in this text in the New Testament.

*The Tyndale Commentary* comments: “These two verses abound in rare and daring words. Peter is very subtly using language uncommon in the New

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<sup>9</sup> Gen. 3:5

<sup>10</sup> 1 John 3:2

Testament but full of meaning in the pagan world, as we know from Jewish literature ... The false teachers laid emphasis on knowledge; so Peter stresses that the object of knowledge in the Christian life is the Lord who calls men.”

*The Matthew Henry's Commentary* states: “Observe, [1.] The good things which the promises make over are exceedingly great. Pardon of sin is one of the blessings here intended; how great this is all who know any thing of the power of God's anger will readily confess, and this is one of those promised favors in bestowing whereof the power of the Lord is great, Num 14:17. To pardon sins that are numerous and heinous (every one of which deserves God's wrath and curse, and that for ever) is a wonderful thing, and is so called, Ps 119:18. [2.] The promised blessings of the gospel are very precious; as the great promise of the Old Testament was the Seed of the woman, the Messiah (Heb 11:39), so the great promise of the New Testament is the Holy Ghost (Luke 24:49), and how precious must the enlivening, enlightening, sanctifying Spirit be! [3.] Those who receive the promises of the gospel partake of the divine nature. They are renewed in the spirit of their mind, after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness; their hearts are set for God and his service; they have a divine temper and disposition of soul; though the law is the ministration of death, and the letter kills, yet the gospel is the ministration of life, and the Spirit quickens those who are naturally dead in trespasses and sins. [4.] Those in whom the Spirit works the divine nature are freed from the bondage of corruption. Those who are, by the Spirit of grace, renewed in the spirit of their mind, are translated into the liberty of the children of God; for it is the world in which corruption reigns. Those who are not of the Father, but of the world, are under the power of sin; the world lies in wickedness, 1 John 5:19. And the dominion that sin has in the men of the world is through lust; their desires are to it, and therefore it rules over them. The dominion that sin has over us is according to the delight we have in it.”

God's promises play an important role in the life of every believer. It was the promise given to Abraham that kept him in fellowship with God, even though he never saw the fulfillment while he was still alive. Referring to Abraham and the other patriarchs, the author of Hebrews writes: “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.”<sup>11</sup>

Even so, we may not experience to full impact of God's promises while still on earth, but they are set before us as the point of reference to which we set our course. The promises of God give us the incentive to resist the pull of a sinful world in which we live and to consider ourselves dead to sin in our identification

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<sup>11</sup> Heb. 11:13

with the death of Christ. Jesus did not only die for us, He also died in our place. As far as God is concerned we are dead. That ought to be enough for us to consider ourselves as being crucified with Christ.

c. *The ladder of faith* (1:5-7).

**5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;**

**6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;**

**7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.**

Peter mentions eight features of the Christian life which must be considered to be the fruit of the Holy Spirit, as Paul describes them in Galatians: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”<sup>12</sup> But Peter seems to put the burden on the believer to produce those fruits.

*The Tyndale Commentary* comments: “*For this reason*: because of our new birth and the precious promises and the divine power offered us in Christ we cannot sit back and rest content with ‘faith’ (cf. Jas. 2:20). The grace of God demands, as it enables, *effort* in man. We are to bring *into* this relationship *alongside* what God has done (such is the force of the propositions in *pareisenenkantes*) every ounce of determination we can muster. To illustrate the way in which the Christian faith must be worked out in behavior, Peter, like Paul before him, and many after him, selected a list of virtues which should be found in a healthy Christian life.”

It remains true that we cannot produce fruit by ourselves. Speaking about the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said to His disciples: “If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>13</sup> We have the awesome power to hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in our life and refuse Him to produce the required fruit. What Peter says here is virtually the same as what Paul means when he writes: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”<sup>14</sup>

According to *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, the words “add to your faith” can be rendered: “Lead up hand in hand; alluding, as most think, to the chorus in the Grecian dance, who danced with joined hands.”

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<sup>12</sup> Gal. 5:22-23

<sup>13</sup> John 15:5

<sup>14</sup> Phil. 2:12, 13

The eight fruits Peter mentions deserve a closer look. The basic one is “faith.” This is the “precious faith” mentioned in the first verse as the bridge to the acquisition of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. If we believe that God considers us righteous because of what Jesus has done for us, we must show this in demonstrating “goodness.” The Greek word used is *arête*, which may be rendered “virtue.” The literal meaning is “manliness,” or “excellence.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* translates this as “Courage or fortitude, to enable you to profess the faith before men, in these times of persecution.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The Greek word ... means properly to ‘contribute to the expenses of a chorus;’ it is used three times by St. Paul, and, in its simple form, by St. Peter in his First Epistle (... 1 Peter 4:11). In usage it came to mean simply to ‘supply or provide,’ the thought of the chorus being dropped. So we cannot be sure that the idea of faith as leading the mystic dance in the chorus of Christian graces was present to St. Peter’s mind, especially as the word occurs again in verse 11, where no such allusion is possible. The fruits of faith are in the faith which produces them, as a tree is in its seed; they must be developed out of faith, as faith expands and energizes; in the exercise of each grace a fresh grace must issue forth.”

The second fruit is called in Greek *gnosis*. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* sees this as “True wisdom, by which your faith will be increased, and your courage directed, and preserved from degenerating into rashness.”

*The Tyndale Commentary* states: “Christianity ... is not merely a matter of personal faith and practical goodness; the intellectual element in our personalities has an important place. *Knowledge* is therefore mentioned next ... It is not certain whether *gnôsis*, the word used here, is significantly different in meaning from *epignôsis* employed there. If there is a difference, the nuance of *gnôsis* would be ‘sagacity,’ ‘practical wisdom.’ This is its customary meaning in Greek ethical language. [One Bible scholar] has caught its meaning in when he describes it as the wisdom ‘which distinguishes the good from the bad, and shows the way of flight from the bad’ (*cf.* Heb. 5:14). This knowledge is gained in the knowledge of Christ (v. 8; *cf.* Jn. 7:17). *Knowledge* was, of course, one of the favorite words of the false teachers, but Peter was not, on that account, afraid to use it. He was confident that the God who had revealed himself in Jesus was the God of truth. Knowledge, therefore, could never harm the Christian. Peter would have no truck with that so-called faith which shrinks from investigation lest the resultant knowledge should prove destructive. Trust has nothing to do with obscurantism. The cure for false knowledge is not less knowledge, but more.”

The third word Peter uses is “self-control.” The Greek word is *egkrateia*. It is the same word Paul uses as the last of the fruit of the Spirit in the Epistle to the Galatians.<sup>15</sup>

The key to self-control is surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit over one’s life. God created us as human beings as a unity of body, soul and spirit. There is no confusion as to which role the body plays in our existence. But it is not always clear what are the functions of the soul and the spirit. We may define the soul as the combination of the will, the intellect and the emotions. Although most of the time, we tend to think that the soul’s main role is expressed in the emotional part of our existence. But if we consider our spirit to be the organ that enables us to experience fellowship with God, we are probably closer to a real definition of existence.

When God warned the first human couple that they would die if they ate of the Tree of Knowledge, He referred to their spirit. Adam and Eve did not die physically when they sinned, and they continued to be able to reason and have emotions. But their fellowship with God was cut off. When God came to them, they were afraid and went into hiding.

We know that our soul should have control over our body. If the body assumes control over the soul, we become addicts to our lusts. Before sin entered creation, the human soul was controlled by the human spirit, which made fellowship with God possible. When the spirit died as a result of disobedience to God’s command, this fellowship was broken. The human spirit is called back to life in regeneration, which is being born again. Fellowship with God is a vital faction in self-control. It is this strange, contradictory, combination of surrender and being in charge of oneself.

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “Third in the list comes self-control, (*enkrateia*). This is to be exercised not only in food and drink, but in every aspect of life. The word is not common in the New Testament (though it comes in Paul’s list of virtues in Gal. 5:23) but, like *goodness* above, it was highly prized in Greek moral philosophy. It meant controlling the passions instead of being controlled by them. Aristotle saw through the shallowness of Socrates’ dictum that no-one willingly rejects the best course once he sees it. He knew full well that men do willingly and willfully sin, and he has a lot to say about *akrasia*, being mastered by one’s lusts. But he had no answer to the problem of human wickedness. That answer is to be found in the Christian way of life. For Christian self-control is submission to the control of the indwelling Christ; and by this means mature virtue (what Aristotle wistfully called ‘divine virtue which is beyond man’) does become a possibility for men. Once again Peter uses a word which must have cut the false

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<sup>15</sup> Gal. 5:23

teachers like a whiplash. They claimed that knowledge released them from the need of self-control (2:10ff; 3:3). Peter emphasized that true knowledge leads on to self-control. Any system which divorces religion from ethics is fundamental heresy.”

*Barnes’ Notes* states: “The word here refers to the mastery over all our evil inclinations and appetites. We are to allow none of them to obtain control over us. ... This would include, of course, abstinence from intoxicating drinks; but it would also embrace all evil passions and propensities. Everything is to be confined within proper limits, and to no propensity of our nature are we to give indulgence beyond the limits which the law of God allows.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* adds: “This self-control extends over the whole of life, and consists in the government of all the appetites; it must be learned in the exercise of that practical knowledge which discerns between good and evil. True knowledge leads on to self-control, to that perfect freedom which consists in the service of God; not to that liberty promised by the false teachers, which is licentiousness.”

Next in the list comes perseverance. The Greek word used is *hupomone* which can be rendered: “cheerful endurance” or “constancy.” Jesus used the word in *The Parable of the Sower*, saying: “But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by *persevering* produce a crop.”<sup>16</sup> The KJV renders it consistently with “patience.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The practice of self-control will result in patient endurance; but that endurance will not be mere stoicism; it will be a conscious submission of our human will to the holy will of God, and so will tend to develop and strengthen ... reverence and piety towards God.”

*The Tyndale Commentary* adds: “‘Self-control,’ says Aristotle, ‘is concerned with pleasures ... and endurance with sorrows; for the man who can endure and put up with hardships, he is the real example of endurance.’”

The fourth word is perseverance, which is the rendering of the Greek word *hupomone*. The KJV renders it consistently with “patience.” The first appearance of the word in the New Testament is in Jesus’ *Parable of the Sower*. We read: “But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by *persevering* produce a crop.”<sup>17</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* comments: “From the habit of self-control springs *perseverance*, the temper of mind which is unmoved by difficulty and distress, and which can withstand the two Satanic agencies of opposition from the world

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<sup>16</sup> Luke 8:15

<sup>17</sup> Luke 8:15



without and enticement from the flesh within. The mature Christian does not give up. His Christianity is like the steady shining of a star rather than the ephemeral brilliance (and speedy eclipse) of a meteor. There are few more reliable tests of faith than this; true faith endures (*cf.* Rom. 5:1-3; Mk. 13:13)."

The goal to be reached is expressed in the Greek word *eusebeia*, which is translated in the KJV as "godliness," or "holiness." The first time the word occurs in the New Testament is in Peter's explanation of the miraculous healing of the paraplegic. He said to the crowd that witnessed the miracle: "Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"<sup>18</sup> The Apostle Paul uses the word nine times in his two epistles to Timothy.<sup>19</sup> Apart from that the word is rare in the New Testament.

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: "The word *eusebeia* is rare in the New Testament, probably because it was the primary word for 'religion' in popular pagan usage. The 'religious man' of antiquity, both in Greek and Latin usage (where the equivalent word was *pietas*), was careful and correct in performing his duties both to gods and men. Perhaps Peter uses it here in deliberate contrast to the false teachers, who were far from proper in their behavior both to God and their fellow men. Peter is at pains to emphasize that true knowledge of God (which they mistakenly boasted they possessed) manifests itself in reverence towards him and respect towards men. There is no hint of religiosity here. *Eusebeia* is a very practical awareness of God in every aspect of life."

Godliness will lead to brotherly kindness, which is the translation of the Greek word *philadelphia*. There is a direct connection between the love of God and the love of the neighbor. Jesus established this unity when He answered the young man who questioned Him: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."<sup>20</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: "*Godliness* cannot exist without *brotherly kindness*. 'If anyone says, ' 'I love God,' ' yet hates his brother, he is a liar' (1 Jn. 4:20). Love for Christian brethren is a distinguishing mark of true discipleship, and represents yet another area where the false teachers were so distressingly deficient. Those who have become partakers of the divine nature, or, as he puts it in 1 Peter, those who have been born again (1:23), must show their royal birth in royalty of behavior towards others children of the King, whatever their differences in culture, class and churchmanship. But this gift has to be worked

<sup>18</sup> Acts 3:12

<sup>19</sup> 1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7,8; 6:3,5,6,11; 2 Tim. 3:5

<sup>20</sup> Matt. 22:37-40

at. Love for the brethren entails bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ; it means guarding that Spirit-given unity from destruction by gossip, prejudice, narrowness, and the refusal to accept a brother Christian for what he is in Christ. The very importance and the difficulty of achieving *philadelphia* is the reason for the considerable stress on it in the pages of the New Testament (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thes. 4:9; Heb. 13:1; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 Jn. 5:1)."

Brotherly love pertains primarily to those who have accepted Jesus' death on the cross as the payment for their sins and who, consequently, have surrendered their lives to God.

From brotherly love comes love of mankind in general. Peter calls this *agape*. This word is probably the most dominant one in the New Testament.

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: "And as God is loving unto every man, and 'maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good,' so Christians, who are taught to be followers (imitators) of God (... Ephesians 5:1), must learn in the exercise of love toward the brethren that larger love which embraces all men in an ever-widening circle (comp. ... 1 Thessalonians 3:12). Thus love, the greatest of all Christian graces (... 1 Corinthians 13:13), is the climax in St. Peter's list. Out of faith, the root, spring the seven fair fruits of holiness, of which holy love is the fairest and the sweetest .... No grace can remain alone; each grace, as it is gradually formed in the soul, tends to develop and strengthen others; all graces meet in that highest grace of charity, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before God."

#### D. BARREN AND FRUITFUL CHRISTIANS (1:8-9)

***8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

***9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.***

The Greek text of these verses reads literally: "For if these things be in you and abound, they make [you that you shall] neither [be] barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Peter emphasizes that knowing Jesus is an intimate relationship that results in bearing spiritual fruit. That qualifies "knowledge" as something infinitely more than an intellectual comprehension. It is a fellowship of which a relationship between husband and wife is a shadow. Speaking about the bond of marriage, the Apostle Paul states: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be

united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church.”<sup>21</sup>

*Barnes’ Notes* comments: “The word rendered ‘barren,’ is, in the margin, ‘idle.’ The word ‘idle’ more accurately expresses the sense of the original. The meaning is, that if they evinced these things, it would show

- (1) that they were diligent in cultivating the Christian graces, and
- (2) that it was not a vain thing to attempt to grow in knowledge and virtue.

Their efforts would be followed by such happy results as to be an encouragement to exertion. In nothing is there, in fact, more encouragement than in the attempt to become eminent in piety. On no other efforts does God smile more propitiously than on the attempt to secure the salvation of the soul and to do good. A small part of the exertions which men put forth to become rich, or learned, or celebrated for oratory or heroism, would secure the salvation of the soul. In the former, also, men often fail; in the latter, never.”

There is in the New Testament a strong emphasis on bearing spiritual fruit as a result of our fellowship with Jesus Christ. Jesus states in John’s Gospel: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>22</sup> Knowing Jesus Christ means remaining in Him.

This is a matter of obedience. A Scottish evangelist once said, sarcastically: “The important thing in being saved is that you go to heaven. If, in addition, you decide to be obedient to the will of God, that is good, but it is not essential!” Evidently, there were among Peter’s readers some people who took this attitude. They believed that Jesus’ death had taken care of their sins, but they did not conclude from this that they owed Him their total obedience.

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “The true knowledge of Christ, as opposed to the false, does produce these moral and spiritual qualities in the believer. They are implicit, already, within the new nature imparted to him (*cf.* Eph. 1:4). If already you possess these qualities (*hyparchonta*), you must allow them to manifest themselves in increasing measure (*pleonazonta*). There is no excuse for resting content with present attainment. Lack of spiritual growth is a

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<sup>21</sup> Eph. 5:31,32

<sup>22</sup> John 15:1-5

sign of spiritual death. Nor is there any room of indolence and the slackening of effort (*argous*); otherwise the Christian becomes unproductive, like the wheat choked by the weeds (the cares, riches and pleasures of life) which produces no fruit (*akarpous*).”

Peter calls those who do not allow the Holy Spirit to produce fruit in their lives “nearsighted” and “blind.” The Greek words used are *muopazo* and *tuphlos*. The last word is rather common in the New Testament; the first one, rendered “nearsighted” is only found in this verse.

This nearsightedness stands for a lack of understanding of sin and its consequences. It also shows a failure to grasp the extent of God’s glory. For sin is “falling short of the glory of God.”<sup>23</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* states: “The NIV, unjustifiably, reverses the order of adjectives here, by the rendering *nearsighted and blind*. Peter wrote *blind and nearsighted*. Why this strange order? The rare word *muōpazō* (only here in the New Testament) usually means ‘short-sighted.’ If a man is blind, how can he be ‘short-sighted?’ If Peter had this meaning in mind, he may mean that such a man is blind to heavenly things, and engrossed in the earthly; he cannot see what is afar off, but only what is near. This makes excellent sense in view of the immorality and earthiness of the false teachers. But probably Peter was thinking of the other meaning of *muōpazō*, namely ‘to blink,’ ‘to shut the eyes.’ If so, the participle is causal. The meaning is that such a man is blind because he blinks or willfully closes his eyes to the light. Spiritual blindness descends upon the eyes which deliberately look away from the graces of character to which the Christian is called when he comes to know Christ.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “We cannot attain to the knowledge of Christ without these graces, for he who has them not is blind, or, at the best, short-sighted, like one who blinks with his eyes when he tries to see distant objects, and cannot bear the full light of day. Such a man can only see the things which lie close around him — earth and earthly things; he cannot lift up his eyes by faith and behold ‘the land that is very far off;’ he cannot ‘see the King in his beauty’ (... Isaiah 33:17).”

#### E. A WORTHY GOAL (1:10-11)

***10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall,  
11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.***

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<sup>23</sup> Rom. 3:23

“Therefore” is the rendering of the Greek word *dio*, which can be translated “consequently.”

Peter’s encouragement to “make your calling and election sure” is similar to Paul’s: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”<sup>24</sup> Paul adds: “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”<sup>25</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “*Therefore, my brothers*, may refer to what immediately precedes. The meaning would then be ‘since there is a danger of the coming on of spiritual blindness, be still more on your guard ... More probably, however, it refers to the whole of the preceding paragraph (vv. 3-9). Because of God’s wonderful gifts, because the use of those gifts leads to an increased knowledge of Christ, therefore they must the rather exert themselves.”

It is up to us to work out the plan that God has laid out before us. Peter speaks of our calling and election. The Greek words used are *klesis*, which can be rendered “invitation,” and *ekloge*, “selection.” The first word occurs in the verse: “Brothers, think of what you were when you were *called*. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.”<sup>26</sup> That put “calling” in the context of salvation. The second word is found in the text in which God tells Ananias about Saul of Tarsus: “Go! This man is my *chosen* instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”<sup>27</sup> This refers to the ministry God wants the believer to enter into. The call to salvation is the same for everyone, the one to ministry refers to the specific function each part of the body is called to play.

The word “election” has acquired a loaded meaning because of the way Calvin used it in the context of predestination. There is no indication in Scripture that God chooses some people to be saved and others to go to hell. Paul states clearly that God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”<sup>28</sup> And Peter states the same truth later in this epistle, saying: “[God] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Phil 2:12

<sup>25</sup> Phil. 2:13

<sup>26</sup> 1 Cor. 1:26

<sup>27</sup> Acts 9:15

<sup>28</sup> 1 Tim. 2:4

<sup>29</sup> II Peter 3:9

We understand from the way Paul puts it that our election is “in Christ.” We read: “For he chose us *in him* before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”

“Election” means that God has chosen Jesus Christ and in as far as we are “in Him,” we are elected!

Peter does not elaborate on the question as to how we make our calling and election sure. Since the call and election are God’s acts, He is also in charge of the outworking of them in our life. Our responsibility is to trust Him for it. Peter says that if we do, we “will never fall.”

The Greek verb used is *ptaio*, meaning “to trip,” or “to stumble.” Jude states that God “is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.”<sup>30</sup> It is faith in God’s ability to keep us from stumbling that will keep us going. If we put our trust in the strength of our own character, we have a sure recipe for failure. The classic example is Peter himself. He said to Jesus on the eve of His crucifixion: “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” And: “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”<sup>31</sup> This self-confidence made him deny his Master three times.

Trust in God’s faithfulness will not only bring us safely home, but it will give us a royal entrance into the kingdom. When Stephen was stoned to death, he saw heaven open and God’s glory. He saw that Jesus had gotten up from His heavenly throne to welcome him home. He must have heard Him say: “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”<sup>32</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “Despite the amount of emphasis Peter has been laying on the need for growth, perseverance and effort in the Christian life, the concluding verses of this section (vv. 10-11) make it abundantly plain that ‘final salvation is not man’s achievement but the gift of God’s lavish generosity ...’

Peter has three things to say about this kingdom. First, it is eternal. That is to say, it belongs to what Jewish thought had named the ‘Age to Come.’ Particularly during times of difficulty and persecution in the last few centuries BC, men of faith had increasingly become disillusioned with ‘this Age,’ and had longed for the time when God would break in and vindicate himself and his people in the coming age. The New Testament conviction is consistently this; that in the Person of Jesus

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<sup>30</sup> Jude v. 24

<sup>31</sup> Matt. 26:33, 35; Mark 14:29, 31

<sup>32</sup> Matt. 25:21

Christ the 'Age to Come' has invaded 'this Age.' The last things have been inaugurated, though, of course, they await completion. It is of this consummation in the eternal kingdom that Peter speaks.

Secondly, in striking contrast to Hellenistic ideas of divinization, our entry into this kingdom is still seen as future. Like Abraham, the Christian traveler is called in faith and obedience to rest content with nothing ephemeral, but to press on towards that city, which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). By saying that we are already partakers of the divine nature (v. 4), and that we have nevertheless still to enter the everlasting kingdom, Peter retains in his own characteristic way the New Testament tension between what we have and what we still lack, between realized and future eschatology.

Thirdly, this kingdom is characterized as belonging to *our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. This is the qualitative definition of the kingdom. It is his kingdom (Mt. 16:28; Jn. 18:36; Ps. 2:6). It is entered by relationship to him. The noblest description of heaven is in personal categories like this. It will embody utterly harmonious relationships between the Savior and the saved. It seems probably that once again Peter has the scoffers in mind (*cf.* 3:3) as he makes these three points about the heavenly kingdom.

Thus the apostle concludes his first paragraph, a stirring appeal to his wavering followers not to allow intellectual appreciation of Christianity to become a substitute for moral application. Is his 'activist' emphasis on heaven for the obedient in verses 10-11 a contradiction of his 'receptionist' teaching on the divine nature in verse 4? No. Heaven is not a reward *pro miritis*<sup>33</sup> but *de congruo*.<sup>34</sup> It accords with the nature of a good and generous God toward those who trust and obey him. This passage agrees with several in the Gospels and Epistles in suggesting that while heaven is entirely a gift of grace, it admits of degrees of felicity, and that these are dependent upon how faithfully we have built a structure of character and service upon the foundation of Christ. [One theologian] likens the unholy Christian in the judgment to a sailor who just manages to make shore after shipwreck, or to a man who barely escapes with his life from a burning house, while all his possessions are lost. In contrast, the Christian who has allowed his Lord to influence his conduct will have abundant entrance into the heavenly city, and be welcomed like a triumphant athlete victorious in the Games. This whole paragraph of exhortation is thus set between two poles: what we already are in Christ and what we are to become. The truly Christian reader, unlike the scoffers, will look back to the privileges conferred on him, of partaking in the divine nature

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<sup>33</sup> Based on merit.

<sup>34</sup> Based on reconciliation.

and will seek to live worthily of it. He will also look forward to the day of assessment, and strive to live in the light of it.”

#### F. TRUTH WILL BEAR REPETITION (1:12-15)

***12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.***

***13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body,***

***14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.***

***15 And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.***

“These things” are the facts of salvation and God’s promises that form the basis upon which we travel toward our final destination, which is heaven. They are the “hope” that keep us going and keep us from falling along the wayside.

In saying this, Peter makes a point about the value of the written Word. A Chinese proverb states that weakest ink is stronger than the human mind. We are prone to forget. And as we get older our mind will lose its ability to remember clearly and in detail.

One of the requirements to the one who was to ascend the throne of Israel was that he would acquire a copy of the law and read it daily. We read: “When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left.”<sup>35</sup>

And the author of Hebrews states about the written Word: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”<sup>36</sup>

The Greek text of v. 12 reads literally: “Wherefore I will [not] be negligent always to put you in remembrance of these things, though [you] know them and be established in the present truth.”

<sup>35</sup> Deut. 17:18-20

<sup>36</sup> Heb. 4:12, 13



*Barnes' Notes* observes: "It was of importance for Peter, as it is for ministers of the gospel now, to bring known truths to remembrance. Men are liable to forget them, and they do not exert the influence over them which they ought. It is the office of the ministry not only to impart to a people truths which they did not know before, but a large part of their work is to bring to recollection well-known truths and to seek that they may exert a proper influence on the life. Amidst the cares, the business, the amusements, and the temptations of the world, even true Christians are prone to forget them; and the ministers of the gospel render them an essential service, even if they should do nothing more than remind them of truths which are well understood, and which they have known before. A pastor, in order to be useful, need not always aim at originality, or deem it necessary always to present truths which have never been heard of before. He renders an essential service to mankind who 'reminds' them of what they know but are prone to forget, and who endeavors to impress plain and familiar truths on the heart and conscience, for these truths are most important for man."

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The apostle will take every opportunity of reminding his readers of the truths and duties which he has been describing, and that because faith in those truths and the practice of those duties is the only way to Christ's eternal kingdom."

The value of daily devotions is that we are kept on the straight and narrow path of salvation. The Psalmist wrote: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."<sup>37</sup> We have to be reminded of what we know already.

*The Tyndale Commentary* states: "It is at first sight somewhat surprising that Peter should address his readers as *established in the truth you now have*. From what he has already said, and what he is yet to say about them, it is very evident that their lives left a lot to be desired – and yet they were established Christians. Surely this is a solemn warning that it is all too easy for those who have been Christians for some time to lapse into serious sin or doctrinal error. There is no safeguard against this except living in direct touch with the Lord and Savior.

There is an illuminating parallel to Peter's concern for the stability of his readers in the face of heresy: the *Epsitula Apostolorum* was written 'that you may be established and not waver, not be shaken nor turn away from the word of the gospel that you have heard.'

It is interesting that Peter, like Jude, can see the Christian tradition given through the apostles (1:16f.) as a unity and as the truth (*cf.* Jude 4), in contrast to the divisive tendencies, unhistorical myths, and unworthy behavior of the false teachers. And there may be something poignant in his use of the word *established*

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<sup>37</sup> Ps. 119:11

to describe his hesitant and wavering readers. For that is the word which Jesus used of him on one memorable occasion when, although so fickle, he was sure that *he* was established in the truth and could not possibly apostasize (see Lk. 22:32). It seems to have become a favorite word of this turbulent man who now really was established. He uses it in his final prayer at the end of 1 Peter (5:10), and a similar word occurs in a significant context in 2 Peter 3:17.”

As stated, Peter was aware of the fact that he was not teaching anything new to the recipients of his letter. He saw it as his duty to “refresh your memory.” He also understood that his time was limited. Like Paul, he compared life on earth with living in a tent. Paul wrote: “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”<sup>38</sup>

Tents are not meant to be permanent dwellings. Our life on earth is short and transient. We are created for heaven and eternity.

*Barnes’ Notes* writes about Peter’s observations about his own upcoming death: “This does not mean that he had any new revelation on the subject, showing him that he was soon to die, as many of the ancients supposed; but the idea is, that the time drew near when he was to die ‘in the manner’ in which the Savior had told him that he would. He had said (John 21:18) that this would occur when he should be ‘old,’ and as he was now becoming old, he felt that the predicted event was drawing near. Many years had now elapsed since this remarkable prophecy was uttered. It would seem that Peter had never doubted the truth of it, and during all that time he had had before him the distinct assurance that he must die by violence; by having ‘his hands stretched forth;’ and by being conveyed by force to some place of death to which he would not of himself go (John 21:18), but, though the prospect of such a death must have been painful, he never turned away from it; never sought to abandon his Master’s cause; and never doubted that it would be so.

This is one of the few instances that have occurred in the world, where a man knew distinctly, long beforehand, what would be the manner of his own death, and where he could have it constantly in his eye. We cannot foresee this in regard to ourselves, but we may learn to feel that death is not far distant, and may accustom ourselves to think upon it in whatever manner it may come upon us, as Peter did, and endeavor to prepare for it. Peter would naturally seek to prepare

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<sup>38</sup> II Cor. 5:1-4

himself for death in the particular form in which he knew it would occur to him; we should prepare for it in whatever way it may occur to us. The subject of crucifixion would be one of special interest to him; to us death itself should be the subject of unusual interest—the manner is to be left to God. Whatever may be the signs of its approach, whether sickness or grey hairs, we should meditate much upon an event so solemn to us; and as these indications thicken we should be more diligent, as Peter was, in doing the work that God has given us to do. Our days, like the fabled Sybil's leaves, become more valuable as they are diminished in number; and as the inevitable hour draws nearer to us, we should labor more diligently in our Master's cause, gird our loins more closely, and trim our lamps. Peter thought of the cross, for it was such a death that he was led to anticipate. Let us think of the bed of languishing on which we may die, or of the blow that may strike us suddenly down in the midst of our way, calling us without a moment's warning into the presence of our Judge."

*The Tyndale Commentary* comments: "It is interesting that the roots of both *skēnōma* (tent) and *exodos* (departure v.15) should occur in the Lucan account of the transfiguration, to which Peter goes on to refer. ...

We have much to learn (in our generation, when death has replaced sex as the forbidden subject) from Peter's attitude to death. He had for years been living with death; he knew that his lot would be to die in a horrible and painful way. And yet he can speak of it in this wonderful way, apparently without fear or regret. It means entry into the everlasting kingdom. It means the exit from this world (v. 15) to some other place prepared for us by God. It means the laying aside of the tent we have been inhabiting. 'There is no reason why we should take its removal so badly. There is an implied contrast between the failing tabernacle and the eternal dwelling place, which Paul explains in 2 Cor. 5:1' (Calvin).

It is in view of Jesus' words that Peter is so anxious to carry out his work of establishing Christians by means of continual reminders. And so he says that he *will make every effort* (the future, *spoudasō* is better attested than the present, *spoudazō*) to ensure that after his death they will have, any time they care to turn to it, a permanent written reminder of his teaching. What is he referring to? Clearly not to this Epistle .... But his words fit Mark's Gospel admirably. Here is a work which from the earliest times was closely associated with Peter. Papias, early in the second century, wrote: 'This also the presbyter used to say – Mark, having been Peter's translator, wrote accurately, not however in order, as much as he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord ... For he was concerned for one thing only, not to omit any of the things he had heard, or to falsify anything in them.' This then, was good tradition early in the second century: it was traditional before Papias, who was himself born about 70 AD. And it is backed up by all the second-century writers who refer to Mark, notably Clement and Irenaeus. The

latter is particularly interesting. He says, ‘After their (i.e. Peter and Paul’s) death (*exodon*) Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of Peter’s preaching.’ It is significant that Irenaeus uses the same word for death as Peter does here. *Exodos* is a rather rare word for death, used by itself (though common enough in conjunction with *biou*<sup>39</sup>). It was so used by Luke of Christ’s death foreshadowed at the transfiguration (Lk. 9:31). It is used here in the same context. And it is used in this passage of Irenaeus. It seems probably that Irenaeus knew this passage in 2 Peter, and took the implicit promise to refer to Mark’s Gospel.”

I find it yet difficult to see Peter’s statement as not referring to his own Epistle.

#### G. THE TRUTH IS ATTESTED BY APOSTOLIC EYEWITNESSES (1:16-18)

***16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.***

***17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."***

***18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.***

Like the Apostle John, Peter refers to himself as an eyewitness of Jesus’ glory.<sup>40</sup> But John may have referred to more only than the supernatural incident of Jesus’ transfiguration. He probably felt that Jesus showed His glory in the way He lived everyday life on earth.

Peter mentions the incident as proof of his apostleship, which gives him authority over the false teachers of his day. Peter’s proof discredits the teaching of his opposition, which he qualifies as “myths.” The Greek word used is *muthos*, which Paul uses several times in his epistles to Timothy and Titus.<sup>41</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* states: “Peter is arguing that when he talks (as he has done in the preceding verses) of the present power of the risen Lord to equip the Christian for holy living, and of the glorious future which awaits the faithful Christian, he is not guilty either of embellishment or of speculation. They are respectively the present and the future manifestations of the historical Jesus, to whose reality he could bear personal testimony.”

<sup>39</sup> Meaning: “from life.”

<sup>40</sup> John 1:14

<sup>41</sup> I Tim. 1:7; 4:7; II Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:14

Although the topics of false teachings are not mentioned, the reference to the Father's statement, during Jesus' transfiguration, suggests that the false teachers denied Jesus' divinity. It may also refer to a false teaching that denied the fact of Jesus' second coming as judge.

The two Greek words used are *dunamis*, "miraculous power," and *parousia*, meaning "coming," or "presence." The last word is usually a reference to Jesus' future return, rather than to His present presence.

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: "It is impossible to decide from this reference the precise character of the false teachers. They were no Gnostics in anything like a developed sense, however, or they would never have attacked 'myths'; they had too many themselves! It seems that, like Hymenaeus and Philetus, they explained away the future element in salvation in terms of the past. Thus they could very well have said that the resurrection is past already, when the believer died and rose with Christ at his baptism (Col. 2:12; Rom 6:3-5), and that the future coming of Christ was realized in the coming of the Spirit. This seems the most natural way of taking the words, accords well with what is said of the false teachers in chapter 3, and explains Peter's use of the transfiguration incident to refute them. Men who explained away the resurrection and scoffed at the parousia could best be refuted by reference to the incarnate life of Jesus. ..."

Peter emphasizes the first-hand nature of the apostolic teaching his readers had received. 'We' – the apostolic 'we' – *were eyewitnesses*, he says. The word used for this, *epoptēs*, is an unusual and interesting one. It was commonly used to denote one initiated into the Mystery Religions. Peter's point in using this word here is probably polemical. He may be suggesting that the false teachers were outside the circle of the initiates to which the author and his readers belong. In so doing Peter effectively reverses their exclusive boasts to superiority over ordinary Christians on the grounds of being initiated into the higher *gnōsis* to which their humbler brethren could never aspire. But he may simply be asserting his eyewitness status, and this is the most common meaning of *epoptēs*. There is frequently a stress on apostolic eyewitnesses whenever the historic Christian faith is being defended against false teaching (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:3-8; 1 Jn. 1:1-3; 4:14)."

#### H. THE TRUTH IS ATTESTED BY PROPHETIC SCRIPTURES (1:19-21)

***19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.***

***20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.***

***21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.***

In going from his own status as eyewitness of Jesus' life and ministry to the Old Testament prophets who prophesied about the coming of the Messiah, Peter places the present in the light of the whole cycle of history. The present acquires its meaning from the past. We are all links in a long chain of developing history and each of us plays a vital role in its development. If my grandfather had died as a child, I would never have been born. What is true in the physical is also true in the spiritual realm. The history of salvation began with prophecy. When man fell into sin God prophesied that the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent.<sup>42</sup> The coming of the Savior of the world was the fulfillment of a long line of prophecies.

It is important to see and understand this historic development in order to know from where we came and where we are heading. In Peter's words, this makes Old Testament prophecy "a light shining in a dark place." Peter may have thought of the proverb that reads: "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day."<sup>43</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* comments: "From personal eyewitness testimony Peter now turns to 'the prophetic word.' As in all other occurrences of the term, Peter means the Old Testament, and he adduces it in support for his teaching in verses 3-11. The verse can be understood in two quite different ways. The crucial word is *bebaioteron*, *more certain*. Does it mean that the Scriptures confirm the apostolic witness (AV, NEB mg.)? Or does it mean that the apostolic witness fulfills, and thus authenticates, Scripture (RV, RSV, NEB, NIV)?"

Most commentators follow the second alternative and take it that the voice at the transfiguration makes even more certain the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Lord. Thus 'the transfiguration bears witness to the permanent validity of the Old Testament. ... It is a distortion of the truth to say (like Marcion and many moderns) that the transfiguration shows the supersession of the Old Testament by the Gospel, for 'the fulfillment of the Old Testament' means not its abolition but its vindication as a perpetual witness to the supremacy of Christ.' This view, though excellent doctrine, is exposed to two criticisms. It is extremely difficult to squeeze this meaning 'we have the prophetic word made more sure' out of the *echomen bebaioteron*, lit. 'we have more sure.' If Peter had meant to say this, why did he not use the normal construction and write *echomen bebaiōthenta*?

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<sup>42</sup> Gen. 3:15

<sup>43</sup> Prov. 4:18

And it is even more difficult to squeeze such a sentiment out of a first-century Jew, let alone a Christian apostle. The Jews always preferred prophecy to the voice from heaven. Indeed they regarded the latter, the *bath qōl*, ‘daughter of the voice,’ as an inferior substitute for revelation, since the days of prophecy had ceased. And as for the apostles, it is hard to overemphasize their regard for the Old Testament. One of their most powerful arguments for the truth of Christianity was the argument from prophecy (see the speeches in Acts, Rom. 15; 1 Pet. 2 or the whole of Heb. or Rev.). In the word of God written, they sought absolute assurance, like their Master, for whom ‘it is written’ sufficed to clinch an argument. Peter’s meaning seems to be that given in the first alternative above. He is saying ‘If you don’t believe me, go to the Scriptures.’ ‘The question,’ says Calvin, ‘is not whether the prophets are more trustworthy than the gospel.’ It is simply that ‘since the Jews were in no doubt that everything that the prophets taught came from God, it is no wonder that Peter says that their word is more sure.’ ...

The metaphor of Scripture as a *light* or torch, illuminating a murky room, is both well known and apt (*cf.* Ps. 119:105 ...) though *auchmēros*, ‘murky’ (NEB), does not recur in biblical Greek. It does, however, come in the *Apocalypse of Peter* as a description of hell. The thought is that the light shows up the dirt, and makes possible its removal. We are to walk by the torchlight of Scripture *until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.* ...

The dawning of the day and the rising of the morning star refers most naturally to the parousia. On the dawning of the day of the second coming see Romans 13:12.” The text of this reference by Paul reads: “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.”

The translation “we have not followed” is the rendering of the Greek word *exakoloutheo*, “to follow out.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on the verb: “This compound verb is used only by St. Peter in the New Testament; we find it again in ... 2 Peter 2:2 and 15. [Some Bible scholars] have thought that the preposition `ex, from or out of, implies wandering from the truth after false guides; but probably the word merely means ‘to follow closely,’ though in this case the guides were going astray. Perhaps the use of the plural number is accounted for by the fact that St. Peter was not the only witness of the glory of the Transfiguration; he associates in thought his two brother-apostles with himself.”

This brings us to one of the key verses in the New Testament about the divine inspiration of Scripture. Peter uses a double negative to affirm this. The Greek text of vv. 20 and 21 reads literally: “Knowing this that no prophecy of scripture is of no private interpretation. For not by the will of man came [the] prophecy in old time but men spoke as of God as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” These two verses, together with Paul’s statement to Timothy which reads:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”<sup>44</sup> form the backbone of the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture.

There are, however, some theological problems connected to these verses. *The Tyndale Commentary* writes: “This passage has been interpreted in many ways. The main problem concerns the meaning of *epiluseōs*, a noun which does not occur again in the New Testament, though the verb comes in Mark 4:34 and Acts 19:39: in both instances it means to unravel a problem. The two main ways of taking it are, first, no prophecy arises from the prophet’s own interpretation – *i.e.* it is given by God; and second, no prophecy is to be understood by private interpretation – *i.e.* but as the church interprets it. In the first case it is the prophet’s understanding of his prophecy which is at issue, in the second it is our interpretation of the prophet’s words.

The second view prevails today among most commentators. In its favor is the fact that the false teachers certainly did misinterpret Scripture (2:1; 3:16). If this were the meaning it would be important. Scripture is neither given (v. 21) nor interpreted by man (v. 20); the Spirit does both tasks. Again, if this were the meaning, it would provide a good introduction to chapter 2, which is, in fact, where the NEB puts it (but in doing it starts its new paragraph in the middle of a Greek sentence!). Peter would then be claiming that only the Spirit-filled church could properly interpret the Spirit-inspired Scriptures. The false teachers read the Bible amiss; they have not got the clue to its proper understanding, which the orthodox have, through the light of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

However there are difficulties about this view. Grammatically, this clause goes with what precedes, not what follows. The same is true of the sense in the preceding paragraph. Peter is not talking about *interpretation* but *authentication*. His theme is the origin and reliability of the Christian teaching about grace, holiness and heaven. The same God whom the apostles heard speak in the transfiguration spoke also through the prophets. The argument in verses 20-21 is a consistent and indeed necessary conclusion to the preceding paragraph. Thus, we can rely on the apostolic account of the transfiguration because God spoke. And we can rely on Scripture because behind its human authors God spoke. The prophets did not make up what they wrote. They did not arbitrarily unravel it. ‘They did not blab their inventions of their own accord or according to their own judgments’ (Calvin). In the Old Testament, this was the characteristic of the false prophets, who ‘speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the

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<sup>44</sup> II Tim. 3:16, 17



Lord' (Je. 23:16, cf. Ezk. 13:3). But true prophecy came from God and, men as they were, the prophets were *carried along* by the Holy Spirit.

## CHAPTER TWO

### a. *Beware of false teachers* (2:1-3).

***1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves.***

***2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.***

***3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.***

Having spoken about real prophets who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word of God, Peter turns to the issue of false prophets who utter prophecies that do not come from God. In the Greek text the word “false prophets” is a single word *pseudopropheítai*. Jesus describes them as wolves in sheep’s clothing.<sup>45</sup> The same is true for the “false teachers,” which are called in Greek *pseudodidáskaloi*. That word is only found in the New Testament in this verse.

Those prophets “secretly introduce” heresy into the church. The Greek word for that action is *pareisago*, which is also unique to Peter, as it is found nowhere else in the New Testament.

But that does not mean that false prophecy was not known in Scripture. The Old Testament abounds with instances in which people got up to prophesy without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jeremiah mentions several times incidents in which false prophets deceived the people by messages that were not the Word of God. God said about them: “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.”<sup>46</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* states: “Peter’s thought still lingers in the Old Testament prophecies. In Israel *there were also false prophets among the people* as well as true, and now history was repeating itself. The readers had *false teachers* in

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<sup>45</sup> Matt. 7:15

<sup>46</sup> Jer. 14:14

their midst. In describing them in this chapter he oscillates between the present and the future tense, as does Paul in a similar context in 1 Timothy 4:1ff. No doubt this is because he sees them as fulfilling the prophecies both of the Old Testament and of Jesus (Dt. 13:2-6; Mt. 24:24, etc). There is a similar play between the future and the present in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and 7, and 2 Timothy 3:1ff and 5. There always have been and there always will be false teachers among the people of God.”

The interesting lesson we can draw from Peter’s comparison between the Old Testament false prophets and the New Testament false teachers is that there is a direct link between teaching and inspiration.

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The literal translation of the words rendered ‘damnable heresies’ is ‘heresies of destruction,’ the last word being the same which occurs again at the end of the verse. These heresies destroy the soul; they bring ruin both to those who are led astray and to the false teachers themselves. The word for ‘heresy’ (*a`iresis*), meaning originally ‘choice,’ became the name for a party, sect, or school, as in ... Acts 5:17, ‘the sect of the Sadducees;’ ... Acts 15:5, ‘the sect of the Pharisees;’ ... Acts 24:5 (in the mouth of Tertullus). ‘the sect of the Nazarenes;’ then, by a natural transition, it came to be used of the opinions held by a sect. The notion of self-will, deliberate separation, led to its being employed generally in a bad sense (see especially ... Titus 3:10, ‘A man that is a heretic, (*airetikōs*).’”

The Greek text of v. 2 reads literally: “And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of.” The last verb is the word *blasfemeetheésetai*, from which the English verb “to blaspheme” is derived. *The Darby Bible* gives this literal translation: “and many shall follow their dissolute ways, through whom the way of the truth shall be blasphemed.” People, who blaspheme the truth, ultimately curse God. This is an indication of the fact that they belong to the devil.

V.3 reads literally in the Greek text: “And through covetousness with feigned words they shall make merchandise of you: whose judgment lingers not now of a long time, and their damnation slumbers not.”

The word “covetousness” suggests that money plays an important role in the lives of these false teachers. Those people follow the wrong way because it pays better. Some people go to church, expecting that the preacher will make them feel better. The false teachers were happy to comply, which brought them greater material benefits. The words “will exploit you” are the translation of the Greek verb *emporeúsontai*, which literally means “they shall make merchandise of you.”

The Apostle Paul warns Timothy about this desire for money. We read: “If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result

in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.<sup>47</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “If verse 2 speaks of the immorality of the false teachers, verse 3 is concerned with their greed and their doom. It is instructive to contrast it with 1 Thessalonians 2:5, where Paul denies that he is a teacher of this type, like the wandering sophists of the Graeco-Roman world, whose main concern was not truth, but success in argument. This account for the reference to *stories they have made up*, or phony arguments, which were designed not for helping the hearers but for fleecing them (hence the mention of *greed*). Peter is turning the false teachers’ charge of ‘cleverly invented stories’ back on themselves. ‘It is not the apostles’ message, but the false teachers,’ that is based on sheer invention.’ ... The verb *emporeuomai*, has a commercial background, to *exploit* or ‘make money out of.’ Like the false teachers of 1 Timothy 6:5, these men thought Christianity could be a source of financial gain to themselves.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments on v. 2: “The heathen were accustomed to charge Christians with immorality; the conduct of these false teachers gave them occasion; they did not distinguish between these licentious heretics and true Christians. The expression, ‘way of truth,’ occurs in the ‘Epistle of Barnabas,’ chapter 5. Christianity is called ‘the way’ several times in the Acts (... Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23, etc.). It is the way of truth, because Christ, who is the Center of his religion, is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; because it is the way of life which is founded on the truth.”

“Their destruction has not been sleeping” sounds like a poetic expression. Destruction is portrayed as a person who is wide awake, like a spider in a web, waiting for unsuspecting insects to be caught. The suggestion is that Satan is lying in wait for those people who wandered into his trap. He is ready to destroy them.

## B. THREE EXAMPLES OF JUDGMENT AND DELIVERANCE (2:4-10a)

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<sup>47</sup> I Tim. 6:3-11

***4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment;***

***5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others;***

***6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;***

***7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men***

***8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—***

***9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.***

***10 This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.***

Peter's three examples of God's judgments in the past serve the double function of a warning to the false teachers and an encouragement to the true believers.

The first example goes back in history to the time before the creation of man. Although this is nowhere clearly stated in Scripture, we may assume that angels were created before God created the earth and the solar system of which our globe is a part.

It is assumed that Ezekiel's prophecy about the "ruler of Tyre" is actually a reference to the fall of Lucifer. Ezekiel writes about the fall of Satan: "You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you."<sup>48</sup>

Some Bible scholars believe that Lucifer was originally the archangel God had put in charge of planet earth. That would account for Ezekiel's mention of him being in the Garden of Eden. Some point to the first verses of Genesis, where we read: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of

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<sup>48</sup> Ezek. 28:13-15

God was hovering over the waters.”<sup>49</sup> The assumption is that God originally did not create the earth as “formless and empty,” covered with darkness,<sup>50</sup> but that the fall of Satan caused our planet to disintegrate. And when God said, “Let there be light,” it was not the beginning of creation, but the recreation and reparation of the damage done by the fall of Satan.

*The Tyndale Commentary* states: “[Peter] begins with the fallen angels of Genesis 6, but does not specify their sin. In Genesis 6:1-4; Jude 6 and Revelation 12:7 it is made clear that rebellion was the prime cause of their fall, though lust is also mentioned. Peter may have been influenced by the embellishment of the Genesis account in the apocryphal *1 Enoch*. Jude certainly was, for he quotes *1 Enoch*, as does the second-century *Gospel of Peter*. But if Peter alludes to this apocryphal book at all, he does so with the utmost discretion (as does 1 Pet. 3:19; 4:6 where again he *may* be familiar with apocryphal material, but it is impossible to prove it).

The details of Peter’s picture are not quite clear. NIV renders it putting them into gloomy dungeons, since most of the best MSS read *seirois* or *sirois*, meaning ‘underground pits’ (whence the English ‘silo’). Others give the rare word *seirais*, meaning ‘chains’ (so AV), which would be closer to Jude’s ‘everlasting fetters’ and the imagery of Enoch x. 4; liv. 4-5 and *Baruch* liv. 12f. which reads ‘And some of them descended and mingled with women. And those who did so were tormented in chains.’ However, both textual and intrinsic probability on balance favor *seirois*.

*Sent them to hell* is a single word in the Greek, occurring only here in the Bible, and meaning to ‘consign to Tartarus.’ Tartarus, in Greek mythology, was the place of punishment for the departed spirits of the very wicked, particularly rebellious gods like Tantalus. Just as Paul could quote an apt verse of the pagan poet Aratus (Acts 17:28), so could Peter make use of this Homeric imagery. Josephus does the same, and talks of heathen gods chained in Tartarus. The evil angels are in the place of torment now, although they must await the final judgment. Peter’s eschatology is characteristic of the whole New Testament, which sees God’s future judgment as finalizing the choices men are making all their lives. There is a close parallel in Revelation 20:10, where the devil, though bound now, is destined for final judgment.”

The statement that the devil is “bound now” betrays the Tyndale author’s strong Calvinistic tendencies. Calvin believed that we are presently living in the Millennium in which Satan is chained. One of my former teachers observed that, if Satan is chained now, he is tied on a very long chain!

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<sup>49</sup> Gen. 1:1, 2

<sup>50</sup> Isa. 45:12

Peter's mention of the punishment of the ancient world by the flood of Noah, which wiped out the whole world population with the exception of Noah and his family, is familiar biblical truth. Noah is called "a preacher of righteousness." No doubt Noah announced the coming judgment and warned to people to escape by conversion and confession of sin, inviting them into the ark that could save their lives. Noah's flood was not a whimsical act of divine anger, we read how emotional God was about this; the Genesis account states: "The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain."<sup>51</sup> That is a strong argument against the belief that a loving God would never send people to hell. In a way that is true. God doesn't send people to hell. People go to hell because they choose to. As one German revival preacher said: "Only volunteers go to heaven, just as to hell."

The third example is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the salvation of "righteous" Lot. The Greek text of v. 6 reads literally: "And condemned [the] cities of Sodom and Gomorrah turning [them] into ashes with and overthrow, [making them] an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly." The Greek word for "turning into ashes" is *tephroo*, "to incinerate." This is the only place where this word occurs in the New Testament.

Most interesting is Peter's evaluation of Lot as "a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men," and who "was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard." We do not get that impression when we read the Genesis account about Lot's life in the vicinity of Sodom and later inside the city. Lot was rescued from Sodom "by the skin of his teeth," as D. L. Moody put it.

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes about Peter calling Lot "righteous": "The Genesis account does not even claim, with our present verse, that Lot was a *righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men*. He appears simply as a man of the world (Gn. 13:10-14; 19:16) who had strayed a long way from the God of his fathers. Though hospitable (19:1f), he was weak (19:6), morally depraved (19:8) and drunken (19:33, 35). His heart was so deeply embedded in Sodom that he had to be positively dragged out (19:16). Time and again it is emphasized that his rescue was entirely due to the unmerited favor of God, which he shows to men because of what he is, not because of what they are (e. g. 19:16, 19).

Why then is he called *righteous* here? The answer may partly lie in extra-canonical tradition; thus he is called 'the just one' in *Wisdom* x. 6; xix. 17. It may partly be a matter of comparison with the men of Sodom, in which case NEB's 'a

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<sup>51</sup> Gen. 6:6

good man' (a decent fellow) may be near the mark. But also, of course, Lot did accept divine intervention on his behalf, as did Elizabeth and Zacharias, who are also called *dikaioi* ('upright') in Luke 1:5-6. Jewish tradition saw Abraham's prayer for the righteous in Sodom as particularly applying to Lot, which says much for the power of intercessory prayer. ... In any case, Peter continues, the licentious behavior of the lawless society in which he lived *tormented* him, lit. 'knocked him up.' NEB catches the meaning with its translation 'tortured.' It is customary for Christians today, living in a secularized society, no longer to be shocked by sinful things which they see and hear. They will, for example, without protest sit through a television program presenting material which a generation ago they would never have contemplated watching at a theatre of cinema. But when a man's conscience becomes dulled to sin, and apathetic about moral standards, he is no longer willing to look to the Lord for deliverance."

We could say that Lot's righteousness was imputed. His righteousness was not his own. In a sense Lot was saved because of the righteousness of Abraham in the same way as we are saved by the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Peter draws the application of his illustration in v.9. If God saved Lot from the destruction of Sodom, whatever his spiritual condition may have been, He certainly will save those who live in fellowship with Him today. The Greek text of this verse reads literally: "The Lord knows [how] to deliver [the] godly out of temptation, and to reserve [the] unjust to be punished unto the day of judgment to be punished."

The Greek of v. 10 is rather complicated. It reads literally: "But them that walk chiefly after [the] flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities."

According to *The Tyndale Commentary*, the words "those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature" suggests sodomy.

*The Commentary* continues: "Peter faced a curiously modern predicament. There were people in the church who lived sensual lives and justified it. The infection was spreading. They did not believe in the notion of judgment and they laughed at the parousia. In this paragraph Peter confines himself to asserting solemnly that judgment will come: he will deal with the delay in the parousia in chapter 3. Judgment is certain, and he underlines it by three Old Testament examples which show the inevitability and universality of judgment. The false teachers, like their Old Testament counterparts, surrendered to sexual license and laughed at the prospect of the judgment of God. People cannot do that and get away with it in God's world. Alongside this dark thread of sin and its doom runs a silver thread of God's rescue of any who, like Noah and Lot, turn to him and call for his rescue. The God of justice cannot be flouted. The God of grace can be relied on."

People who do not believe in judgment do not believe in human dignity either. They will never put it that way. But if we do not consider ourselves to be responsible and accountable for how we live and what we do, we discount the dignity we possess as the bearers of God's image. Responsibility and dignity are like Siamese twins; one cannot live without the other!

### C. THE INSOLENT OF THE FALSE TEACHERS (2:10b-11)

***10b Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; 11 yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord.***

The Greek words, rendered in the NIV as “bold and arrogant,” are *tolmetes*, “daring,” and *authades*, “self-pleasing,” or “arrogant.” The KJV renders that latter with “self-willed.” The first word only occurs in this text in the New Testament; the second is also used by Paul in his letter to Titus, where we read: “Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be *blameless* — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.”<sup>52</sup>

The Greek word rendered “celestial beings” in the NIV is *dóxas*, which is derived from a word meaning “glory.” The word is used both referring to human glory, as in the verse “Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his *splendor* was dressed like one of these,”<sup>53</sup> as well as of the glory of God, as in the verse: “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's *glory* with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”<sup>54</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “We observe that in this verse St. Peter passes from the future tense to the present. *And despise government*; rather, *lordship*, (*kuriótetos*). St. Jude has the same word in verse 8. In ... Ephesians 1:21 and ... Colossians 1:16 it is used of angelic dignities. Here it seems to stand for all forms of authority. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities; literally, *daring, self-willed, they tremble not when speaking evil of glories*; or, *they fear not glories, blaspheming*. The word rendered ‘daring’ (*tolentaí*) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. These daring, self-willed men despise all lordship, all glories, whether the glory of Christ (‘the excellent glory,’ ... 2 Peter 1:17), or the glory of the angels, or the glory of holiness, or the glory of earthly sovereignty. The next verse, however, makes it probable that the

<sup>52</sup> Titus 1:7

<sup>53</sup> Matt. 6:29

<sup>54</sup> Matt. 16:27



glory of the angels was the thought present to St. Peter's mind. It may be that, as some false teachers had inculcated the worship of angels (... Colossians 2:18), others had gone to the opposite extreme (comp. Jude 8)."

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes about the phrase "these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings": "The ... phrase may mean that they 'slander celestial beings,' or that they 'speak disrespectfully of church leaders.' It all depends on the meaning we assign to *doxai* and *ka't autōn*. Assuming the *doxai* to be celestial beings they could be theoretically either good angels or demons. If the former, then *ka't autōn* will refer to the false teachers. If the latter, then *ka't autōn* will refer to these *doxai*. It is, however, exceedingly difficult to maintain the hypothesis of evil angels here, despite the parallel passage with Michael and Satan in Jude, because *doxai* a word full of imagery of light, is totally inappropriate to demonic beings. The *doxai*, must be the angels, and the *autōn* the false teachers, on whom the angels pronounce God's judgment – in temperate terms.

Assuming, then, that Peter is thinking of the slandering of angels, the phrase could be taken in two ways. Either they 'made light of' the unseen powers, in the materialistic attitude of which verse 12 complains, when it likens them to brute beasts; or else they 'spoke disrespectfully' of angelic beings. This is the meaning in Jude, and perhaps here too. It could well be that the false teachers justified their licentious ways by citing the example of the 'sons of God' who mated with the daughters of men (Gn. 6:1ff.). There was considerable rabbinic argument as to whether these 'sons of God' were men or angels. If the false teachers took the latter view, and quoted the angels in justification of their immorality ... they would indeed be blaspheming (lit. 'speaking harm of') the angels and bringing them into disrepute. In favor of this interpretation, it could be urged that Paul uses both *doxa* and *kuriotēs* of the angelic powers, and the present context makes such an interpretation probably. However, in the light of verse 12 with its insistence on the crass materialism of the heretics, we cannot rule out [one Bible scholar's] understanding of the phrase as referring to church leaders, against whom the false teachers were insubordinate. 'The rulers of the church would naturally rebuke the false teachers, and these would naturally reply in unmeasured language.'"

The above quoted comments prove at least that Peter's epistle is wrought with serious problems of interpretation.

Jude quotes an extra biblical source as illustration of the point Peter makes here, stating: "But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'"<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Jude 9

Peter's point is, may be, best illustrated by the proverb that "fools run in where angels fear to tread."

Peter may have thought of Zechariah's vision in which he saw the high priest Joshua standing before the Angel of the Lord and Satan on the other side, accusing him. Even there the rebuke of Satan was given indirectly. We read: "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, 'The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?'"<sup>56</sup>

*The Adam Clarke's Commentary* agrees with this, stating: "This is a difficult verse, but the meaning seems to be this: The holy angels, who are represented as bringing an account of the actions of the fallen angels before the Lord in judgment, simply state the facts without exaggeration, and without permitting anything of a bitter, reviling, or railing spirit, to enter into their accusations. See Zech 3:1, and Jude 9; to the former of which Peter evidently alludes. But these persons, not only speak of the actions of men which they conceive to be wrong, but do it with untrue colorings, and the greatest malevolence. Michael, the archangel, treated a damned spirit with courtesy; he only said, The Lord rebuke thee, Satan! but these treat the rulers of God's appointment with disrespect and calumny."

Peter describes the angels as "stronger and more powerful." But that does not mean that angels rank above human beings in the order of creation. Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels?"<sup>57</sup> Because of the fall of the human race, it is often difficult for us to understand that in God's order of creation, we rank above the angels. But that was, evidently, not in Peter's mind when he wrote these words.

#### D. THEIR ARROGANCE, LUST AND GREED (2:12-16)

***12 But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.***

***13 They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you.***

<sup>56</sup> Zech. 3:1, 2

<sup>57</sup> I Cor. 6:2, 3

***14 With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed — an accursed brood!***

***15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.***

***16 But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey — a beast without speech — who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness.***

Peter compares the false teachers of his day to animals, “brute beasts.” The Greek word for “brute” is *alogos*. *Logos* is the word John uses in the introductory chapter of his Gospel, making it refer to the Incarnation. In the context of Peter’s text it simply means “unable to communicate.”

Peter’s analysis of the animal world would not go over well with today’s animal lovers or the society for the protection of animals. His main point, however, is not the criticism of animals, but the fact that in the order of creation man ranks above the animals. In David’s words: “Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents.”<sup>58</sup>

These false teachers had lost the crown that God had given to Adam as king of creation. They had lost all human dignity, both in their status and way of life.

*The Tyndale Commentary* comments: “Peter now launches out in a direct assault on the false teachers; he glows with moral indignation. These men, so far from possessing angelic restraint, live *like brute beasts* at the dictates of their passions, or as RSV translates, ‘like irrational animals, creatures of instinct,’ in contrast to the rational being, man. But these folks have neglected their rationality and followed their passions. Very well, their end will be like an animal’s too. They will be *caught and destroyed*. What a graphic indictment of the effect on a man of living like a beast! First he gets capture and then he gets destroyed by his passions. As [one Bible scholar] points out, sensuality is self-destructive. ‘The aim of the man who gives himself to such fleshly things is pleasure; and his tragedy is that in the end he loses even the pleasure.’ What is more, he goes on, ‘for a while he may enjoy what he calls pleasure, but in the end he ruins his health, wrecks his constitution, destroys his mind and character and begins his experience of hell while he is still on earth.’

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<sup>58</sup> Ps. 8:5-8 (NLT).

Their mistake is to confuse the thrill of animal instinct with the presence of the Holy Spirit – for it is very likely that these advocates of Christian liberty were loud in their claims to fullness of the Holy Spirit.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The order of the words in the best manuscripts favors the translation of the Revised Version, *But these, as creatures without reason, born mere animals to be taken and destroyed.* The word rendered ‘mere animals’ is literally ‘natural’ (*physiká*); comp. ... Jude 1:10, ‘what they know naturally (*physikos*) as brute beasts.’ Speak evil of the things that they understand not; literally, as in the Revised Version, *railing in matters whereof they are ignorant.* ... The context and the parallel passage in St. Jude show that the *doxai*, the glories, are the things which the false teachers understand not and at which they rail. Good angels do not pronounce a railing judgment against angels that sinned. These men, knowing nothing of the angelic sphere of existence, rail at the elect and the fallen angels alike, they should speak with awe of the sin of the angels; jesting on such subjects is unbecoming and dangerous. And shall utterly perish in their own corruption. The best manuscripts read here *kai phtharèsontai* >‘shall also be destroyed in their own corruption.’ It seems better to take *phthopa*> in the sense of ‘corruption’ here, as in ... 2 Peter 1:4, and to suppose that St. Peter is intentionally playing on the double sense of the noun and its cognate verb than, with [one Bible scholar], to refer the pronoun *auton*, ‘their own,’ to the *aloga zoa*, and to understand St. Peter as meaning that the false teachers, who act like irrational animals, shall be destroyed with the destruction of irrational animals.”

These false teachers were not only wrong in their theology, but also in their lifestyle. They presented harmful examples of living to young and immature Christians, leading some of them on the path of destruction. Paul states that most immoral behavior is carried on under the cover of darkness. He writes: “For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.”<sup>59</sup> But Peter’s false teachers carry on their carousing in broad daylight. They show no sign of embarrassment about their sinful behavior.

Vv.13 and 14 reads literally in Greek: “And shall receive [the] reward of unrighteousness, that they count [it as] pleasure to riot in the daytime. [They are] spots and blemishes, sporting themselves with deceiving their own while they feast with you. Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an unstable heart exercised with covetous practices; they have cursed children.”

Evidently, these false teachers used the love meals, the *agape* of the young church as occasion to seduce women, turning spiritual love in Christ into physical

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<sup>59</sup> I Thess. 5:7

sexual relationships. Sin begins with a look, which turns into a desire, and the desire ends in an act. That was the way the first human sin was committed. We read: “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.”<sup>60</sup>

Jesus warns us about the dangers of a wrong look. We read: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”<sup>61</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* comments: “Their eyes are full, says Peter in a remarkable phrase, not of *adultery* (so also RSV) but of ‘an adulterous woman’ (*cf.* NEB). They lust after every girl they see; they view every female as a potential adulteress. Peter makes another shrewd psychological observation. Lascivious thoughts, if dwelt upon and acted upon, become dominant. It becomes impossible for them to look at any woman without reflecting on her likely sexual performance, and on the possibilities of persuading her to gratify their lusts. ...

These libertines had such eyes that *they never stop sinning* (*akatapaustous hamartias*). It may be that this phrase should be translated, as in NEB, ‘never rest from sin,’ in which case Peter would be referring not to the unsatisfactory nature of lust, but to the bondage it brings with it. There is only one way out, the way of death to sin and rising to newness of life; the only alternative to denying Christ is to be identified with him in his death and resurrection. It is this way of victorious living to which Peter refers in I Peter 4:1-3, ‘he who has suffered in his body (*i.e.* died to sin) is done with sin.’ The verb he uses for ‘ceased from’ in I Peter is cognate to the rare word *akatapaustous* here.”

Peter calls the false teachers an “accursed brood,” which is the rendering of the Greek “cursed children.” The word “cursed” puts these teachers into the same category with the serpent who tempted Eve in paradise. We read there: “So the Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.’”<sup>62</sup>

In order to emphasize his warning against the false teachers of his day, Peter refers to the Old Testament incident of Balaam, who was hired by Balak to curse the people of Israel during their journey toward the Promised Land. Balaam ended up never pronouncing a curse on the Israelites, but he advised Balak to seduce the

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<sup>60</sup> Gen. 3:6

<sup>61</sup> Matt. 5:27, 28

<sup>62</sup> Gen. 3:14

Israelite males by offering them the young females of his people with whom they could prostitute. Balaam profited financially, but he lost his spirituality.

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “Now it is quite true that the main point of the Balaam account in Numbers 22–24 is his avarice; but Numbers 31:36 attributes to his influence the immorality of the Israelites at Baal-Peor (Num. 25). These two factors surely combined to make him a most useful prototype of the immoral false teachers out for gain. Such a type appears in Jude 11, where the reference to Baal-Peor is implicit (cf. I Cor. 10:8), and also in Revelation 2:15, where the same charge occurs again. The Nicolaitans, like Balaam, seem to have taught that the covenant of Yahweh with his people was so strong that nothing could impair it, certainly not some insignificant peccadillo like fornication or idolatry! All this was urged in the name of compromise, both political and social. Consequently the use of Balaam was a master-stroke against the plea for compromise, no matter how lucrative, how seductive it was made to appear. Once again we come up against this Christian insistence on the ineradicable link between right belief in the true God and right behavior. This link the Balaam tradition sought to break.”

There seems to be a spark of humor in Peter’s reference to the talking donkey who tried to keep Balaam from pursuing his plan to go and curse Israel. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on the Balaam incident with the donkey: “It was not the words of the donkey (for it merely deprecated his beating it), but the miraculous fact of its speaking at all, which withstood Balaam’s perversity. Indirectly the donkey, directly the angel, rebuked his worse than asinine obstinacy. The donkey turned aside at the sight of the angel; but Balaam, after God had said, ‘Thou shalt not go,’ persevered in wishing to go for gain. Thus, the donkey, in act, forbade his madness. How awful a contrast—a mute beast forbidding an inspired prophet!”

*The Pulpit Commentary* adds: The word for ‘rebuke’ (*eleyxin*) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. The guilt of offering the wages of unrighteousness rested with Balak; Balaam’s own transgression lay in his readiness to accept them — in his willingness to break the law of God by cursing, for filthy lucre’s sake, those whom God had not cursed. The dumb ass speaking with man’s voice forbade the madness of the prophet. The word for ‘ass’ is literally ‘beast of burden’ (*hupozugion*), as in ... Matthew 21:5). ‘Dumb’ is literally ‘without voice;’ naturally without voice, it spake with the voice of man. The word *ekólysen*, rendered ‘forbade,’ is rather ‘checked,’ or ‘stayed.’ The word for ‘madness’ (*paraphronian*) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. The ass checked the prophet’s folly by her shrinking from the angel, and by the miracle that followed; the angel, while permitting Balaam to expose himself to the danger into which he had fallen by tempting the Lord, forbade any deviation from the word to be put

into his mouth by God. Balaam obeyed in the letter; but afterwards the madness which had been checked for the moment led him into deadly sin (... Numbers 31:16).”

#### E. THE EMPTINESS OF THE FALSE TEACHERS (2:17-22)

***17 These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them.***

***18 For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.***

***19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.***

***20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.***

***21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.***

***22 Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."***

Peter continues his description of the false teachers with a double comparison in which water plays a role that evokes hope but ends up disappointing. The first is a dried-up spring. It is the place where a weary traveler expects to find a drink, but is left thirsty. The second is a cloud that promises rain, but is blown over by a heavy wind, leaving the farmer’s field dry.

The point Peter wants to make is that the false teachers promise refreshing and renewal, but leave their hearers without anything that can satisfy. *The Tyndale Commentary* states about the illustrations: “You come to it as to an exciting new spring – and find it has no water to offer. It is only the man in touch with Christ, the water of life (Jn. 4:13-14), who will find water that will satisfy the thirst round about (Jn. 7:38). Heter-orthodoxy is all very novel in the classroom; it is extremely unsatisfying in the parish.” *The Commentary* refers to two verses in Proverbs which extol the words of the righteous and wise, reading: “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked,” and: “The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Prov. 10:11; 13:14

Peter uses the Greek word *homichle* for “mist,” which is different from “cloud,” *nephele* in Greek. This is the only place in the New Testament where *homichle* occurs. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about the “cloud” Peter describes: “They give no water to the thirsty land, but only bring darkness and obscurity.”

*The Tyndale Commentary* states about Peter’s *homichle*: “Aristotle tells us that *homichle* is the haze which heralds dry weather, but is so easily dispersed by a sharp gust of wind. This describes the instability of the false teachers and the ephemeral nature of their teachings. You have only to visit a second-hand theological bookshop, with its piles of unsalable rubbish, one the latest thing in theological audacity, to see the force of this. As for the darkness reserved for the heretics, Calvin writes, ‘In place of the momentary darkness which they now cast, there is prepared for them a much thicker and eternal one.’ Surely he has understood the link between the errorists’ crime and punishment, which has escaped most commentators, who complain that darkness is a very inappropriate doom for mist or springs!”

The Greek text of v. 18 reads literally: “For when they speak words of great swelling vanity, they allure through [the] lusts of the flesh, [through much] wantonness, those that were clean that escaped from them who live in error.” *The Tyndale Commentary* comments: “They mouth big, ponderous words (*hyperonka*, swelling, means ‘unnaturally swollen,’ can also mean ‘bombastic, haughty’) in their discourses (this is the nuance of *phthengomenoi*); but they are words which amount to nothing of significance (*mataiotētos* is a descriptive genitive, *empty*). Ostentatious verbosity was their weapon to ensnare the unwary, and licentiousness was the bait on the hook, i.e. by appealing to the lustful desires of human nature, they entice ... *Aselgeiais* is extremely difficult syntactically. Is it in apposition to ‘the desires of the flesh?’ At all events ‘grandiose sophistry is the hook, filthy lust is the bait.’”

V. 20 continues the condemnation of the false teachers. Peter assumes that, in their initial contact with the Gospel, they have experienced the effect of salvation in a change of lifestyle. They stopped breathing in the polluted atmosphere of the world. The Greek word used is *miasma*, meaning: “foulness,” or “pollution.” That word also is also unique for Peter’s vocabulary. It is found nowhere else in the New Testament.

*The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments: “The world is here represented as one large, putrid marsh, or corrupt body, sending off its destructive *miasmata* everywhere and in every direction, so that none can escape its contagion, and none can be healed of the great epidemic disease of sin, but by the mighty power and skill of God. Augustine has improved on this image: ‘The whole world,’ says he,



‘is one great diseased man, lying extended from east to west, and from north to south; and to heal this great sick man, the almighty Physician descended from heaven.’ Now, it is by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as says Peter, that we escape the destructive influence of these contagious *miasmata*. But if, after having been healed, and escaped the death to which we were exposed, we get again entangled, *emplakentes*, enfolded, enveloped with them; then the latter end will be worse than the beginning: forasmuch as we shall have sinned against more light, and the soul, by its conversion to God, having had all its powers and faculties greatly improved, is now, being re-polluted, more capable of iniquity than before, and can bear more expressively the image of the earthly.”

The person who experiences salvation by putting his faith in Jesus Christ must burn his ships behind him, cutting off the way to the past. If our surrender to Christ is less than one hundred percent, we leave ourselves open to severe satanic attacks. Peter’s illustration seems to indicate that a believer in Christ can lose his salvation.

The challenge every believer has to face is the question of unconditional obedience. There is a tendency, still operative in today’s Christianity, to view conversion merely as a guarantee for a place in heaven. We are told to believe in Christ for salvation. If, on top of that, we decide to live a life of obedience to the will of God, that is commendable, but it is not vital.

That seems to have been the stand these false teachers had taken. They had experienced forgiveness of their sins, but they had not trusted God for cleansing of the lives by the blood of Jesus Christ. God’s command, both in Old and New Testament times, is “be holy, because I am holy.”<sup>64</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “Peter is convinced that the last state of such men is worse than the first. A servant who willfully disobeys his master is far more culpable than one who disobeys through ignorance. There appears to be an allusion here to the words of Jesus in Luke 12:47f. But there is no less clear an allusion to the last state of the man who got rid of one unclean spirit only to be invaded by seven others (Mt. 12:45; Lk. 11:26). Indeed, it is almost a straight quotation. The only difference is illuminating. Jesus says ‘The final condition of that man is worse than the first,’ and prophesies ‘That is how it will be with this wicked generation.’ Peter says, in effect, that Jesus’ prophecy has come true: the last state of the false teachers has turned out to be worse than the first. This would be a most natural adaptation of Jesus’ words.”

Although Peter’s statement is obviously a condemnation of the practice of false teachers, we can also detect in it a note of compassion, as if Peter tries to

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<sup>64</sup> Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26

make those people realize the danger in which they are, which could make them decide to turn back to the straight and narrow path they had abandoned.

Peter ends this warning by quoting two proverbs borrowed from the animal world: a dog returns to his vomit and a pig that has been cleaned rolls itself again in mud. The first of Peter's statements is actually a direct quotation from the Book of Proverbs: As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly."<sup>65</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* writes: "Peter concludes this chapter of stirring denunciation and strong invective with two proverbs which aptly describe the situation of the false teachers. Their punishment is that they will be given over to the lot they have chosen. The awfulness and irrevocability of hell lies just here; God underwrites a man's deliberate choice. In the end we all go 'to our own place.' The dog which has got rid of the corruption inside it through vomiting it up cannot leave well alone; it goes sniffing round the vomit again. The pig that has got rid of the corruption outside it by means of a scrubbing cannot resist rolling in the mud. 'The gospel is a medicine that purges us as a wholesome emetic, but there are many dogs who swallow again what they have brought up, to their own ruin. Likewise the gospel is a basin which cleanses us from all our dirt and stains, but there are many pigs who, immediately after they are washed, roll back again into the mud. Thus the godly are warned to beware of both dangers if they do not want to be included in the ranks of dogs and pigs' (Calvin)."

#### A. THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER REITERATED (3:1–2)

***1 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.***

***2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.***

The NIV's "Dear friends" is the rendering of the Greek word *agapeetoi*, "beloved ones." *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "The expression 'beloved,' four times repeated in this chapter, shows the apostle's affectionate interest in his readers." *The Tyndale Commentary* comments: "He calls them dear friends as he summons them to recall. Jude also marks his switch from attack to encouragement by calling his readers 'dear friends' (v. 17). The title comes three times in this last chapter of 2 Peter in significant contexts: "Dear friends, recall' (v. 2); 'Dear friends ... make every effort ... (v. 14); 'Dear friends, be on your guard' (v. 17)."

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<sup>65</sup> Prov. 26:11

Peter qualifies his two epistles as “reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.” The Greek text reads literally: “I stir up your remembrance by way of pure minds.” The Greek verb used is *diegeiro*, which has the meaning of waking up someone from his sleep. We find the same verb used in the incident in which Jesus was asleep in the boat and the disciples woke Him up when a storm threatened to drown them. We read: “He *got up*, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’”<sup>66</sup>

False teaching can dull the mind to the point where we fall asleep intellectually. Paul uses the same image in a spiritual sense: “You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.”<sup>67</sup> For Paul, being alert is a lifestyle.

Peter states that being alert will keep our minds pure. Satan will always try to infiltrate our thought-life by introducing bad thoughts. Such flashes of thinking may be unavoidable. But, as Luther said, we cannot prevent from birds flying over our heads, but we can keep them from building their nests on our heads. If the Word of God lives within us, it will help us to keep our thinking pure.

Bible scholars have problems with v. 2 in this chapter. *The Tyndale Commentary* states: “The continuous procession of genitives which marks this verse in Greek is extremely harsh. It appears to mean ‘the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles’ and the construction seems to be a double negative: the command is the apostles,’ and they are Christ’s. [One Bible scholar] may be right in taking the final phrase as an afterthought, ‘the commandment of your apostles, or rather, I should say, of the Lord.’ At all events, the meaning is clear enough, and stresses the link between the prophets who foreshadowed Christian truth, Christ who exemplified it, and the apostles who gave an authoritative interpretation of it. God’s self-disclosure was to be seen in the written word of God through the prophetic scriptures, and the spoken message through the apostolic proclamation (see Eph. 2:20; 3:5). The source of their authority was the Spirit who inspired both (see Eph. 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:10-12; 2 Pet. 1:16-21). Peter has already in 1:16 stated that under the influence of this same Spirit of God both apostles and prophets bear testimony to the ‘power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ It is clear that heretics have questioned both these attributes. In chapter 2

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<sup>66</sup> Mark 4:39

<sup>67</sup> I Thess. 5:5-8

they are taken to task for denying the authority of the Lord who bought them, and for despising his power. In chapter 3 they will be reproved for doubting the reality of his parousia.”

By referring to “the holy prophets” Peter points to all of the Old Testament. The Lord’s command given to the apostles may be a reference to the Gospel of Mark, which was probably written when Peter wrote this letter. It may also simply be a reference to the existing oral tradition propagated by the apostles.

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “‘That ye may be mindful’ is represented by one word in the Greek (*enesthenai*); compare the exact parallel in ... Luke 1:72. Great stress is laid on the word of prophecy in both Epistles (see ... 1 Peter 1:10-12 and ... 2 Peter 1:19). And of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior; rather, as in the Revised Version, *and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles*. All the best manuscripts read *homon* here. It is a remarkable expression; but Christ’s apostles can be rightly called the apostles of those to whom they are sent, as being their teachers, sent to them for their benefit; just as the angels of God are called also the angels of Christ’s little ones (... Matthew 18:10). Compare also ‘the angels of the seven Churches’ in the Revelation. St. Peter shows an intimate knowledge of several of St. Paul’s Epistles, and of that of St. James; he is writing to the Churches addressed in his First Epistle, most of which were founded by St. Paul or his companions. We must therefore understand this passage, as well as verse 15 of this chapter, as a distinct recognition of the apostleship of St. Paul. The translation of the Authorized Version, ‘the apostles of the Lord and Savior,’ involves a violent disturbance of the order; it seems best to make both genitives depend on ‘commandment:’ ‘your apostles’ commandment of the Lord;’ the first genitive being that of announcement, the second of origin. The commandment was announced by the apostles, but it was the Lord’s commandment. (For the double genitive, comp. ... James 2:1 and ... Acts 5:32. For the whole verse, see the parallel passage in ... Jude 1:17.)”

## B. THE TAUNTS OF THOSE WHO SCOFF AT THE SECOND COMING (3:3-4)

**3** *First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.*

**4** *They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."*

V. 3 reads literally: “[That] you may be mindful of the words which were spoken by the holy prophets, and of us the apostles of the commandment of the Lord and Savior.”

There are some complicated words in the Greek text: “You must understand” is the translation of the single verb *mneestheénai*, “to be mindful,” *reemátoon proeireménon*, “words which were spoken.”

The Greek word for “scoffer” is *empaiktes* which is derived from the verb *empaizo*, “to jeer,” or “to deride.” The verb is used of the Roman soldiers who mocked Jesus before they crucified Him. We read: [They] “twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and *mocked* him. ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ they said.”<sup>68</sup>

The mocking of these scoffers concerns the delay of the Second Coming. Those people were the second generation of those who had heard the message of Jesus’ return. Their parents must have lived in the expectation of the Second Coming, but since they died without the event having taken place, the “scoffers” believed that there was no point in expecting it any longer.

If that was the attitude of those who lived one generation away from Jesus’ ascension, what does the generation of our time believe? It has been more than twenty centuries and the world keeps on spinning.

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “A skilful contrast is implied in verses 2-4 between the readers who remember the predictions of the prophets and the command to live a holy life, and the scoffers who reject the commandment by indulging their own lusts, and flout the predictions of the prophets by mocking the parousia hope.

The *scoffers* were, of course, already present, but the apostles had given prior warning of their arrival (hence the use of the future tense) *in the last days*. This is a fascinating description of the Christian era, and preserves the tension between what is already realized in Christ and what lies ahead. His coming to the world was the decisive event in human history. It was ‘when the time had fully come’ (Gal. 4:4), ‘these last days’ (Heb. 2:2). With the advent of Jesus the last chapter of human history had opened, though it was not yet completed. In between the two advents stretches the last time, the time of grace, the time, too, of opposition. For the prediction of false teachers in the last days, see Matthew 24:3-5, 11, 23-26; 2 Timothy 3:1ff.; James 5:3; Jude 18. Such false teaching and apostasy were seen as part of the necessary birth-pangs before the messianic age in all its fullness was born.”

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<sup>68</sup> Matt. 27:29

*The Pulpit Commentary* writes: “Great stress is laid on the word of prophecy in both Epistles (see ... 1 Peter 1:10-12 and ... 2 Peter 1:19). And of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior; rather, as in the Revised Version, *and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles*. All the best manuscripts read *humon* here. It is a remarkable expression; but Christ’s apostles can be rightly called the apostles of those to whom they are sent, as being their teachers, sent to them for their benefit; just as the angels of God are called also the angels of Christ’s little ones (... Matthew 18:10). Compare also ‘the angels of the seven Churches’ in the Revelation. St. Peter shows an intimate knowledge of several of St. Paul’s Epistles, and of that of St. James; he is writing to the Churches addressed in his First Epistle, most of which were founded by St. Paul or his companions. We must therefore understand this passage, as well as verse 15 of this chapter, as a distinct recognition of the apostleship of St. Paul. The translation of the Authorized Version, ‘the apostles of the Lord and Savior,’ involves a violent disturbance of the order; it seems best to make both genitives depend on ‘commandment:’ ‘your apostles’ commandment of the Lord;’ the first genitive being that of announcement, the second of origin. The commandment was announced by the apostles, but it was the Lord’s commandment. (For the double genitive, comp. ... James 2:1 and ... Acts 5:32. For the whole verse, see the parallel passage in ... Jude 1:17.)”

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “The false teachers are described by a pleonastic Hebraism, ‘scoffers ... with scoffing’ (RSV; Jude 18 omits the ‘with scoffing’). These men mock at the parousia and at the same time ‘live self-indulgent lives’ (NEB). Cynicism and self-indulgence regularly go together. The renewed emphasis on the lust of those he is opposing makes it almost certain that Peter has the same men in mind here as in chapter 2; they are not two different sets of opponents. These men do not mock merely because the second coming has delayed; they laugh at the very idea. ... Intellectual arrogance, social snobbery, contempt for the physical and the sensuality that so often accompanies such an attitude – all this would make them as opposed to the notion of judgment, inherent in the parousia, as their counterparts at Corinth were to the idea of bodily resurrection. Anthropocentric hedonism always mocks at the idea of ultimate standards and a final division between saved and lost. For men who live in the world of the relative, the claim that the relative will be ended by the absolute is nothing short of ludicrous. For men who nourish a belief in human self-determination and perfectibility, the very idea that we are accountable and dependent is a bitter pill to swallow. No wonder they mocked! For an Old Testament example of a similar situation and message see Isaiah 28:14-22.”

These false teachers had little idea of the relationship between time and eternity. Peter emphasizes later in this chapter that “with the Lord a day is like a

thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” Living within the confines of time and space these people couldn’t conceive what it would mean to live outside and above time and space as God does. To be honest, we all have that problem. There is, however, a difference of not being able to imagine eternity and mocking eternity, which is what these false teachers did.

The Greek words, rendered “this ‘coming’ he promised,” literally: “the promise of his coming,” are *epangelia teés parousías*. *Epangelia* is the Greek word from which *evangel*, “good news,” or “gospel” is derived. The “gospel” consists of the good news about Christ’s first coming into the world to save and about His second coming to finish salvation. Part of the latter will be judgment. In denying the second coming, the false teachers denied judgment. This leads to the thought that, ultimately, we are not responsible for our actions. Responsibility is an integral part of human dignity. By denying judgment, these people lowered themselves from a human level to that of an animal.

### C. PETER ARGUES FROM HISTORY (3:5-7)

***5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.***

***6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.***

***7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.***

Bible scholars agree that the Greek of verses 5 and 6 is difficult to comprehend. They read literally: “For this they willingly are ignorant of, that the heavens [were] of old, and [the] earth out of [the] water and standing in [the] water the word of God.”

To *deliberately forget* seems a good translation of the Greek words *lanthánei thélontas*. It is true that our memory can play us tricks. But that was not the case with these false teachers. They purposely blocked certain facts from their mind. Those facts pertained to ancient history.

Peter goes back to the beginning of Scripture, to the familiar passage about creation, which reads: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”<sup>69</sup> From there he moves to the record of the flood in the days of Noah. We read: “In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, on the seventeenth day of the second month — on that day all the

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<sup>69</sup> Gen. 1:1, 2

springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.”<sup>70</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* comments: “Their premise (that this is a stable, unchanging world) is false; hence their conclusion (that it will remain so, and there will be no parousia) is false also. They willfully neglected the flood, when God *did* intervene in judgment. The lesson taught by the flood was that this is a moral universe, that sin will not for ever go unpunished; and Jesus himself used the flood to point this moral (Mt. 24:37-39). But these men chose to neglect it. They were determined to lose sight of the fact that there were heavens in existence long ago, and an earth which was created by the divine fiat out of water, and sustained by water. Such seems to be the meaning; but it is a difficult verse. Peter refers, of course, to the watery chaos (Gn. 1:2-6) out of which the world was formed at God’s repeated word, ‘Let there be ...’. It was from water that the earth emerged; it was *with* (i.e. by means of) *water* (rain, etc.) that life on earth was sustained; and yet this same water engulfed it, when God’s word of judgment went forth at the flood. ...

The emphasis in this verse on God’s fiat in creation is important to Peter in arguing against the false teachers who apparently held the self-sufficiency and immutability of the natural order. On the contrary, he insists, the course of history is governed by the God who is both Creator and Judge of his world. The words are a protest against the old Epicurean view of a concourse of atoms, and its modern counterpart, the theory of a perpetual (i.e. unbroken) evolution.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The mockers say that all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation. That creation itself was a great, a stupendous change, a mighty effort of the power of God. St. Peter refers to it in words evidently derived from the Book of Genesis, not from any other sources, whether Greek, Egyptian, or Indian. There were heavens from of old (the word *ekpalai* occurs elsewhere only in ... 2 Peter 2:3). There was an earth formed or standing out of the water. The Greek participle here used is *sunestosa*, literally, ‘standing together or consisting’ (comp. ... Colossians 1:17); it may be taken closely with both prepositional clauses, ‘earth consisting of water and by means of water.’ Tales had taught that water was the beginning of things, the original element (*panta ex udatos sunestanai*); the narrative in Genesis represents water as originally overspreading all things: ‘The earth was without form [*aóratos*, Septuagint], and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.’ We may therefore understand St. Peter as meaning that the earth was formed or compacted out of water, or out of those

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<sup>70</sup> Gen. 7:11, 12



substances which the water at first held in solution; and that it is kept together in coherence and solidity by means of water. If, on the other hand, we regard the participle as closely connected with the second preposition only, the meaning will be that the earth, held together and compacted by means of water, rose up out of the water, and appeared above it, when God said, 'Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear.' It is possible, again, to understand the preposition *dia* locally, and to translate 'amidst water.' Comp. ... Psalm 136:6, 'He stretched out the earth above the waters;' and ... Psalm 24:2, 'He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.' Of course, neither St. Peter nor Moses is speaking in the language of science; their object was, not to teach scientific truth, but to present the great fact of creation in an aspect suitable to our poor capacities. For the clause, 'by the Word of God (*to tou theou logo*)', comp. ... Hebrews 11:3, 'Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God (*remati Theou*).' St. Peter may be referring to the formula, 'And God said,' so constantly repeated in the account of the creation, or (what is really the same truth) to the fact that 'all things were made by him [by God the Word], and without him was not anything made that was made.'"

In v. 7 Peter seems to be saying that the same Word that was the instrument of creation will be the instrument of destruction. If water was the basic element God used for creation, fire will be God's means of judgment. We know that our globe contains fire beneath the earth crust. The end of the world will be like one enormous volcanic eruption.

*Barnes' Notes* comments: "[But the heavens and the earth which are now] As they now exist. There is no difficulty here respecting what is meant by the word 'earth,' but it is not so easy to determine precisely how much is included in the word 'heavens.' It cannot be supposed to mean 'heaven' as the place where God dwells; nor is it necessary to suppose that Peter understood by the word all that would now be implied in it, as used by a modern astronomer. The word is doubtless employed in a popular signification, referring to the 'heavens as they appear to the eye;' and the idea is, that the conflagration would not only destroy the earth, but would change the heavens as they now appear to us. If, in fact, the earth with its atmosphere should be subjected to an universal conflagration, all that is properly implied in what is here said by Peter would occur."

It seems, however, that more than a description of the end of the world, Peter speaks here about the judgment that awaits the ungodly. John states as much in Revelation, where we read: "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of

fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."<sup>71</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: "The whole idea of cosmic conflagration belongs to apocalyptic imagery, and that is a sphere where literalism is always dangerous. Origin, for instance, was at pains to deny that literal fire is intended. Judgment by fire is one of the great Old Testament pictures of the Day of Yahweh; the same holds good of intertestamental literature and the New Testament. It means purification and the destruction of evil when God comes to judge his world. And so here, while we may not exclude the possibility that Peter is envisaging the fiery destruction of the whole universe (by no means incredible to a generation which lives after Hiroshima), all that he actually says is that the heavens and earth are kept in store for fire in anticipation of the judgment of ungodly men.

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The Old Testament, which spoke of a flood in the past, speaks often of a fiery crisis in the future. But this, too, *they deliberately forget* (v. 5). The parallel between flood and fire is emphasized by the use of the same root in each case for *destroyed* (v. 6) and *destruction* (v. 7). ...

This passage poses many hermeneutical problems for modern people. We find difficulty in the creation of the world from water, the flood, and the possible destruction of the world in a fiery conflagration. But the imagery is as relevant and powerful today as it was then. Mankind cannot presume on the stability of the world. We cannot take for granted that our environment will continue to make possible human life. The forces of nature retain their primeval destructive power: nuclear weaponry makes the literal fulfillment of Peter's apocalyptic picture of cosmic conflagration not only possible but the daily background of our lives. And Peter's assurance that these things are not governed by rationalistic presumption or chance, but by divine control is ultimate justification for retaining hope in the midst of a crazy world. God is in control. Final doom is no more inevitable for our world than it was for Nineveh, if, like the men of Nineveh, we humble ourselves and repent."

#### D. PETER ARGUES FROM SCRIPTURE (3:8)

***8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.***

It is as difficult for us, who live in the confines of time and space, as it is for a fish that lives in water, to imagine what life on dry land would be like, to imagine

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<sup>71</sup> Rev. 20:14, 15

what it would be like to live in eternity, where time is not a factor. We tend to conceive of eternity as “time without end.” But eternity may be “without time.” What we know as “past, present and future,” may be an eternal present. We don’t even have words to describe eternity. Peter comes close to a realistic definition, but he only has time-related words to depict that which is timeless. Eternity is not only “time without end,” it is also “time without beginning!”

Peter may have had Moses’ Psalm in mind when he wrote these words. Moses said: “For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.”<sup>72</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* states: “Peter now turns his attention to the faithful. Although the heretics may remain willfully ignorant, at least let his beloved readers not miss the important truth that time is not the same to God as it is to man. In providing them with ammunition to meet the scoffers’ scorn at the parousia’s delay, the writer emphasizes first the relativity of time, and secondly the loving forbearance of God. In *a day is like a thousand years* he quotes Psalm 90:4, ‘a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.’ What man regards as a long time is like a mere day in God’s reckoning of time. Peter has been accused of ‘selling the pass’ and getting out of the difficult doctrine of the parousia by maintaining the relativity of time. On the contrary he stands within a Jewish exegesis of Psalm 90:4 which is apparent, *e.g.*, in *2 Baruch* 48. 12-13, ‘with thee the hours are as the ages, and the days are as the generations.’ He is asserting God’s sovereignty over time. The delay in the parousia may seem long to us: in God’s eternal perspective it may be short. Peter is urging his readers ‘when the coming of Christ is talked about, to raise their eyes upwards, for by so doing they will not subject the time appointed by God to their own ridiculous wishes’ (Calvin). God sees time with a *perspective* we lack; even the delay of a thousand years may well seem like a day against the back-cloth of eternity. Furthermore, God sees time with an *intensity* we lack; one day with the Lord is like a thousand years. ‘On this account men ought constantly to be on the alert, for the end may come at any time’ ... Time is God’s gift, and he has bidden us to watch, pray and work.

It is interesting that, whereas the psalmist emphasizes only the insignificance of time in comparison with God’s ways, Peter also stresses the significance of time, and its value to the God who has, through the incarnation, for ever immersed himself in human history. And whereas Psalm 90 contrasts the eternity of God with the brevity of human life, 2 Peter contrasts the eternity of God with the impatience of human speculations. ...

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<sup>72</sup> Ps. 90:4

The delay of the Day of Yahweh was a problem the prophets had to face (Hab. 2:3) and one which concerned the men of Qumran as well ... both of which assert that, despite the delay, the Day will come. Peter also makes this point, after asserting that the delay only seems long because of our time perspective, and that it provides further opportunities for men to repent and be saved.”

#### E. PETER ARGUES FROM THE CHARACTER OF GOD (3:9)

***9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.***

Paul expresses the same thought as Peter. In writing to Timothy about intercession for everyone, including those in high government positions, he states: “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”<sup>73</sup> The idea that God predestined some to be saved and some to be lost is nowhere to be found in Scripture.

*The Tyndale Commentary* states: “Peter’s third refutation of the scoffers is drawn from the nature of God and has many antecedents in Jewish apocalyptic thought. It is not slowness but patience that delays the consummation of all history, and holds open the door to repentant sinners, even repentant scoffers. Not impotence but mercy is the reason for God’s delay. God has always been ‘slow to anger’ (Ex. 34:6). I Peter 3:20 speaks of the patience of God in relation to the flood; here it is in relation to the judgment. ... He is ready to show his mercy upon all (Rom. 11:32). He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked – but rather, he waits for the wicked to turn from his ways and live (Ezk. 18:23).”

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “Men are slow in fulfilling their promises from various, often selfish, motives; the Lord’s delay comes from love and long-suffering. But is long-suffering to us-ward; rather, to *you-ward*, which seems to be the best-supported reading; two ancient manuscripts give ‘for your sake.’ St. Peter has the same thought in the First Epistle (... 1 Peter 4:20); there he reminds us how the long-suffering of God waited while the ark was preparing; here he tells us that the delay of the judgment, at which unbelievers scoff, is due to the same cause.”

The Gospel of John tells us that the reason for the incarnation is God’s love for this world.<sup>74</sup> That, and the fact that the same love is the reason for the delay of

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<sup>73</sup> I Tim. 2:3, 4

<sup>74</sup> John 3:16

the Second Coming, ought to stimulate us to testify to the unsaved about the hope we have in Christ.

#### F. PETER ARGUES FROM THE PROMISE OF CHRIST (3:10)

***10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.***

In speaking about the Second Coming, Peter turns again to one of Jesus' sayings. We read in Matthew's Gospel: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."<sup>75</sup>

The Greek text of v. 10 reads literally: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief (in the night); in [the] which the heavens shall pass away [with] a great noise, and [the] elements shall melt with fervent heat, also the world and [the] works [that are] therein shall be burned up."

The negative comparison between the Lord's coming and a break-in by a thief is interesting in that it depicts ultimate justice with a picture of ultimate sinfulness. The point of contact is the unexpectedness of the event.

There is in Peter's statement no mention of a millennium. That makes it difficult to understand which event Peter is actually speaking about. Since his epistle is addressed to believers, we may assume that the topic is the rapture in which the church is taken up. But the disintegration of heaven and earth points to the end of time. Obviously, we must not interpret "the heavens" as the dwelling of God and the angels. Peter speaks about the sky that envelops our globe, the stars and planets that constitute our present galaxy.

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<sup>75</sup> Matt. 24:37-44

The Greek word rendered “elements” is *stoicheion*, meaning “something orderly in arrangement.” Paul uses the word in the verse in Galatians: “So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the *basic principles* of the world.”<sup>76</sup> The author of Hebrews uses it in the verse: “In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the *elementary truths* of God’s word all over again.”<sup>77</sup> In those two verses it is used in a spiritual sense. Peter speaks of physical elements, the atoms that are the basic elements of all visible things. Some Bible scholars believe that Peter is referring to the spirits in charge of the power of nature. But that doesn’t seem to fit too well in this text.

Another interpretation is that the works of men will all be revealed before the throne of judgment. But that too doesn’t seem to fit the context.

There is, of course, a relationship between the physical condition of the world in which we live and the morality of all human actions. When Adam and Eve sinned, God pronounced a curse upon our planet. We read that God said to Adam: “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ ‘Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”<sup>78</sup>

A world in which righteousness is the basic principle requires a new creation. Peter mentions this toward the end of this chapter.

## G. THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE SECOND COMING (3:11-14)

***11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives***

***12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.***

***13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.***

***14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.***

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<sup>76</sup> Gal. 4:3

<sup>77</sup> Heb. 5:12

<sup>78</sup> Gen. 3:17-19

The future disintegration of all physical elements is rarely an impetus for holy living. But even if the end of the world is not foremost in our minds, we all know that, for each of us, life on earth will come to an end and judgment will await us.

Since the end of the Second World War, nuclear disintegration of our planet has become a real possibility. The question has been put before us, what we would do if we knew that we would die within the hour because as a result of a nuclear attack.

Peter tells us that we ought to live a holy life because we know that judgment awaits us. Whether this is the result of a cosmic catastrophe, terminal sickness, or old age, ought not to make any difference. Judgment will await us one way or another.

*The Tyndale Commentary* states: “As always in the New Testament, the moral imperative follows the eschatological indicative. The expectation of the Lord’s return always inspires Christians to a holy life (cf. 1 Jn. 2:28). Disbelief in the Lord’s return all too often produces indifferentism in behavior, as it had with these errorists. There is an indissoluble link between conduct and conviction. ...

In the midst of a precarious existence in a precarious world, it is important to remember, as this verse reminds us, that people matter more than things. This we tend so easily to forget. We slip into the habit of thinking of the world as more enduring than its inhabitants. Peter denies this. People are more important and more enduring than things. In an unstable and perishing universe the one stable and imperishable factor is human personality. It is with this that God is primarily concerned. A man’s character is the only thing he can take out of this life with him. Therefore, whether we choose to consider dissolution in personal or cosmic terms, the quality of the lives we lead in the light of this coming dissolution is of supreme importance. Peter, wise pastor that he is, urges his readers to reflect, and apply to themselves the truths he has just enunciated. Holiness of life, worship of God and service to men are the three practical conclusions he draws from this study of the advent. These qualities are meant to be permanently present (*huparchein*) in our lives, in contrast to the unpredictability of our circumstances in a world where all things may be dissolved.”

V. 12 seems to be strangely broken up in the NIV’s rendering. The first part is obviously the continuation of v. 11. The Greek text of both verses reads literally: “[Seeing] then that all things shall be dissolved, what manner of [persons] ought you to be in [all] holy conversation and godliness, looking and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein [the] heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and [the] elements shall melt in fervent heat?”

A footnote in the NIV gives an alternate reading of part of the phrase: “Or as you wait eagerly for the day of God to come.”

The important thing in the mind of most Christians is that they go to heaven at the end of life on earth. We spend little time, if any, on the thought of what will happen to all of creation after we are gone. It is as if we say to the devil, who is the prince of this world, that he can keep this world after we leave it. That is not what Christian hope ought to be, according to Peter's statement. David sang: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters."<sup>79</sup> The prince of this world is an imposter and we must claim back for God that which is His.

How can we speed up the coming of the day of the Lord? Peter states that a lifestyle of holy living and an active anticipation of the Second Coming will make a difference in God's timing.

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "The Father hath put the times and seasons in his own power; but as the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, so now he is 'long-suffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish;' and in his gracious mercy waits for the repentance of his chosen. St. Peter seems to represent Christians as 'hastening the coming [literally, 'presence'] of the day of God' by working out their own salvation, and helping to spread the knowledge of the gospel (... Matthew 24:14), and so rendering the long-suffering patience of God no longer necessary. The words imply also the duty of praying for that coming, as we do in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, and in the Funeral Service, 'Beseeching thee, that it may please thee, of thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect, and to hasten thy kingdom.' Compare St. Peter's speech in Act 3, where he says, 'Repent ye therefore... that so (*òpos àn*) there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ' (verses 19, 20, Revised Version). This remarkable coincidence of thought furnishes an argument of considerable weight in favor of the genuineness of this Epistle. Another possible rendering of the word is 'earnestly desiring,' which is adopted in the text of the Revised Version, and is preferred by some commentators."

Peter mentions three qualities of Christian life that ought to mark us: "spotless," "blameless" and "peace with him." The Greek text uses words that mean literally: "diligent," "without spot," and "blameless." Peter uses the same Greek word, rendered here "diligent," earlier in his epistle, where we read: "Therefore, my brothers, be *all the more eager* to make your calling and election sure."<sup>80</sup> He uses the word "defect" about Christ in his First Epistle, where we read:

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<sup>79</sup> Ps. 24:1, 2

<sup>80</sup> Ch. 1:10



“Christ, a lamb without blemish or *defect*.”<sup>81</sup> The Greek word for “blameless” is only found in this verse in the New Testament.

The last part of the phrase reads literally: [That] you may be found of him in peace.” *The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “There is, moreover, one further quality which the expectation of Christ’s return should bring, a deep sense of *peace*. The parousia will be the day of vindication. It is by allowing his mind to dwell on the return of Christ that the Christian will regain a sense of balance and proportion, however difficult his present circumstances, and the peace which passes understanding will take root deeply in his heart. I remember a Bantu woman telling me in South Africa that she could face the humiliation to which her color daily made her liable without rancor or bitterness because she knew that the Lord Jesus would return one day, and then all wrongs would be righted. Such an attitude can, of course, easily lead to a quite un-Christian quietism; religion can become the opiate which dulls the people to acquiesce in injustice. But the parousia hope can both spur men to Christian action here and now, and also give a due perspective to those enigmas which, in this life, are never resolved.”

#### H. PETER QUOTES PAUL FOR SUPPORT (3:15-16)

***15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.***

***16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.***

The part in Paul’s writing to which Peter is referring seems to be: “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”<sup>82</sup> The problem is that Peter does not refer to one of Paul’s general epistles, sent to a particular church, but to a private letter to Timothy. The question begs an answer as to how Peter could have been familiar with part of Paul’s private correspondence.

But Peter’s reference may not be to that particular verse in Paul’s correspondence. Paul wrote extensively about the return of Christ in epistles sent to some of the churches to which Peter also wrote. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “If we ask to what Epistles of St. Paul is St. Peter referring, the passage which at once occurs to us is 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5. This Epistle was probably known to St.

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<sup>81</sup> I Peter 1:19

<sup>82</sup> I Tim 2:3, 4

Peter; there may be a reference to ... 1 Thessalonians 5:2 in verse 10 of this chapter; and Silvanus, whose name St. Paul associates with his own in both Epistles to the Thessalonians, was with St. Peter when he wrote his First Epistle (... 1 Peter 5:12).”

*The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, quoting another source, states: “This letter being written to those to whom the first letter was sent, the persons to whom the Apostle Paul wrote concerning the long-suffering of God were the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Accordingly, we know he wrote to the Ephesians (Eph 2:3-5), to the Colossians (Col 1:21), and to Timothy (1 Tim 2:3-4), things which imply that God's bearing with sinners is intended for their salvation. The persons to whom Peter's letters were sent were, for the most part, Paul's converts.”

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “The reference to *our dear brother Paul* is fascinating. It is taken as the conclusive proof that this letter is non-Petrine by those who look at the New Testament through Tübingen spectacles, and see everywhere signs of a radical split between Jewish Christianity headed by Peter and Gentile Christianity headed by Paul. On such a view this verse, like the whole of the Acts of the Apostles, must be taken as a mid-second-century attempt to paper over the cracks and read Catholicism back into the first century. This view, however, can scarcely stand today. The Acts is at pains to point out parallels between Peter and Paul, and represents Peter as supporting Paul's denial of the need for gentile circumcision (Acts 15:7-11). The same picture of amity between them emerges from Galatians 2:8-10. The only disagreement we know of between them seems to have been of short duration, when Paul publicly rebuked Peter for not being consistent with his own principles about table-fellowship with Gentiles (Gal. 2:14). It is a gratuitous assumption, and one that runs counter to the whole Christian emphasis on brotherly love and forgiveness, to suppose that the split was permanent, and that Peter could never have spoken, therefore, in such warm terms of Paul as he is made to do here. Indeed, I find it hard to imagine a pseudepigrapher managing to strike quite this note. In the second century one tended either to think of Paul as an arch-villain or as the apostle *par excellence*, not as a *dear brother*. That is, however, exactly how the first-century Christian leaders spoke of one another (1 Cor. 4:17; Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7, 9, Phm. 16; *etc.*), and would be a very natural phrase for Peter to use of Paul.”

Peter states that there are some parts of what Paul wrote that are difficult to understand. Peter was not the well-educated person Paul was. As a Galilean fisherman, he may have been hardly literate. The conclusion of the members of the Sanhedrin, who challenged Peter and John, was that they were “unschooled.” We read: “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were

unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”<sup>83</sup>

Paul, however, was a highly educated scholar, who had had Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrin, as his personal tutor.<sup>84</sup>

Peter may be saying here that there are things in Paul’s epistles that he cannot understand himself. But he recognized that God had given wisdom to Paul and that he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Peter qualifies people who use what Paul wrote in a twisted way as ignorant and unstable. The Greek words *amathes*, “ignorant,” and *astherictos*, “unstable,” are found only in Peter’s epistle in the New Testament. So much for Peter’s own ignorance!

*Barnes’ Notes* comments on Peter’s statement about Paul: “Many a man knows well enough what Paul means, and would receive his doctrines without hesitation if the heart was not opposed to it; and in this state of mind Paul is charged with obscurity, when the real difficulty lies only in the *heart* of him who makes the complaint. If this be the true interpretation of this passage, then it should not be adduced to prove that Paul is an obscure writer, whatever may be true on that point. There are, undoubtedly, obscure things in his writings, as there are in all other ancient compositions, but this passage should not be adduced to prove that he had not the faculty of making himself understood. An honest heart, a willingness to receive the truth, is one of the best qualifications for understanding the writings of Paul; and when this exists, no one will fail to find truth that may be comprehended, and that will be eminently adapted to sanctify and save the soul.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “This passage is of the greatest interest, as showing that some of St. Paul’s Epistles had by this time taken their place in the estimate of Christians by the side of the sacred books of the Old Testament, and were regarded as Holy Scripture. By ‘the other Scriptures’ St. Peter means the Old Testament, and also, perhaps, some of the earlier writings of the New, as the first three Gospels and the Epistle of St. James. St. Paul, in ... 1 Timothy 5:18, quotes a passage which seems to come from ... Luke 10:7 as Scripture (comp. ... 1 Peter 1:12).”

*The Tyndale Commentary* states: “It is comforting to think that Peter, too, found Paul’s letters *hard to understand*, i.e. ‘obscure,’ or ‘ambiguous.’ *Dusmētos* is a rare word, with a nuance of ambiguity about it. It was applied in antiquity to oracles, whose pronouncements were notoriously capable of more than one interpretation. There are, says Peter, such ambiguities in Paul’s letters, which

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<sup>83</sup> Acts 4:13

<sup>84</sup> See Acts 22:3, 4.

ignorant (better ‘uninstructed’) and *unstable people distort* or ‘twist’ (a delightful word *strebloō*, meaning literally to ‘tighten with a windlass’) *to their own destruction*. Peter probably is alluding to Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith which was, we know, twisted by the unscrupulous to mean that once justified a man could do what he like with impunity. Indeed, the more he sinned the better, for it afforded a greater opportunity for the grace of God to be displayed (Rom. 3:5-8; 6:1). Paul’s insistence that the Christian is free from legal rules (Rom. 8:1-2; 7:4; Gal. 3:10) was twisted to mean that he condoned license. One can almost hear his own libertarian war-cries being quoted back at him in I Corinthians 6:12, ‘Everything is permissible for me’ and in Galatians 5:13, ‘You, my brothers, were called to be free.’ Such was the cry of the false teachers (2:19).”

### I. CONCLUSION (3:17-18)

***17 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.***

***18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.***

The Greek text of v.17 reads literally: “You, therefore, beloved, [seeing] you know these things before, beware lest, being led away with the error of the wicked, you [also] fall from your own steadfastness.” The Greek word rendered “steadfastness” is *sterigmos*, which is derived from a word meaning “stability.” It is another word that is only found in the New Testament in Peter’s epistle.

The question presents itself whether Peter believed that one could lose his salvation. First of all, the word *sterigmos* does not mean “salvation,” but “stability.” And stability is not the fruit of our own character but of the indwelling Holy Spirit in the believer’s life. We are only stable in our walk with the Lord in as much as we believe that God can keep us from falling. Jude states that God “is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.”<sup>85</sup>

*The Tyndale Commentary* observes that the word *sterigmos* is derived from the same root as the verb Jesus had used in Luke 22:32, “When you have turned back, strengthen (*stérixon*) your brothers.” The observation is interesting, because it would make Peter’s advice part of a very personal experience. Jesus had said this to Peter, warning him of the fact that he would deny knowing Jesus during the process that led to the crucifixion.

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<sup>85</sup> Jude v. 24

The problem, however, is that we are talking about the connection between Greek nouns and verbs, and Jesus, as did Peter, spoke Aramaic. Whether there is the same linguistic connection in that language, I don't know.

Commenting on Jesus' words to Peter, *The Tyndale Commentary* states: "This is a command which, throughout this Epistle, Peter has been seeking to obey. It is not surprising that he who had been so mercurial and had been changed by the grace of God into a man of rock should be so concerned about stability."

*Barnes' Notes* comments: "People should read the Bible with the feeling that it is *possible* that they may fall into error, and be deceived at last. This apprehension will do much to make them diligent, and candid, and prayerful, in studying the Word of God."

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: "St. Peter insists on the knowledge of Christ as essential for growth in grace, at the beginning, as at the end, of this Epistle."

Peter's last exhortation to us is to "grow in the grace and knowledge" of Jesus. To grow in grace means to become more and more convinced that we would be lost if left to ourselves. Only if we live in close, daily fellowship with Christ as a branch in the vine, will divine life keep us standing. One of the essential elements of grace is that it is unmerited. It is not dependent upon our achievement but on God's love.

Growing in knowledge means being occupied with the Word of God. Jesus says: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."<sup>86</sup>

Paul explains what it is like to remain in Christ and in His Word. We read: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."<sup>87</sup> The growing of knowledge is not a merely intellectual exercise. As the image of the vine and the branch indicates, it is an intimate relationship. As in a marriage relationship, it means growing in love.

*The Tyndale Commentary* comments: "Peter's own steadfastness is shown by the fact that he ends his letter as he began it, on the subject of growth (*cf.* 1:5). The Christian life, it has been said, is like riding a bicycle. Unless you keep moving, you fall off! No true Christian thinks, as the false teachers seem to have done, that he has 'arrived.' Peter and Paul (Phil. 3:13f.) both urge others to press on as they themselves do. The Christian life is a developing life, for it consists in getting to know at ever greater depth an inexhaustible Lord and Savior."

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<sup>86</sup> John 15:5, 7, 8

<sup>87</sup> Col. 3:16, 17

Peter ends his epistle with a doxology, stating that the glory of Jesus Christ is eternal. *The Tyndale Commentary* states: “It is fitting that the glory of Christ should close this Epistle which has had so much to say about the ignominy of man. Peter displays that attitude of loving and reverent dependence on the ascended Lord which, throughout the Epistle, he had been seeking to inculcate in his readers as one of the great means of progress in the Christian life.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: “We notice the doxology addressed to Christ; it reminds us of the hymn which Pliny, in his famous letter to Trajan, says the Christians of Bithynia (one of the provinces mentioned in ... 1 Peter 1:1) were wont to address to Christ as to God. To him be (or is) the glory — all the glory which belongs to God, which we ascribe to him. ‘For ever’ is, literally, ‘for the day of the age or of eternity (*eis hemerab aionos*).’ This remarkable expression is found only here, and is variously interpreted. [One Bible scholar] quotes St. Augustine: ‘It is only one day, but an everlasting day, without yesterday to precede it, and without tomorrow to follow it; not brought forth by the natural sun, which shall exist no more, but by Christ, the Sun of Righteousness.’”