

# **2 PETER**

**An Explanation  
with Notes and Quotes,  
Illustrations and Applications**

*G. Michael Cocoris*



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# PREFACE

The purpose of this commentary is to provide a practical explanation of 2 Peter. The objective is a balanced exposition—explaining the passage in context and applying its truths to life with illustrations. Some commentaries are, by design, of a technical nature, delving into the meanings of words and phrases even outside their use in the book under consideration. Those commentaries tend to ignore the context of the book and its application. Other commentaries go to the other extreme and concentrate on the application, often not fully expounding the passage. Commentaries should do both. They should offer a contextual exposition of the book and apply the truths of that book to life. Adding illustrations facilitates clarity.

First and foremost, this is a contextual exposition. The context is not just the paragraph or the chapter but the whole book. In studying any book of the Bible, the first question that should be asked is: “What is the subject of this book?” Each natural literary unit, whether a paragraph or a narrative, develops a subject. A legitimate exposition will show how the author develops his subject. That, and only that, is contextual Bible study. All details in a book must be explained in light of the message and structure of the entire book. Words only have meaning in a context. A detailed explanation of words and phrases ripped from their sentence and the broader context is not exposition. The flow of the thought of the passage in the context of the book is the message the author intends to convey.

The Bible was written for living (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Even the most brilliant explanation that stops short of the applications is an abortion of what God intended. Thus, the practical ramifications of every passage must always be considered.

The procedure of study I use is to first divide the biblical book into its natural literary units (narratives or paragraphs). Then, I analyze each unit. The analysis includes an outline of the development of thought in that unit (major points and sub-points), an explanation of each sentence, and a summary statement. After I have personally analyzed each unit, I read commentaries, deliberately reading commentaries from different theological perspectives. I credit commentators’ comments by putting their names in parenthesis, even if I had seen that point in the text during my study before I read their comments. Thus, each chapter of this material expounds a natural literary unit of the book of 2 Peter.

In the process of study, I also wrote a tentative title, introduction, and conclusion as if what I was working on was a sermon. If I stumble across an illustration, I include it, but, at this point, I do not search for illustrations. I write all of this for each literary unit in the book before preaching the first sermon in the book. As a result, when I begin speaking through the book, I have the whole book in mind.

As I prepare to preach each literary unit, I may change the tentative title, introduction, and/or conclusion. I rarely change the explanation of the text. It is as I preach each unit that I search for illustrations. Again, having studied the whole book first is helpful here. I sometimes found an illustration I knew would fit better later in the book.

The introduction of each chapter briefly relates that section to life and/or the context. The captions throughout the chapters are divisions of that portion of Scripture and correspond to the main points of a sermon. The italicized headings correspond to the sub-points of a sermon. Rather than footnotes, the author’s name is in parenthesis in the text. While applications are made throughout the exposition, the passage as a whole is summarized and applied at the end.

I wish to thank Brigitte Odom for proofreading this material.

May the Lord be pleased to use this approach to the Scripture to enlighten, encourage, and edify believers, thus glorifying His Son.

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# INTRODUCTION

Second Peter has been called “the most controversial book in the New Testament” (Hiebert), “the most controversial epistle of the New Testament” (Baxter), and “Peter’s swan song” (McGee).

## Author

The epistle itself bears abundant testimony to Peter’s authorship. It claims to have been written by “Simon Peter” (1:1). It even claims to be his second letter (3:1). The author refers to the Lord’s prediction about Peter’s death (1:14; *cf.* Jn. 21:18-19). He also claimed he was an eyewitness of the transfiguration (1:16-18). If 2 Peter was written before Jude, Jude is the earliest and strongest attestation of 2 Peter.

Second Peter has been rejected as genuine more than any other New Testament book. Boa says: “There is no other book in the New Testament that poses as many problems of authenticity as 2 Peter” (Boa, p. 181). Hiebert puts it like this: “It is fair to say that 2 Peter has been the most controversial book in the New Testament” (Hiebert, p. 140). There are several reasons for that. For one thing, the early tradition for 2 Peter is weaker than any other New Testament book. For example, there are no undisputed second-century quotations from 2 Peter. Third-century writers were generally aware of 2 Peter and respected its contents, but it was still cataloged as a disputed book. The fourth century finally saw the official recognition of the book despite lingering doubts.

But there is early, very early, even first-century evidence for 2 Peter. Jude alludes to 2 Peter! This has been called the “earliest and most important piece of evidence” (Hiebert, p. 144). Zahn thinks we have an early attestation of it in the Epistle of Jude and that we really need no other (Zahn, cited by Thiessen, p. 287).

The other major objection to 2 Peter is the differences between the style and vocabulary of 1 and 2 Peter. The Greek of 2 Peter is rough and awkward compared to that of 1 Peter. There are also differences in formality and the use of the Old Testament. The differences are usually explained by Peter’s use of Silvanus as his amanuensis for 1 Peter and his hand for 2 Peter. Besides, there are definite similarities between the two epistles (see Hiebert, p. 153). As Lumby says, “It is almost inconceivable that a forger, writing to warn against false teachers, writing in the interest of truth, should have thus deliberately assumed a name and experience to which he had no claim” (Lumby, cited by Thiessen, p. 288).

Could it be that some reject this letter because it rejects them?

## Recipients

If 2 Peter 3:1 refers to 1 Peter, and most scholars say it does 2 Peter was written after 1 Peter, which was penned in AD 64. If Peter were alive in AD 67, when Paul wrote 2 Timothy, it is likely he would have mentioned him. So Peter must have been martyred before 67 AD. Second Peter 1:14 indicates the letter was written just before his death. So, 2 Peter was written about AD 64.



Second Peter 3:1 seems to suggest that Peter had in mind the same readers of Asia Minor as he did in 1 Peter, although the more general salutation of 1 Peter 1:1 would allow for a wider audience.

The occasion of this epistle was the presence of false teachers among the churches. Technically, these false teachers “were coming” in the future (2:1; 3:3). They will deny the Second Coming of Christ (3:4), live a lustful lifestyle (3:3; 2:10, 14), and lead others, even believers, astray (2:14). These teachers were professing Christian, but denied the validity of the Second Coming type of promise. By doing so, they cut the ground out from under Christian morality and holiness. They also lured believers into a sin.

A general view of the character of these false teachers may be gathered from the epistle. They denied the Lord that brought them (2:1), were daring and irreverent (2:10b, 12), and scoffed at the promise of the Lord’s return (3:3-4). They lived immoral lives (2:13), seduced unstable souls (2:14, 18), and by their influence, caused the way of truth to be evil spoken of (2:2). They made great promises of liberty to their followers but were themselves the slaves of sin (2:19). They were characterized by insubordination to established authority (2:10c, 12). It is evident these false teachers were already at work in certain places (2:11, 12, 17, 18, 20; 3:5, 16). With prophetic insight, Peter saw that the evil would become much more widely operative (2:1, 2; 3:3).

## Message

The subject of 2 Peter is the Second Coming of Christ. Peter begins by talking about precious promises (1:4). Chapter 3 describes these promises as Christ’s coming (3:4, 9, 13). He talks about the coming of the Lord in chapter 1 (1:16) and at the end of chapter 3 (2 Pet. 3:4, 10, 12). False teachers and scoffers denied these truths and led believers into a life of ungodliness. A reminder of these truths provokes us to escape the corruption in the world and live godly lives (3:11). In light of the Lord’s return, believers should avoid false teachers and live godly lives.

## Structure

Second Peter is basically in the form of an ancient letter. It has a salutation, a body, and a benediction.

I. Salutation	1:1, 2
II. Prologue: Promises make Godliness Possible and Profitable	1:3-11
III. The Body of the Letter	12-3:13
A. The Promises of Prophecies are Sure	1:12-21
B. The Perversions of False Teachers will be Judged	2:1-22
1. Judgment	2:1-9
2. Their Nature	2:10-17
3. Their Allurements	2:18-22
C. The Pronouncements of Scoffers are Wrong	3:1-13
1. Scoffers will Deny the Second Coming	3:1-7
2. The Lord is not Slack concerning His Promises	3:8-10
3. Therefore, We should live Godly Lives	3:11-13
IV. Conclusion	3:14-18

## Purpose

While the letter's purpose is nowhere stated, the last two verses summarize the two-fold purpose. It is evident from the content that Peter's purpose is to warn them lest they be led astray with the error of the wicked (3:17). Chapter 2 warns of the false teachers who walk according to the flesh and despise authority (2:10). They are self-willed (2:10), wicked (2:14), and will be judged (2:1, 3, 4). The heretics will use deceptive words (2:3) to lead believers astray (2:2, 18; 3:17). Chapter 3 warns against scoffers who deny the promise of the Lord's coming (3:3). This, too, has a bearing on godliness (3:11).

Peter also writes to remind them of what they knew and to exhort them to heed it so they would grow. Peter does not claim to be telling them anything new. He repeatedly reminds them of things they already knew (1:12, 15; 3:1, 15, 17). His purpose is to remind them and thus exhort them to godliness and growth (1:5, 3:11, 17, 18). These two purposes are connected. Resisting error will help ensure godliness and growth.

**Summary:** Peter wrote his second epistle to a broader audience to warn them against coming false teachers and scoffers and to remind them that since the Lord is returning, they should live godly lives.

In light of the return of the Lord, believers should avoid false teachers and live godly lives.

# MAY YOUR PEACE INCREASE

With pain in her voice and anguish etched on her face, she soberly sobbed, “I just want peace!” The speaker was a Christian lady who had just poured her innermost feelings out to me. She was having conflicts in several areas of her life and she wanted the war to stop; she just wanted peace.

She was a believer in Jesus Christ. Didn’t she have peace? The answer, of course, is “yes.” There is a sense in which all who know Christ have peace, at least peace with God. Yet, it is also possible for believers to struggle with life and long for peace of heart. Perhaps the peace they already have needs to increase. That is possible. The Bible speaks of peace being multiplied, which implies that it is there and needs to be expanded. Where is that passage and does it tell us how our peace can be increased? The passage is the opening verses of 2 Peter. Let’s consider them carefully.

## Author

*Simon Peter* Ancient letters began with a salutation, which consisted of identifying the author and the recipients, plus a greeting. Second Peter follows that format. The author identifies himself as “Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1). Second Peter clearly claims to have been written by the Apostle Peter. It even claims to be his second epistle (3:11). Yet 2 Peter has been rejected as genuine more than any other epistle. One of the major reasons for its rejection is that there is no undisputed second Century quotation from it. The subject of this book, the shortness of it, and its style (there are very few quotable lines) account for the lack of quotations. Nevertheless, it was quotable in the *first* century by another New Testament book—Jude. Peter wrote 2 Peter. Could it be that some reject the letter because it rejects them?

*Servant* Peter calls himself a “servant of Jesus Christ.” In 1 Peter, he introduced himself simply as an apostle. Here, however, he identifies himself as a servant (Greek: “slave”) before he says he is an apostle. A slave in the ancient world was someone who was 1) owned by his master, 2) at his master’s disposal, 3) obligated to give unquestioned obedience to his master, and 4) constantly in the service of his master (Barclay). In contrast to the arrogant false teachers who “despise authority” (2:10), Peter displays his submission to authority.

*Apostle* Simon Peter was not only a slave of Jesus Christ, he was also an apostle of Christ (1:1). The Greek word translated “apostle” describes someone sent on a mission with authority. As a slave, Peter was submissive to authority. As an apostle, he exercised authority. There is a lesson in leadership here. Before anyone can become an authoritative leader, he or she should be a servant. Before exercising authority, an individual must be submissive to it.

I know a businessman named Tom Cutler, who has operated an insurance agency for over twenty-five years. A few years ago, his adult son wanted to join his father in his business. The father hired him—as a clerk. Several years later, I was in the office talking to the secretaries whose job was to train the son. They described how the father instructed them to train him. The son’s first responsibilities in the office were to empty the trash, sweep the floors, and make coffee. By the time I was introduced to him, he had legitimately worked his way up to being one

of the top producers in the company. The wise father had trained him well, teaching him to obey authority before exercising authority.

## Addresses

*To Those who have Obtained Faith* Second Peter is addressed “to those who have obtained like precious faith with us” (1:1). The faith to which Peter refers is not *the* faith, that is, a body of doctrine, but the trust that brings salvation (Green). The faith of the readers is called a faith that is “like precious” faith as the apostles. The Greek word rendered “like precious” means “equally honored, priced, valued.” It has been interpreted to mean “equally privileged” (Mayor), “of equal standing” (Green), “of the same kind” (A-G). It was used for foreigners given equal citizenship in a city where they were aliens. (Barclay). Their faith was as valid as the apostles. In verse 4, this same root of the Greek “precious” means “valuable” (see “precious promises”). Their faith was of tremendous value. The faith of the original recipients was as valid and as valuable as that of the apostles. If the faith they had obtained was that valuable, they certainly would not want to deny it nor disregard it as others had.

*In the Sphere of Divine Righteousness* Peter adds, “By the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (1:1). Is “by the righteousness of our God” faith in the righteousness of Christ as our justification, or is it a reference to all the preceding and, therefore, a reference to the justice of God (Green, who say that it refers to the fairness of God)? The latter meaning seems more natural here (Mayor; Alford). Their faith had its proper sphere in divine righteousness. That is where they obtained it and by implication, that is where they should maintain it. By contrast, the false teachers “have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam ... who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2:15).

In the Greek text, there is one article uniting God and Savior. Peter is calling Jesus God (Green; Wiersbe). Barclay says, “The great interest of this is that it does what the New Testament very, very seldom does. It actually calls Jesus God. The only real parallel to this is the adoring cry of Thomas when he recognized his Lord for what He was: “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). This is not a matter to argue about at all; it is not even a matter of theology; for to Peter and to Thomas to call Jesus by the name of God was not a matter of theology, but an outburst of the adoration of the heart. It was simply that in the depths of the emotion of their heart and in the glory of their wonder, they felt that human terms could not contain this person whom they knew as Lord.”

They had obtained the valuable faith in the sphere of the righteousness of their God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Such faith produces peace with God. According to the Scripture, we are natural enemies, but we have been reconciled to God by the death of Christ. In Romans 5, Paul speaks of us being enemies and we have been reconciled to God through the death of Christ. “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10). Paul also declares, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

In his autobiography, Deion Sanders wrote, “I tried everything. Parties, women, buying expensive jewelry and gadgets, and nothing helped. There was no peace. I mean, I was playing great. Every time I would turn on the TV, I could see myself in three or four commercials. You see yourself, the kids see you, you’ve got all this media attention and everything the world has to offer, but no peace, no joy, just emptiness inside.” Then, Deion came to Christ. After that, he

said, “There’s always the little suggestion, the innuendo, the hint that somehow you’ve gone around the bend. You’ve lost it, gone completely nuts, and become a “born-again Christian. My career has remained about the same since I became a Christian, but I’m sure a lot of people will be watching to see what happens now. But that’s cool. I hope they do because they will see a new heart and new sense of peace in my life.”

The tragedy is that God has made peace with us, but we do not have the peace of God. On December 25, 1944, a Japanese soldier named Onada was left on the island of Lubang in the Philippines, with the command to “carry on the mission even if Japan surrenders.” Four other Japanese soldiers were left on the island as Japan evacuated Lubang. One soldier surrendered in 1950. Another was killed in a skirmish with local police in 1954. Another was killed in 1972. Onada continued his war alone. All efforts to convince him to surrender or to capture him failed. He ignored messages from loudspeakers announcing Japan’s surrender and that Japan was now an ally of the United States. Leaflets were dropped over the jungle, begging him to surrender so he could return to Japan. He refused to believe or surrender.

Over the years, he lived off the land and raided the fields and gardens of local citizens. He was responsible for killing at least 30 nationals during his 29-year personal war. Almost a half-million dollars was spent trying to locate and convince him to surrender; 13,000 men were used to try to locate him.

Finally, on March 10, 1974, almost 30 years after World War II ended, Onada surrendered his rusty sword after receiving a personal command from his former superior officer, who read the terms of the cease-fire order. Onada handed his sword to President Marcos, who pardoned him. The war was over. Onada was 22 years old when he was left on the island. He returned a prematurely aged man of 52. Onada stated, “Nothing pleasant happened in the 29 years in the jungle.” Like Onada, many people are fighting a lonely battle against God, who is offering reconciliation and peace.

## The Address

*Grace and Peace* Peter greets them with “**grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord**” (1:2). Since they had trusted Jesus Christ (1:1), they had received grace and peace. Peter desires that grace and peace might be multiplied, a Greek word that means “to be full, increase.” Grace and peace were standard New Testament greetings found in the salutation of many epistles. Peter alone among New Testament authors in desiring that grace and peace be given to believers (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phil. 1:2; Heb. 13:25; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Jn. 3; Jude 2). However, Peter and Jude are the only ones who say in the salutation that it may be multiplied (1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2; Jude 2).

*In the Knowledge of God* The sphere in which grace and peace will increase and be full is “the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Knowledge is a keyword in 2 Peter (1:3; 3:18). Not only grace and peace, but all things pertaining to life and godliness come through knowledge of God and Christ (1:3). Therefore, all believers should grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (3:18).

“Grace and peace are multiplied in and by the full knowledge of God” (Mayor, who calls the knowledge of God the “means” whereby grace and peace are increased, Mayor, p. 182). The Greek word translated “knowledge” in this verse is the usual Greek word for knowledge with a preposition added as a prefix. In an appendix, Mayor discusses the debate over the meaning of

this word for “knowledge.” Lightfoot contends that the resultant compound form means “a larger and more thought knowledge” (Lightfoot on Col. 1:9). Robinson, however, claims that the prefix expresses “direction” rather than “addition.” It directs attention to some particular point of knowledge (Robinson on Ephesians, pp. 248-254). Mayor agrees that Robinson has a point but concludes that Lightfoot is “justified in claiming for it an intensive force” (Mayor, pp. 171-174). Green says that in 2 Peter, Lightfoot’s understanding is more appropriate because it a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ that Peter is discussing. Peter makes the “experience of God’s peace and the reception of grace (or help) to be dependent upon the deep knowledge of God and of Jesus” (Green). Barclay says that Plutarch uses this word for a full knowledge of music instead of the knowledge of a mere amateur. “God’s grace and peace are ‘multiplied’ toward us as we walk with and trust His promises” (Wiersbe).

Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7). In Romans 5, Paul spoke of peace *with* God. In Philippians 4, he writes about the peace *of* God. When things are going on that cause worry, Paul says not to be anxious. Instead, be thankful, pray, and the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds.

During the recent uprisings in the Middle East, Ron Jones and his wife, who served with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Israel, communicated the following in their prayer letter: “The result of the fighting and killing has left a profound sense of discouragement that hovers over the country. Several times we have come into closer contact with this conflict than our comfort zone allowed. Yesterday, a friend shared with us something she observed that was a delightful reminder of God’s care for us. She watched a shepherd caring for his flock near the area where guns were fired. Every time the shots rang out, the sheep scattered in fright. The shepherd touched each of them with his staff and spoke calmly to them, and the sheep settled down immediately because they trusted the shepherd. And then another shot sounded, and the same routine happened again. Each time, the sheep needed the shepherd to orient them again and to reassure them they were safe. We are like those sheep, and our Shepherd reaches out and touches us with his staff, speaking words of calm and comfort.”

**Summary:** Simon Peter, a slave and yet an apostle of Jesus Christ, sent a letter to those who had obtained faith in the sphere of divine righteousness of equal value with the apostles and greeted them with the desire that their grace and peace be full in their knowledge of God and Christ.

Do you have peace *with* God? If not, trust Christ for eternal life.

Do you have the peace *of* God? If not, why not? Jill Briscoe says, “I remember talking to a girl here in this church two or three years ago. She said, ‘Jill, I’ve lost my joy. I’ve lost my peace, and I want it back.’ ‘Where did you lose it?’ I asked. ‘That has nothing to do with this,’ she replied. ‘Help me to get it back.’ ‘But where did you lose it?’ ‘I don’t want to talk about that.’ But eventually, she did talk about it. She lost it when she moved in with her boyfriend. That’ll do it” (Jill Briscoe, “Hanging Up Our Faith,” *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 148).

Cindy Holmes is a writer and pediatric nurse in Houston, Texas. She wrote an article about a mother and child she got to know at the hospital. Both were suffering from full-blown AIDS. The child, Tyler, was born infected with HIV. From the outset, he had been dependent upon all kinds of medical treatment.... Sometimes he needed supplemental oxygen, but Cindy said it didn’t slow him down. He was all boy—a little dynamo. He frequently raced through his

Houston neighborhood with a little backpack that held medications he had to take.... Sometimes, he would pull an oxygen canister in the little red Radio Flyer wagon, but that didn't slow him down. Off he would go through the neighborhood playing like children play.

Cindy Holmes got to know both mother and son when they were confined to the hospital in the last stages of their illnesses when they both were dying. When it became obvious to Tyler's mother that he was probably going to die first, she decided she'd better talk with him about what was going to come next.

She pulled him up into her bed, and they talked about life, love, and fun. Then, she brought up the topic of heaven. She said, "You know, Tyler, I was kind of hoping that you'd do your growing up here, but the doctors say your body is telling them that you might want to move on and grow up in heaven." She continued, "You know, I made a decision."

Tyler asked, "What's that, Mommy?"

She said, "I've decided that if you're going to go live in heaven, I'm going to do that too because wherever you are, that's where I want to be."

A few days later, Cindy Holmes was in Tyler's room. She said he looked up at her and said, "Miss Holmes, will you do me a favor?"

Cindy said, "Sure, Tyler. What do you need?"

He asked, "When I die, would you put a red shirt on me?"

Cindy answered, "Tyler, why do you want me to do that?"

Tyler explained, "Well, I'm going to grow up in heaven, and I've been told it is fun over there. I'm going to have friends, and I'm going to play. But my mommy will come over there, too, and she will be looking for me. And if I'm real busy and don't see her coming, I want her to see me. So it's really important I have something she can see. So would you give me a red shirt?" Tyler looked up from his bed and continued, "You know, heaven wouldn't be heaven without Mommy."

Cindy Holmes said, "I was overwhelmed by this inexpressible sense of peace was on his face even at a time of inexpressible crisis. And suddenly, I understood where it was coming from. His peace was the result of his mother's presence with him through his life, throughout his illness, and her promise that no matter where he went and no matter what happened, she would still be there" (Michael Brown, pastor of the United Methodist Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, from the sermon "Acquainted with the Night," 8/13/2000).

In 1871, the Chicago Fire gutted the section of the city where the Moodys lived. Dwight was preaching at church the Sunday evening the blaze lit up the Chicago skyline. Alone at home with their two small children, his wife Emma calmly dressed each child in two suits of clothing and led them to the window before they fled, promising them a sight they would never forget: a cityscape engulfed in flames ("Dwight Moody," *Christian History*, no. 25). We can have peace when all around us is burning up and falling down.

Actor Jimmy Stewart found comfort in Psalm 91. In 1941, Stewart enlisted in the Army Air Corps and prepared to go overseas. Stewart's father, Alex, choked up when he tried to bid him farewell, so he wrote a note for his son to read en route. After being shipped out, Jimmy read the words his father had been unable to say aloud: "My dear Jim boy. Soon after you read this letter, you will be on your way to the worst sort of danger. Jim, I'm banking on the enclosed copy of the 91<sup>st</sup> Psalm. The thing that takes the place of fear and worry is the promise of these words. I am staking my faith in these words. I feel sure that God will lead you through this mad experience. I can say no more. I only continue to pray. Goodbye, my dear. God bless you and keep you. I love you more than I can tell you. Dad."

As a veteran of the Spanish-American War, Alex knew the comforting power of Psalm 91:3-5 for those preparing for battle. “Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare.... You will not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day.” Jimmy Stewart returned home a decorated war hero, unharmed, even though his record included 20 combat missions. During the height of battle, Stewart said he learned to lean on the words of his tattered copy of Psalm 91, especially verses 1 and 2, which speak of God as a refuge and fortress. Upon returning home, he told his father: “What a promise for an airman. I placed in his hands the squadron I would be leading. And, as the psalmist promised, I felt myself borne up.”



# GOD'S GREAT PROVISION FOR YOU

On more than one occasion, I have talked to people who were struggling with doing something they should do but were having a difficult time doing it. They have told me things like, "I cannot do it." "It is not within me to do it." Have you ever said that or thought that? Did you ever hear a sermon and think, "That is not for me because I can't do that?" If so, there is something that you need to know. God has an excellent provision for you.

## The Provision

Second Peter 1:3-4 consists of one sentence, but it is a sentence that is never completed. It has no major verb! Furthermore, it contains several subordinate clauses that are difficult to sort out and interpret. It is an extremely difficult sentence. Nevertheless, Peter's point is plain.

*The Provision* Peter begins this book with a prologue in which he says, "as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (1:3). God's power has given (perfect participle) to us, that is, believers (1:1) all we need for living a godly life. In the Greek text, "all" is emphatic. Believers in Jesus Christ have been blessed with all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). They are complete in Christ (Col. 2:10). They have all they need to live life, a spiritual, godly life. "He does not give us all we might like, but all that we need for life and godliness" (Green). Wiersbe says that just as normal babies are born with all the "equipment" they need to grow, so believers have all they need to grow. He adds, "God never has to call back any of His "models" because something is lacking or faulty."

*The Means* Believers were given all things pertaining to a godly life "through the knowledge of Him who called us" (1:3). God has called through the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14; Green). God calls people to Himself through the gospel. When we trusted Christ, we "met" God (Jn. 17:3). Hence, Peter speaks of our "knowledge of Him who called us." Through this knowledge of God, who called us to Himself through the gospel, we have all we need to live a godly life.

Peter adds "by glory and virtue" (1:3). Three subordinate clauses in verses 3 and 4 begin with the same Greek preposition (see "through knowledge, by glory, by which"). This preposition often has the instrumental idea of "by" or "through," as it is translated here. It can also refer to the manner or attendant circumstance. In such cases, it would be translated by the English word "with," which seems to be preferable in this phrase. In other words, the phrase "by glory and virtue" describes the One who called us and should be translated "with glory and virtue" (2 Cor 4:4, 6). At the same time, it is also true that glory and virtue are the goals of the believer (see "virtue" in 1:5).

Glory has been defined as "the manifestation of the Divine character, which compels the veneration, the love, and the worship of men" (Mayor). Virtue has been described as "the inner perfection or excellence" (Mayor), "goodness" (Green). Mayor says the meaning is Christ has called us through His glory, that is, through the revelation of His perfection. What belongs to God in the Old Testament (Isa. 42:8, 12) is here attributed to Jesus (Green).

The great provision believers have to live godly is a relationship with God Himself. Someone has said, "You Are Blessed,"

If you woke up with more health than illness this morning, you are more blessed than the million who won't survive the week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 20 million people around the world.

If you attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than almost three billion people in the world.

If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head, and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of this world.

If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish somewhere, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealth.

If your parents are still married and alive, you are very rare, especially in the United States.

If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful, you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not.

If you can hold someone's hand, hug them, or even touch them on the shoulder, you are blessed because you can offer God's healing touch.

If you can read this message, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world that cannot read anything at all.

You are so blessed in ways you may never even know."

All of that is true, but that is not to be compared with what we have in Christ. God has abundantly blessed believers in Christ. In his *Systematic Theology*, Lewis Sherry Chafer lists 33 blessings of being in Christ.

1. In the Eternal Plan of God
2. Redeemed
3. Reconciled
4. Related to God through Propitiation
5. Forgiven All Trespasses
6. Vitally Conjoined to Christ for the Judgment of the Old Man to a New Walk
7. Free from the Law
8. Children of God
9. Adopted
10. Acceptable to God by Jesus Christ
11. Justified
12. Made Nigh
13. Delivered from the Power of Darkness
14. Translated into the Kingdom of the Son of His Love
15. On the Rock, Christ Jesus
16. A gift from God the Father to Christ
17. Circumcised in Christ
18. Partakers of the Holy and Royal Priesthood
19. A Chosen Generation, a Holy Nation, a Peculiar People,
20. Heavenly Citizens
21. Of the Family and Household of God

22. In the Fellowship of the Saints
23. A Heavenly Association (Partners with Christ in life, position, service, etc.)
24. Having Access to God
25. Within the Much More Care of God (Objects of His Love, Grace, etc.)
26. His Inheritance
27. The Inheritance of the Saints
28. Light in the Lord
29. Vitally united to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
30. Blessed with the Earnest or First-Fruits of the Spirit
31. Glorified
32. Complete in Him
33. Possessing Every Spiritual Blessing

## The Promises

*The Word* Again Peter adds another subordinate clause, “by which have been given to us exceeding great and precious promises” (1:4). Again, the preposition “by” should be translated “with.” This clause further elaborates on the “all things” mentioned in 2 Peter 1:3. In other words, all things God has given to us include great promises. Wiersbe says, “These promises are *great* because they come from a great God, and they lead to a great life. They are precious because their value is beyond calculation.”

God’s promises are in God’s Word. Paul declares, “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Everything we need to know about godly, righteous living is recorded in the Word of God. Wiersbe points out, “God has not only given us all that we need for life and godliness, but He has ‘also given us His Word to enable us to develop this life and godliness.’”

Standing on the promises that cannot fall,  
 When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,  
 By the living word of God, I shall prevail,  
 Standing on the promises of God.

R. Carter

*The Promises* To what promise does Peter refer? Some come to this passage and conclude Peter has a promise in mind, such as 1) prayer (Jn. 16:24), 2) peace (Jn. 16:33), and 3) power (Acts 1:8). Here are some of God’s pledges to His own. He promises:

1. Help in time of need. “Let us, therefore, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).
2. Peace in trouble. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

3. Power in service. “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

While those things may be included, they are not explicitly mentioned in 2 Peter. In this epistle, Peter refers to “the promise of His coming” (3:4) and the promise of a new heaven and new earth. (3:13). In light of the backdrop of this epistle, Peter probably has the promise of Christ’s return in mind. There were (or would be) false teachers among the churches who were denying the Second Coming of Christ (3:4), living a lustful lifestyle (3:3; 2:10, 14), and leading others, even believers, astray (2:14). These teachers were professing Christian, but heretics, who denied the validity of the Second Coming type of promise. By doing so, they cut the ground out from under Christian morality and holiness. They lured believers into a libertine-type lifestyle.

Peter’s point is that God has made promises and God keeps His promises. Thousands of letters are sent each year to God. They end up in a sorting office in Jerusalem. According to the Associated Press, the letters arrive from all over the world. “We have hundreds of thousands of letters sent either to God or Jesus Christ and for some reason, they come to Jerusalem,” said post office spokesman Yitzhak Rabihiya. In one letter, an Israeli man asked God for 5,000 shekels (\$1,000) to ease his poverty. Postal workers were so moved that they sent him 4,300 shekels. “After a month, the same person wrote again to God,” Mr. Rabihiya explained, “but this time he wrote, ‘Thank you, God, for the contribution, but next time, please don’t send it through those postmen. They’re thieves; they stole 700 shekels’” (*The London Times*, 10/4/03).

## The Purpose

*To Partake* The purpose of God giving us these promises is “that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (1:4). Through God’s promises, we partake of God’s nature and doing that allows us to escape the decay and destruction the world gets entrapped in because of its desires.

*To Escape* The Greek word rendered “lust” means “desires.” This refers to the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). Those kinds of lust bring corruption, a Greek word that means “decay, corruption, destruction.” God motivates us and empowers us to live a holy life by setting such wonderful and attractive promises that we, through these promises, can lift ourselves above the corrupt environment round about us and live a holy life.

On a psychological level, we say this: It’s essential for a man to have hope; if a man loses his hope, he loses motivation; and in losing motivation, he loses the ability and power to live on a higher plane; and the only means we have to lift us above the environment about is to have a hope of something better than we see about us. In essence, that’s what Peter is saying. He says, “God’s power that comes to you through the knowledge of Christ has made full provision for a godly life. This provision is wrapped up in very great promises that God has set before you, enabling you to escape the corruption in the world through lust.”

At one point in his life, John Wesley was going through a period of spiritual crisis. In 1730, about 5 o’clock in the morning on May 24, he opened his Bible to these verses, read about the exceeding great and precious promises given to us, and that seemed to carry him through this crisis. On June 4, he makes this notation in his diary: “Through all of these days I scarce remember to have opened the New Testament but upon some great and precious promise and I saw more than ever that the gospel is in truth “one great promise from the beginning of it to the

end.” Now, it seems to me that he has caught the atmosphere of the verse. He began to lay hold of the promises of God in such a way that they enabled him to rise above whatever particular spiritual problem he was facing. And then he began to see the gospel in a new light as embracing promises, which would motivate us, empower us, and lift us to a higher level of life.

Now, as we shall see (esp. ch. 3), Peter has two great promises in mind: the promise of the Second Coming and the promise of the new heavens and a new earth. Peter seeks to motivate Christians eschatologically and to set the future and the glory of the future before them. Thus, through the channel of these promises, the power of God is unleashed in believers’ lives. You show me a person living with a vivid expectation of the future as it is presented in the Word of God and I will show you a person who is able, by the power of God, to rise above the level of the world. The great problem in getting Christians is to divorce themselves from the old life and to dedicate themselves to the new life. And if a person is bound in a sin, he needs very strong motivation to get himself loose. Power in Christian living must come through motivational techniques. The motivational technique here is “exceeding great and precious promises.”

**Summary:** By calling us to a relationship to Himself and giving us great promises in His Word, God has given believers all they need to live godly lives.

We need to add faith and obedience to these promises. William Penn, the founder of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, was well-liked by the Indians. Once, they told him he could have as much of their land as he could encompass on foot in a single day. So, early the next morning, he started out and walked until late that night. When he finally went to claim his land, the Indians were greatly surprised, for they didn’t think he would take them seriously, but they kept their promise and gave him a large area that today is part of the city of Philadelphia. William Penn simply believed what they said. Should we do less with God (*Our Daily Bread*, 6/13/1973)?

# GETTING STARTED IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Do you want to grow spiritually? God wants you to grow and has provided everything you need to live a godly life. The question, “Do you want to grow?” Let me assume that the answer to that is “Yes.” Then, the question is, “What must you do to grow?” What does the process of growth look like and what is your part in it? The answers to all those questions are in 2 Peter chapter 1.

## Begin With Faith

*Begin with Faith* In light of what Peter said, he now urges, “But also for this very reason giving all diligence add to your faith virtue” (1:5). Peter assumes the readers of this passage have faith (1:1). The Christian life begins with faith. Faith is the foundation for the seven following virtues (Mayor; Green). Faith in the New Testament is not just believing facts; it is trust. You can believe that the elevator will take you to the 100<sup>th</sup> floor, but to get to the 100<sup>th</sup> floor, you must trust the elevator. Likewise, to get to heaven, you must trust Jesus Christ.

## Realize What God Has Done

*First Peter* If the expression “for this very reason” relates to all of verses 3 and 4 (Mayor; Green; Hiebert; Hodges), it refers to the believer’s position, namely, that God’s power has bestowed upon them all things that pertain to life and godliness. If it relates to just the later part of verse 4, it refers to the believer’s potential.

Because God has given believers great promises so they can be partakers of the divine nature and escape the world’s corruption, believers should diligently develop godly character traits. Hodges says believers are responsible for drawing on God’s provisions in order “to build a godly character in an ungodly world. To put it another way, because of what God has done (vv 3-4), there is now something we should do (vv 5-7).”

*Other Passages* Other passages in the New Testament teach that believers have all they need to grow spiritually (Rom. 6:1-14; Eph. 1:3; Col. 2:10).

During Super Bowl XXXVII, FedEx ran a commercial that spoofed the movie *Castaway*, in which Tom Hanks played a FedEx worker whose company plane went down, stranding him on a desert island for years. Looking like the bedraggled Hanks in the movie, the FedEx employee in the commercial goes up to the door of a suburban home, package in hand. When the lady comes to the door, he explains that he survived five years on a deserted island, and during that whole time, he kept this package to deliver it to her. She gives a simple “Thank you,” but he is curious about what is in the package that he has been protecting for years. He says, “If I may ask, what was in that package after all?” She opens it and shows him the contents, saying, “Oh, nothing, really. Just a satellite telephone, a global positioning device, a compass, a water purifier, and some seeds.” Like the contents in this package, the resources for growth and strength are available for every Christian who will take advantage of them.

## Then Be Diligent

Spiritual growth begins with faith (1:5). The goal is love (1:7). There are steps to get from faith to love (1:5-7), but you need to know something.

*Be Diligent* The Greek word translated “diligences” means 1) haste, speed, 2) earnestness, zeal. It denotes haste in performance or eagerness and earnestness in action. It is the opposite of sloth and sluggishness. Moffatt describes a cynic’s Christian experience as “an initial spasm followed by a chronic inertia” (Moffatt, cited by Green). Webster defines “inertia” as “resistance to motion, action, or change.” The percentage of Americans who think incivility is a serious problem: 89. Think mean-spirited political campaigns are to blame: 73. Think rock music is to blame: 67. Think talk radio is to blame: 52. Think their behavior is uncivil: 1.

*Add* The believer is to “add” these godly traits. The Greek word translated “add” means “supply, provide.” Originally, this Greek word was used for the person who led a choir. Then, it came to be used for the one who defrayed the cost of the choir. After that, it was generally used of anyone who supplied the cost for any purpose (Mayor). It came to mean “generous and costly co-operation” (Green). As a rich patron lavishly supplied every need for the training and staging of the chorus for public celebration, so, the believer is to provide a generous activity in adding virtues.

Barclay explains that the Greek verb translated “add” comes from the Greek noun for “chorus.” It was used of the leader of the chorus. He says, “Perhaps the greatest gift that Greece, and especially Athens, gave to men, was the great plays and dramas of men like Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, works of literature and art which are still among the most cherished possessions of the world. All these plays needed large choruses, for the choruses were integral parts of them. It was, therefore, very expensive to produce such plays. In the great days of Athens, there were public-spirited citizens who voluntarily and willingly took on the duty, at their own expense, of collecting, maintaining, training, and equipping such choruses. It was at the great religious festivals that these plays were produced. For instance, at the city Dionysia, there were produced three tragedies, five comedies, and five dithyrambs. Men had to be found to find and equip and train the choruses for them all. It could cost such a man as much as 3,000 drachmae; and it was the pride of such men to train and to equip their choruses as nobly and as splendidly as they could. The men who undertook these duties, voluntarily, out of their own pocket, and out of love for their city were called” the leader of the chorus.”

Barclay adds, “The word, therefore, has a certain lavishness in it. It never means to equip in any cheese-paring and miserly way; it means lavishly and willingly to pour out everything that is necessary for a noble performance. Later this Greek word grew to the point that it came to mean to be responsible for any kind of equipment, even equipping an army with all necessary provisions and supplies. Behind this word is the idea of a willing and lavish generosity in the equipment. So Peter urges his people to equip their lives with every virtue; and that equipment must not be the provision of a kind of necessary minimum, but a lavish and generous equipment. The very word is an incitement to be content with nothing less than the loveliest and the most splendid life.”

*With God’s Help* The Greek word rendered “giving” means “to bring in alongside of.” Alongside of God’s supply of all things pertaining to godliness, especially the giving of great and valuable promises, believers are to put forth a wholehearted effort with “every ounce of determination” they can muster. The grace of God enables the effort (Green). So, along with what God has done, the believer is to develop these virtues vigorously.

Pastor John Ortberg writes in the *Leadership* journal: “Significant human transformation always involves training, not just trying. Spiritual transformation is a long-term endeavor. It involves both God and us. I liken it to crossing an ocean. Some people try, day after day, to be good, to become spiritually mature. That’s like taking a rowboat across the ocean. It’s exhausting and usually unsuccessful. Others have given up trying and throw themselves entirely on ‘relying on God’s grace.’ They’re like drifters on a raft. They do nothing but hang on and hope God gets them there. Neither trying nor drifting are effective in bringing about spiritual transformation. A better image is the sailboat, which, if it moves at all, it’s a gift of the wind. We can’t control the wind, but a good sailor discerns where the wind is blowing and adjusts the sails accordingly. Working with the Holy Spirit, which Jesus likened to the wind in John 3, means we have a part in discerning the winds, in knowing the direction we need to go, and in training our sails to catch the breezes that God provides. That’s true transformation.”

Our part may be small in the overall scheme of things, but we will not get there without it. M. Craig Barnes, National Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C. pastor, says, “I was asked to conduct the funeral for a man who had helped develop the Boeing 747. After the service, I spoke with the widow and commented on how remarkable it was that her late husband had helped build that marvelous machine. She said, ‘The truth is, he worked on one little switch box smaller than a loaf of bread. That’s all he worked on for 15 years. But when that 747 lifted off the ground for the first time, it was the happiest day of his life.’”

Imagine, that huge plane couldn’t have lifted off without that man’s contribution. Likewise, our part may be small, but it is essential.

**Summary:** To get started in a life of spiritual growth, begin with faith, understand what God has done, and diligently add godly virtues, as you are dependent on the Lord for the power to do it.

To get to heaven, trust Christ, like trusting an elevator to get you to the 100<sup>th</sup> floor. If you are on the elevator, the question now is, what kind of passenger will you be? To be a loving person, you must work at it. Paul said, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). Then, he added, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing” (Phil 2:14). Notice, God works, but so do you. “Spiritual growth is not automatic. It requires cooperation with God and the application of diligence and discipline” (Wiersbe). Human effort alone is inadequate, but effort is also indispensable (Green).

Wiersbe writes, “It is impossible for fallen human nature to manufacture these seven qualities of Christian character. They must be produced by the Spirit of God. To be sure, there are unsaved people who possess amazing self-control and endurance, but these virtues point to *them* and not to the Lord. *They* get the glory. When God produces the beautiful nature of His Son in a Christian, it is God who receives the praise and glory.

“Because we have the divine nature, we can grow spiritually and develop this kind of Christian character. It is through the power of God and the precious promises of God that this growth takes place. The divine ‘genetic structure’ is already there: God wants us to be ‘conformed to the image of His Son’ (Rom. 8:29). The life within will reproduce that image if we diligently cooperate with God and use the means He has lavishly given us. And the amazing thing is this: as the image of Christ is reproduced in us, the process does not destroy our own personalities. We still remain uniquely ourselves!



“One of the dangers in the church today is imitation. People have a tendency to become like their pastor, or like a church leader, or perhaps like some ‘famous Christian.’ As they do this, they destroy their own uniqueness while failing to become like Jesus Christ. They lose both ways! Just as each child in a family resembles his parents and yet is different, so each child in God’s family comes more and more to resemble Jesus Christ and yet is different. Parents don’t duplicate themselves. They reproduce themselves, and wise parents let their children be themselves.”

R. G. Lee tells of Audobon, the great naturalist who exercised great self-mastery and self-discipline to learn about the world of birds. He counted his physical comforts as nothing compared to success in his work. He would rise at midnight night after night and go out into the swamps to study the habits of certain night hawks. He would crouch motionless for hours in the dark and fog, feeling well rewarded if, after weeks of waiting, he secured one additional fact about a single bird. One summer, he went day after day to the bayous area near New Orleans to observe a shey waterfowl. He would have to stand almost to his neck in the nearly stagnant waters, scarcely breathing, while countless poisonous moccasin snakes swam past his face, and great alligators passed and re-passed his silent watch. It was not pleasant, but his face glowed with enthusiasm. “But what of that? I have the picture of the birds”. Audobon endured all of that for the picture of a bird.

## STEPS IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH (PART I)

When I was young, I was a Boy Scout. As a Boy Scout, I had to take the Scout oath, which said, “On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law, to help other people at all times to keep myself physically strong mentally awake, and morally straight.”

As a Boy Scout, I also had to learn and live by the Scout Law. There were 12 of them.

1. A SCOUT IS TRUSTWORTHY A Scouts’ honor is to be trusted. If he were to violate his honor that telling a lie or by cheating, or by not doing exactly a given task when trusted on his honor, he may be directed to hand over his Scout badge.
2. A SCOUT IS LOYAL He is loyal to all to whom loyalty is due: his Scout leader, his home and parents, and country.
3. A SCOUT IS HELPFUL He must prepare at all times to save a life, help injured persons, and share the home duties. He must do at least one good turn to somebody every day.
4. A SCOUT IS FRIENDLY He is a friend to all and a brother to every other Scout.
5. A SCOUT IS COURTEOUS He is polite to all, especially to women, children, old people, and the weak and helpless. He must not take pay for being helpful or courteous.
6. A SCOUT IS KIND He is a friend to animals. He will not kill nor hurt any living creature needlessly, but will strive to save and protect all harmless life.
7. A SCOUT IS OBEDIENT He obeys his parents, scoutmaster, patrol leader, and all other duly constituted authorities.
8. A SCOUT IS CHEERFUL He smiles whenever he can. His obedience to orders is prompt and cheery. He never shrinks nor grudges at hardships.
9. A SCOUT IS THRIFTY He does not wantonly destroy property. He works faithfully, wastes nothing, and makes the best use of his opportunities. He saves his money so that he may pay his own way, be generous to those in need, and helpful to worthy objects. He may work for pay but must not receive tips for courtesies or good turns.
10. A SCOUT IS BRAVE He has the courage to face danger in spite of fear and to stand for the right against the coaxing of friends, or the jeers or threats of enemies, and defeat does not down him.
11. A SCOUT IS CLEAN He keeps clean in body and thoughts, stands for clean speech, clean sports, clean habits, and travels with a clean crowd.
12. A SCOUT IS REVERENT He is reverent toward God. He is faithful in his religious duties and respects the convictions of others in matters of custom and religion.

Then I became a Christian and discovered lists of virtues in the New Testament (Gal. 5:22-23; 2 Cor. 6:4-10; 1 Tim. 6:11; Rev. 2:19). What are these virtues and where does one begin to add them to his or her life?

## Virtue

On the foundation of faith is to be built seven Christian character traits. In the Greek text, each new trait is introduced with the same preposition, a Greek word that means “in” or “in connection with.” Each trait is “rooted” in the preceding (Mayor).

*The Definition* Peter says, “Add to your faith virtue” (1:5). The Greek word translated “virtue” means “moral goodness” and “excellence.” In the sense of “excellence,” the original idea is “blended with the impression which it makes on others.” Hence, it is translated “praise” (Abbott-Smith). It only appears four times in the New Testament (Phil. 4:8; 1 Pet. 2:9; 2 Pet. 1:3, 5).

Mayor renders it “moral energy” and Green prefers “excellence,” saying that it was used of the proper fulfillment of anything, such as the “excellence of a knife is to cut, of a horse to run.” He goes on to say that in people, this excellence is “Christlikeness.” Barclay says that this word, although very rare in the New Testament, it is the supreme Greek word for virtue in every sense of the term. He says that it means “excellence.” For example, it was used of land, which is “fertile, and productive, and rich to bear crops.” That virtue makes a person “a good and an effective citizen and friend.” Barclay also thinks this Greek word means “courage, not an excuse for cowardice.”

Hodges says that it is a general word for moral excellence. He adds, “In the ethical teaching of the Hellenistic world of Peter’s day, the word often seems to have indicated mastery over one’s baser passions and lusts. Thus the translation ‘virtue’ is more or less on target. Even our word “morality” is not too wide of the mark. Every Christian starts out his Christian experience with “faith.” After all, we are saved by grace through faith. But one of our first responsibilities is to begin to build on that faith, a life that is ‘virtuous’—that is, a life that can be characterized as highly moral and ethical.”

*A Description* Based on the definition of the Greek word “virtue,” several statements describe this kind of person. A virtuous, moral, ethical person says, “I want to do what is right.” This kind of person says, “I want to do what is right *because* it is right.” We do things for personal profit or because we want to please people. When anything other than doing what is right, because it is right, is the motive, we are in danger of not doing what is right.

Bernard Goldberg recounts a pivotal moment in television news in his book, *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distorts the News*. In the early 1970s, CBS president Dick Salant told staffers, “I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is that CBS News made money last quarter for the first time in history. The bad news is that CBS News made money last quarter for the first time in history.” Goldberg writes, “Salant knew, everyone knew. If news could make money, the suits running the networks would expect just that. Sure, they would want quality in theory. But they wanted ratings and money in fact.” In the words of Don Hewitt, creator of *60 Minutes*, “Before they would say, ‘Make us proud.’ Now they tell us, ‘Make us money.’”

In his book *Lessons from a Father to His Sons*, John Ashcroft writes: “Until 1997 Michael Jordan, indisputably the leading player in the NBA for over a decade, was never the highest paid player. When asked why he did not do what so many other players do—hold out on their contracts until they get more money—Michael replied, ‘I have always honored my word. I went for security. I had six-year contracts, and I always honored them. People said I was underpaid, but when I signed on the dotted line, I gave my word.’ Three years later, after several highly visible players reneged on their contracts, a reporter asked Michael once again about being

underpaid, and he explained that if his kids saw their dad breaking a promise, how could he continue training them to keep their word? By not asking for a contract renegotiation, Michael Jordan spoke volumes to his children. He told them, ‘You stand by your word, even when that might go against you.’ His silence became a roar.”

A virtuous, moral, ethical person says, “I realized that I am responsible.” The dictionary definition of the English word “virtue” means “moral excellence, righteousness, responsibility, goodness.” Instead of being responsible, we shift the blame to others. I have seen this over and over in marriages. A couple having difficulty comes to see me. I ask, “What is the problem?” He says, “It is her.” She says, “It is him.” Some will do anything to shift the responsibility to someone or something else so they will not have to be responsible.

A police officer pulled a man over for speeding and had the following exchange:

Officer: “May I see your driver’s license?”

Driver: “I don’t have one. I had it suspended when I got my fifth DUI.”

Officer: “May I see the owner’s card for this vehicle?”

Driver: “It’s not my car. I stole it.”

Officer: “The car is stolen?”

Driver: “That’s right. But, come to think of it, I believe I saw the owner’s card in the glove box when I was putting my gun in there.”

Officer: “There’s a gun in the glove box?”

Driver: “Yes, sir. That’s where I put it after I shot and killed the woman who owns this car and stuffed her in the trunk.”

Officer: “There’s a BODY in the TRUNK?!?!?”

Driver: “Yes, sir.”

Hearing this, the officer immediately called his captain. Police quickly surrounded the car, and the captain approached the driver.

Captain: “Sir, can I see your license?”

Driver: “Sure. Here it is.”

It was valid.

Captain: “Who’s car is this?”

Driver: “It’s mine, officer. Here’s the registration.”

Captain: “Could you slowly open your glove box so I can see if there’s a gun in it?”

Driver: “Yes, sir, but there’s no gun in it.”

Sure enough, there was nothing in the glove box.

Captain: “Would you mind opening your trunk? I was told there’s a body in it.”

Driver: “No problem.”

The trunk was opened; no body.

Captain: “I don’t understand it. The officer who stopped you said you told him you didn’t have a license, stole the car, had a gun in the glove box, and that there was a dead body in the trunk.”

Driver: “Yeah, I’ll bet he told you I was speeding, too.”

A virtuous, moral, ethical person is one in whom there is no deception. As Nathaniel approached Jesus, “Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile’ (Jn. 1:47). Jacob, the first Israelite, was a conniving, scheming fellow full of guile. He wrestled with God and God changed his name to Israel. In other words, God took the guile and deception out of him and made him a genuine man. Now

Jesus looks at Nathaniel and says, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile,” that is, he is genuine and sincere.

Sammy Sosa was kicked out of a baseball game because he had used a corked bat. He hit a ball, the bat broke, and there was embarrassing evidence. The bat he was using was illegal. After the game, Sosa apologized to the fans and said he simply picked up the wrong bat. The league announced it had examined all 70 of his other bats and all were “legit.” Some hitters drill out the core of a hardwood bat and fill it with cork. Result: the bat retains its hitting power but becomes lighter and easier to swing. Sosa says he only uses a corked bat in home run contests and batting practice. The fans love to see him hit the long ball, he said. Some experts believe there is no evidence that corked bats offer much of an advantage. Maybe it’s a mental thing. At any rate, some believers are “corked.” The problem is that we all think we are virtuous. The question is, how much virtue do you have?

In *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, Charles Swindoll tells about a man who bought fried chicken dinners for himself and his date late one afternoon. However, the attendant at the fast-food outlet inadvertently gave him the proceeds from the day’s business—a bucket of money (much of it cash) instead of fried chicken. Swindoll writes: “After driving to their picnic site, the two of them sat down to enjoy some chicken. They discovered a whole lot more than chicken—over \$800! But he was unusual. He quickly put the money back in the bag. They got back into the car and drove all the way back. By then, the manager was frantic. “Mr. Clean got out, walked in, and became an instant hero. ‘I want you to know I came by to get a couple of chicken dinners and wound up with all this money here.’

“Well, the manager was thrilled to death. He said, ‘Let me call the newspaper. I’m gonna have your picture put in the local paper. You’re one of the most honest men I’ve ever heard of.’

“To which the man quickly responded, ‘Oh, no. No, no, don’t do that!’ Then he leaned closer and whispered, ‘You see, the woman I’m with—she’s, uh, somebody else’s wife.’” One can be honest and still not have integrity.

Dave Breese says that virtue comes close to what the world calls character. He defines it as the regular practice of goodness. He says, “It is not an isolated breakthrough into goodness, but a perennial state” He illustrates the difference. “Suppose you were to attend a big-league ballpark and find, to your astonishment, that I was playing on one of the teams. Let us say that I came to bat and promptly hit the ball into the left-field stands. You might say, ‘My, that Dave Breese can certainly play baseball!’ But you would be wrong. You would be wrong in that what you had seen was an isolated breakthrough, not a perennial state. If you knew my batting average, you would correctly assume I was an interloper, wearing someone else’s uniform on the baseball field. You might assume you had observed a publicity stunt rather than the real thing. And you would be correct.

“By contrast, let us say that I went to the ballpark back long ago and saw Babe Ruth play without knowing who he was. Let us say that I saw the Babe strikeout. I might assume that he was a poor athlete and wonder why he was on the team. ‘He’s no good,’ I might say. But I would be wrong. What I saw would have been a temporary defection from a high level of baseball ability.

“That’s the way it is with virtue. Virtue is a high state of moral ability perfected over the years by walking with God. Virtue is a condition whereby, any day, any night, any weekend, we can be sure that the virtuous person is living a righteous life, no matter what pressures may be placed upon him.

“How necessary are such lives today? How important is it for millions of Christians to add virtue to their faith? We may mouth great and resounding words about Christianity and the Bible. We may claim gifts and point to vast experience. All of our claims are like sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal if we have not added virtue to our faith” (Breese, pp. 46-47).

## Knowledge

*The Definition* Peter continues, “To Virtue Knowledge” (1:5). Barclay contrasts the Greek word for “wisdom” and this Greek word for “knowledge” and concludes that the word for “Knowledge” is “practical knowledge.” He adds, “It is the knowledge of what to do in any given situation; it is the knowledge to apply to particular situations the ultimate knowledge which (wisdom) gives. He goes on to say that this knowledge *gnosis* is that “which enables a man to decide rightly and to act honorably and efficiently in the day-to-day circumstances and situations of life.” Peter does not say precisely what knowledge is to be added to virtue. Mayor says that it is not to be limited to doctrine. In this book, perhaps it is true knowledge in contrast to the spurious knowledge of the false teachers. Knowledge was no doubt one of their favorite words. True knowledge is knowledge of God’s Word and God Himself.

*The Description* Believers need knowledge of doctrine. Paul speaks of believers being “no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Eph. 4:14). Without a sound, a solid understanding of doctrine, you are leaving yourself open being “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.”

You are thinking, “That would never happen to me.” Let me tell you a story. Paul went to Galatia, led people to Christ, formed churches, and left town. The people were so grateful that Paul said of them, “What then was the blessing you *enjoyed*? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me” (Gal. 4:15). Nevertheless, soon after Paul left, the Judaizers came behind Paul, claiming that grace was fine, but ultimate justification required observance of circumcision. When Paul heard that, he wrote, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:6-9).

“The lack of scriptural knowledge is the source of all evils in the church” (John Chrysostom).

Believers need knowledge of practical Christian living that only comes from the Word of God. Paul says, “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). Through stories and statements, examples, and exhortations, the Bible tells us what we need to remove from our lives and what we need to put into our lives.

Hodges explains, “Morality must be constantly informed and guided by knowledge.” It is “not simply a rigid adherence to a set of rules. If virtue becomes nothing more than conformity to commands (though it is that in a real sense), it is in danger of degenerating into legalism.” He goes on to say, “The believer is not to remain a babe in Christ who does things simply because he is told to do them, though that is the proper place to start our obedience to God. But God

wants us to grow in spiritual understanding so that we not only do what is right but also understand why it is right! In other words, in Christian living, God wants us to do and discern. For that, we need the ever-deepening “knowledge” of God’s Word.”

Believers need knowledge of how to be like Christ. The word “virtue” Earlier is used of Christ earlier in this passage (1:3). Part of what is involved in becoming like Christ is contemplating what Christ is like in the Word. Paul says, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

**Summary:** To grow, you must add to your faith, first and foremost, virtue and, then, knowledge. You must have the attitude that says, “I am going to be responsible for doing what is right according to the Word of God. I am going to be Christ-like.”

Notice that this list delineates the steps of growth more than any other passage in the New Testament, the first step is virtue, not knowledge. Most “follow-up” programs assume that knowledge is what people need to grow. There is no question but that knowledge is essential; it is the next item on the list but not the next thing after faith. If you had asked me, “What is the most basic thing a person needs to grow, I think (before I seriously considered this passage) I would have said, “desire.” Obviously, desire is necessary, but perhaps, more basic is virtue, not desire. I have known believers who, in my opinion, had, at least, some desire to grow but didn’t. As I think about those individuals, it seems there was desire, but there was also deception. In other words, there was no virtue.

Dave Breese says, “In some ways, virtue could also be called the most necessary. Virtue is the quality that places its stamp upon all other qualities in life. To fail at virtue is to fail at everything. A man may be talented, knowledgeable, capable, and characterized by remarkable ability in many ways. However, if he is not believed to be virtuous, he will hardly be trusted, even in the performance of his highest abilities. He will fail” (Breese, p. 45).

It was a small adjustment that could make a big difference. It was against NASCAR rules, but almost everyone else was doing it. So crew chief Tim Shutt crawled under the No. 20 car of Mike McLaughlin, who races on the NASCAR Busch circuit.

“Joe [Gibbs, team owner] is adamant that we don’t cheat,” says Shutt, a relatively new believer who encountered Christ at a Christian retreat for participants in the racing industry. “Most teams figure that as long as you get away with it, it’s not cheating.”

“I said to Mike that morning in practice, ‘If we’re no good in practice, I’ll put this piece—the illegal piece—on. Probably 30 other teams are doing it.’ I was justifying it.

“I got up under the car, I got halfway through putting it on, and that verse, ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God,’ came flashing in red in front of me, and whoa, that was it. I said, ‘I’m leaving this up to you, God.’” Shutt didn’t put the piece on the car.

McLaughlin won the race. It was Talladega, one of the biggest races of 2001.

“When we won, the first thing that came to my mind was that verse,” Tim says. “God wanted to show himself to me.” (Victor Lee, *Sports Spectrum*; reprinted in *Men of Integrity*, May/June 2002).

## STEPS IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH (PART II)

Let's assume that you have decided to work on your spiritual development. What would you say will be your biggest obstacle? You might say that your biggest problem is a lack of knowledge. Knowledge is definitely needed, but it is available. May I suggest you see your greatest difficulty by looking in the mirror? Our biggest hurdle is us! Peter says that one of the steps in spiritual growth is self-control.

### The Definition

**“To Knowledge self-control” (1:6).** Self-control is to be added to knowledge. Two Greek words in the New Testament contain the idea of self-control. One, used in Titus 1:8; 2:2; 4, 5; 6, 12; etc., means to be sensible and self-controlled. The other, which appears here, seems to focus more on self-control (Gal. 5:22; the verb form occurs in 1 Cor. 7:9, 9:25). Green says self-control is controlling your passions instead of being controlled by them.

Mayor says that the *Seventh Book of Ethics* contains a graduated scale of good and evil based on the power to resist temptation. At the highest level, passion is entirely subject to reason. At the lowest level, reason is entirely subject to passion. Between these is self-control (the same Greek word used here), where reason wins over passion (or where passion prevails in spite of reason).

Barclay renders this word “self-mastery” and says it means “the ability to take a grip of oneself.” He adds that Aristotle distinguishes four states in life. In the first, “passion has been entirely subjugated to reason; the fight is won, and reason reigns supreme; we might call it perfect temperance. In the second, it is the opposite; “it is the state in which reason is entirely subjugated to passion; the fight is lost, and passion reigns supreme; we might call it unbridled lust. In between, there are two states, one in which “reason fights but passion prevails; the battle is still on, but at the moment, it is a losing battle; we might call it incontinence.” The fourth, the one that is described by the same Greek word that appears as “self-control” in 2 Peter 1:6, is where “reason fights against passion and prevails; the battle is still on, but it is a winning battle; we call it *self-control, or self-mastery*” (Barclay, italics his).

Barclay goes on to say that Christianity “does not contemplate a situation in which a man is emasculated of all passion, in which he is drained of virility, in which he is de-sexed and emptied of every passion; it envisages a situation in which a man’s instincts and passions remain, but remain under perfect control and mastery, and so become his servants and not his tyrants.”

Hodges says that the Greek word here translated “self-control” is hard to define precisely. He thinks it could refer to the control of physical drives, but “in the ethical thought of Peter’s day, it could apparently indicate that personal prudence which avoided extremes and led to moderation rather than self-indulgence.” He proposes a meaning like “disciplined moderation.” He concludes, “Out of ‘knowledge,’ there should arise that down-to-earth restraint which leads to a balanced life free from harmful extremes. We might describe this as ‘balanced self-discipline’ in all that we do.”

Knowledge of the Word of God and the God of the Word teaches believers to control their desires and drives. Peter teaches that self-control must be added to knowledge, but the believer



can know that and not practice self-control. Thus, self-control is to be deliberately and diligently added to knowledge. Perhaps the false teachers taught that their “knowledge” released them from needing self-control (2:10 ff.; 3:3).

Socrates taught that no one is willing to reject the best course once he or she sees it. Aristotle disagreed. Consequently, he had a great deal to say about not having self-control and, thus, being mastered by one’s desires (Green).

By the way, Paul says, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good” (2 Tim 3:1-3). In the last days, people will be “without self-control.” They will be “out of control” (Breese, p. 75).

## The Application

The New Testament itself mentions areas that need self-control. In some of these, the Greek word for self-control is used, but in others, it is not.

*Sexual Desire* Believers are to control their sexual desires (1 Cor 7:9). According to the Scripture, there are two solutions to sexual sin. The first is to flee. Paul says, “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body” (1 Cor 6:18). You can. “A common path to sexual sin is the notion that feelings are not only all-important but also totally uncontrollable; they just happen to you” (Louis McBurney, M.D., *Leadership*, vol. 6, no. 3).

The second solution is to get married. Paul says, “But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*” (1 Cor 7:8-9).

*Mind* Believers are to control their thoughts. Peter says, “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13). This is a passage where the word “self-control” does not appear, but the idea is clearly there.

Controlling the mind is difficult. David Seamands tells the story of the alchemist who sold villagers a special powder that he claimed would turn water into gold, provided that they never thought of red monkeys when they mixed it. Of course, no one ever got the gold because you can’t tell yourself to stop thinking about red monkeys, or you’ll just keep thinking about red monkeys.

Controlling the mind is possible. The movie *A Beautiful Mind* traces the life of genius mathematician and Nobel Prize winner John Forbes Nash, Jr. (played by Russell Crowe), who is tortured by paranoid schizophrenia. Nash was a genius mathematician studying at Princeton, seeking to discover a truly original idea. He explained his concept of equilibrium in his 1950 dissertation, *Non-cooperative Games*, which eventually earned him the 1994 Nobel Prize in Economics. Long before this, while a student at Princeton, Nash began to experience paranoid schizophrenia. Several delusional characters left him unable to discern reality from hallucination.

His paranoia climaxed while Nash worked as a professor in the early 1950s at M.I.T.’s Wheeler Defense Labs. Nash was recruited to decipher Soviet codes for the U.S. government, but following his initial experiences with code-breaking, he descended into a delusional world where he continued to work for government agent William Parcher (played by Ed Harris).

During this time, Nash's wife, Alicia (played by Jennifer Connelly), admitted him to an institution that diagnosed and treated his disease. After shock therapy and medications left him unable to think through math problems, care for his young son, or be intimate with his wife, Nash determined to get off the medications and reason his way through his severe mental illness. His determination to overcome his condition led him to re-establish his relationship with Princeton and eventually to resume teaching.

In 1994, Thomas King (played by Austin Pendleton) from the Nobel Committee met with Nash to assess his mental state and determine if he would be a suitable Nobel laureate. In their conversation, Nash says to King, tongue in cheek, "I *am* crazy." Then, more soberly, "I take the newer medications, but I still see things that are not here. I just choose not to acknowledge them. Like a diet of the mind, I just choose not to indulge certain appetites."

The way to control the mind is by thinking about something else. Paul exhorts, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

*Emotions* Believers are to control their emotions. "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:31-32). Again the word self-control does not appear, but the concept to present ("tenderhearted;" etc.).

Our emotions get out of control. Adrienne and David Samen eloped, and shortly after, the 21-year-old Marine reservist left for active duty in Iraq. For six months, the 18-year-old bride from North Haven, Connecticut, anticipated a fancy wedding reception when her new husband returned. They finally celebrated with a reception on August 18, 2003, at The Mill on the River restaurant in South Windsor, Connecticut. All was going well until restaurant workers closed the bar. At that point, Adrienne lost control of her temper and began throwing the wedding cake and gifts. She then left the restaurant in a rage.

The police were called and found the bride walking down the road in her wedding gown. When they attempted to take her into custody, she kicked the police cruiser's door and even tried to bite an officer. When Adrienne was brought before Judge Patricia Swords, the magistrate told her, "This behavior does not bode well for the well-being of your marriage." Samen confessed her behavior was disgraceful, and the judge fined her \$90 plus any damages to the restaurant. She also suggested Samen seek substance abuse and anger management counseling. The incident received national attention, with the *New York Post* and other media dubbing Samen "Bridezilla" (Associated Press, 8-30-03).

Yours may not be that extreme, but your emotions get out of control. *Father of the Bride* is a comedy that deals with a father's anxiety about giving his daughter away in marriage. George, the father (played by Steve Martin), narrates the story, focusing heavily on the preparations and huge wedding expenses. Always aware of the large sum of money he's spending, George teeters on the brink of maniacal rage. George finally hits the roof when he finds out that the reception will cost \$250 a head. On an errand for his wife, George stands in a supermarket aisle and tears open a bag of hot dog buns. A stock boy looks on in wonder and politely asks, "Excuse me, sir. What are you doing?"

George shouts, "I'll tell you what I'm doing! I want to buy eight hot dogs and eight hot dog buns to go with them. But no one sells eight hot dog buns. They only sell 12 hot dog buns! So I end up paying for four buns I don't need! So I am removing the superfluous buns!" "I'm sorry,

sir,” says the boy calmly, “but you’re gonna have to pay for all 12 buns. They’re not marked individually.”

George says, “Yeah. Do you know why? Because some big shot over at the wiener company got together with some big-shot over at the bun company and decided to rip off the American public because they think the American public is a bunch of trusting nitwits who’ll pay for things they don’t need rather than making a stink! Well, they’re not ripping off this nitwit anymore because I’m not paying for one more thing I don’t need! GEORGE BANKS IS SAYING NO!”

Later, when George’s daughter, Annie, calls the wedding off, he tries to console his future son-in-law, explaining that Annie inherited his tendency to blow up over small things. George explains, “Annie comes from a long line of major over-reactors.... Me, I can definitely lose it. My mother ... a nut. My grandfather ... stories about him were legendary.” Suddenly, George has an epiphany: “That’s when it hit me: Annie was just like me.”

Someone has well said, “We are not masters of our own feelings, but we are by God’s grace masters of our consent.”

*Tongue* Believers are to control their tongues. America is becoming a nation of angry, short-tempered people. From road rage to airplane rage, grocery store rage, and violence at youth sports events, the media has been reporting these emotional outbursts with unprecedented frequency.

More than three-fourths of Americans believe angry behavior has increased in places such as airports and highways, according to a recent *USA Today* CNN/Gallup Poll. Flight attendants and pilots report a dramatic increase in problem passengers: 66 incidents in 1997 and 534 incidents in 1999.

C. Leslie Charles, author of *Why Is Everyone So Cranky?*, writes: “I’m describing a fuming, unrelenting sense of anger, hostility, and alienation that simmers for months, even years, without relief. Eventually, all it takes is a triggering incident, usually minor, for the hostile person to go ballistic.... Cell phones, pagers, and high-tech devices allow us to be interrupted anywhere, at any time. This constant accessibility and compulsive use of technology fragments what little time we do have, adding to our sense of urgency, emergency, and overload.

A human development professor at Cornell University, James Garbarino, reports a major social shift: “There is a general breakdown of social conventions, manners, of social controls. This gives as a validation the permission to be aggressive. Kids used to be guided by a social convention that said, ‘keep the lid on.’ Today, they are guided more in the direction of taking it off.”

Garbarino also observes an increasing “culture of vulgarity.” Swear words are now common on cable TV and violence is promoted in much of today’s youth music. Psychologist Frank Farley of Temple University cites “a loosening of inhibitions promoted on TV talk shows such as Jerry Springer. It is OK to say whatever is on your mind,” Farley concludes. (*USA Today*, 7/18/2000).

Jay Kesler, president of Taylor University, told about a state trooper awarded an “Outstanding Trooper” award. Kesler, who attended the same church as the trooper, said to him, “The governor said that in 15 years as a trooper, you haven’t once roughed up a drunk or used excessive force on anyone. How can you be a state trooper for 15 years, dealing with the kind of stuff you deal with and have that happen?”

“Well, I guess two things,” the trooper responded. “First, if I am called to break up a fight at a tavern, I never say to myself, *There’s a drunk*. I always say to myself, ‘*There’s a man—someone’s husband, someone’s son, someone’s neighbor—who got drunk.*’ So, I always try to

think of him as a man, not a criminal. Secondly, the Bible says that a soft answer turns away wrath. So whenever I walk up to the window of an automobile, I always speak a little lower than the person I'm speaking to" (Jay Kesler, from message "Families That Succeed," delivered on "Focus on the Family" radio program).

John Wooden, former basketball coach at UCLA, was the antithesis of many of today's coaches. He seldom left his seat on the Bruins bench during a UCLA game. "I tried to teach players that if they lose their temper or get out of control, they will get beat," he says. "Modeling was better than words. I liked the rule that we used to have that a coach couldn't leave the bench. I'm sorry they did away with that."

Wooden set records that may never be broken in college basketball. From 1948 to 1975, he had a win-loss record of 885-203—a phenomenal career-winning percentage of .813. He had an 88-game winning streak at UCLA. Players like Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Bill Walton, and Walt Hazzard played under him.

Pressed in an interview to be critical of former Indiana University coach Bobby Knight, Wooden would only say, "I think Bob Knight is an outstanding teacher of the game of basketball, but I don't approve of his methods. But I'm not a judge, and I'm not judging Bob Knight. There is so much bad in the best of us and so much good in the worst of us, it hardly behooves me to talk about the rest of us." (*Abilene Reporter-News*, 5/18/2000).

*All Areas* Believers are to exercise self-control in every area of life. Paul says, "And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for an imperishable crown*" (1 Cor 9:25). The word rendered "temperate" is the Greek word "self-control."

William Law said, "Our souls may receive infinite hurt and be rendered incapable of all virtue, merely by the use of innocent and lawful things. What is more innocent than rest and retirement? And yet, what is more dangerous than sloth and idleness? What is more lawful than eating and drinking? And yet, what more destructive of all virtue ... than sensuality and indulgence? ... It is the right and prudent management of ourselves, as to these things, that all the art of holy living chiefly consists" (William Law, *Leadership*, vol. 7, no. 1).

"The alarm clock rings [at 3:30 a.m.] in [radio broadcaster Paul] Harvey's 22-room home in West suburban River Forest. His routine never varies: brush his teeth, shower, shave, get dressed, eat oatmeal, get into his car, and drive downtown. It all takes a well-organized 45 minutes or so. He dresses formally—in shirt, coat, and tie—as if going to work as a bank president and in sharp contrast to the aggressively informal, sometimes slovenly manner common to most radio performers. 'It is all about discipline,' Harvey says. 'I could go to work in my pajamas, but long ago, I got some advice from the engineer for my friend Billy Graham's radio show. If you don't [use discipline] in every area, you'll lose your edge'" (Rick Kogan, "Good Days for Paul Harvey," *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, 8/04/2002, p. 10).

## The Clarification

The Greek word translated "self-control" in 2 Peter 1:6 is the same one that appears in Galatians 5:22 (the fruit of the Spirit is self-control), which raises the issue of God-control. Many believers today speak of spiritual life as if it is all God-controlled. That flies in the face of Scriptural statements about believers being responsible for controlling themselves.

"We live under the illusion that if we can acquire complete control, we can understand God, or we can write the great American novel. But the only way we can brush against the hem of the

Lord, or hope to be part of the creative process is to have the courage, the faith, to abandon control. For the opposite of sin is faith and never virtue. We live in a world that believes that self-control can make us virtuous. But that's not how it works" (Madeleine L'Engle, *Walking on Water*).

Breeze argues that the believer is "not a thoughtless, unwilling puppet. The plan of God is accomplished in our world by the will of the believer, responding affirmatively to the will of God as given in the Word. To say that the Holy Spirit controls us is a less-than-accurate description of the relationship between the believer and his Lord. It is rather true that He instructs us, He leads us, and we, by doing the will of God, perform heaven's purposes. The call is not for the believer to abandon himself to God. Rather he is called to responsible, thoughtful, willful obedience. Our commitment to Christ should not be presented as self-abandonment but self-control. We are not called to surrender ourselves to Him. Rather, we are "laborers together with God" (1 Corinthians 3:9). This call to commitment in Christ is expressed in Scripture by the word *present* (Romans 12:1) and the word *yield* (Romans 6:13). Both of these ideas find their source in the Greek word *paraistimi*.

"This fascinating compound word literally means "stand up next to God." Its origin is interesting. In the course of battle, a commander would give careful instructions to the officers responsible for commanding the troops. After laying out the battle plan, he would ask them two questions: 'Do you understand the order of the battle?' and, 'Do you commit yourself as a responsible lieutenant commander?' If the answer was affirmative on both counts, the lieutenant saluted and said, 'Yes, sir!'

"In like fashion, each of us must ask himself, Do I understand the will of the great Commander? Do I commit myself to *courageously* perform my *responsibilities* in the great *battle*? If your answer is yes on both counts, you are invited to participate as a responsible individual in fulfilling heaven's program in this world. To understand this is to *see* the significance of the call to self-control. God is not a puppeteer; He is a father!"

**Summary:** Believers are to exercise self-control in every area of life by depending on God's grace.

In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin wrote, "I conceived the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection. I wished to live without committing any fault at any time; I would conquer all that either natural inclinations, custom, or company might lead me into. As I knew or thought I knew, what was right or wrong, I did not see why I might not always do the one and avoid the other. But I soon found I had undertaken a task of more difficulty than I had imagined. While my care was employed in guarding against one fault, I was often surprised by another; habit took the advantage of inattention; inclination was sometimes too strong for reason. I concluded, at length, that the mere speculative conviction that it was our interest to be completely virtuous was not sufficient to prevent our slipping" (Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, pp. 99-102).

"Delaying gratification is a process of scheduling the pain and pleasure of life in such a way as to enhance the pleasure by meeting and experiencing the pain first and getting it over with. It is the only decent way to live (M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*).

## STEPS IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH (PART III)

The spiritual life has been compared to running in a race (Heb. 12:1). It takes effort to run in a race. Likewise, it takes effort to live a spiritual life. It takes effort to grow spiritually. In his second epistle, Peter talks about some of the effort involved when he says, “giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge” (1:5). The expression “giving all diligence” and the term “add” both indicate that if you are to grow, you must put forth the effort.

Have you ever been discouraged? Have you ever felt like quitting? Perhaps you have thought about getting out of the race altogether or just decided to sit on the sidelines. If you have ever felt that way, Peter has a word for you. He says if you are to grow into the person God intended you to be, you must add “perseverance.”

### The Definition

*Endurance* “To self-control perseverance” (1:6). Perseverance is to be added to self-mastery. The Greek word rendered “perseverance” means “endurance.” It is made up of two Greek words: “under” and “to stay, remain, abide.” Endurance is remaining steadfast under pressure. It requires persistent self-control. It is the “habit” of self-control.

Green comments, “This patience is no stoic quality of accepting all that comes as from the dictates of blind fate. It springs from faith in the promises of God, knowledge of Christ, and experience of his divine power (vv. 3-4). And so it produces in the Christian a deepened awareness of a Father’s wise and loving hand controlling all that happens. Like Jesus himself, who for the joy set before him endured the cross (Heb. 12:2), we are enabled to see our apparent misfortunes in the calm light of eternity.” Mature believers do not give up. They are like steady shining stars rather than the temporary brilliance of a meteor (Green).

Mayor points to an interesting passage in Aristotle where self-control and endurance are contrasted. “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.”

Barclay renders this word “steadfastness” and says that Chrysostom called it the “Queen of the Virtues.” He goes on to say that the background of this Greek word is always courage. “Didymus of Alexandria writes on the temper of Job: ‘It is not that the righteous man must be without feeling, although he must patiently bear the things which afflict him; but it is true virtue when a man deeply feels the things he toils against, but nevertheless despises sorrows for the sake of God.’” Barclay adds that this steadfastness “does not simply sit down and accept and endure. There is always a forward look in it. It is said of Jesus, by the writer to the Hebrews, that for the joy that was set before Him, He *endured* the Cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12:2).” That is steadfastness; it “is the brave and courageous acceptance of everything that life can do to us, and the transmuting of even the worst event into another step on the upward way.”

*Patience* To put endurance in focus, it needs to be compared with another word in the New Testament, namely, “patience.” Trench says that the Greek word translated “patience” “expresses patience in respect of persons,” and the one rendered “endure” is patience “in respect to things.” He goes on to say that when patient people have to deal with injurious people, they do not suffer

themselves to be “easily to be provoked by them, or to blaze up into anger.” On the other hand, the people who endure are those “who, under a great siege of trials, bear up and do not lose heart or courage.” He adds that only the first word is an attribute of God (Trench, p. 198).

The school superintendent asked a volunteer to send a fax. Later in the day, he talked to the person who received the fax. “Did you get the fax?” the superintendent asked. “Yes,” replied his friend, “but I didn’t need 15 copies!” The superintendent went to the volunteer to find out what happened. “I kept sending it,” she said, “but it kept coming back out!” She did not understand fax machines, but she understood persistence.

## The Difficulties

What hinders believers from growing spiritually? What obstacles prevent progress? What difficulties need to be endured? The New Testament names several.

*The Pressures of Life* Jesus told a parable about a sower. Then He explained it. He said, “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock *are those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; these have no root, who believe for a while and fall away in time of temptation. Now the ones *that* fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience (Lk. 8:11-15).”

Some believe and fall away because of temptation (Lk. 8:13). They received Christ as their sin-bearer but never come to know Him as their burden-bearer. Some are “choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Lk. 8:14). Some “bear fruit with patience,” that is, with endurance (Lk. 8:15).

Martin Luther once observed, “Riches are the least worthy gifts God can give a man. What are they to God’s Word, to bodily gifts, such as beauty and health, or to the gifts of the mind, such as understanding, skill, and wisdom? Or what are they compared to spiritual treasures? Yet men toil for wealth day and night and take no rest. Therefore God commonly gives riches to foolish people, to whom He gives nothing else!”

Years ago, the children of a wealthy family were constantly left in the care of servants. Then, the family lost their wealth. The servants had to be discharged, and the parents once again had to care for their children. One evening, when the father returned home, his little girl climbed up on his lap and, twining her arms around his neck, said, “Papa, don’t get rich again. You didn’t come home when you were rich, but now we can be around you, get on your knees, and kiss you. Please, please don’t get rich again, Papa!”

Some years ago in Bogota, Colombia, a tame pigeon swallowed a diamond and several emeralds worth \$40,000 and flew away. The news item stated that the children of a millionaire had been playing with the stones when the bird snatched them. What a parable on wealth that is amassed at the expense of spiritual, moral, and personal values. Such riches soon “take wings and fly away.”

*Trials* Hodges notes that “the person who cultivates a virtuous life, which is reinforced by knowledge and self-discipline, is well prepared for the worst of times. In the midst of trials, virtue, knowledge, and self-discipline are tested. Perseverance is needed so that neither Christian character nor conduct is marred or damaged by even the hardest of personal trials.”

Paul says, “Tribulation produces perseverance” (Rom 5:3) and James says, “The testing of your faith produces patience” (Jas. 1:3). The Greek word translated “patience” is the Greek word for “endurance.” James exhorts believers to let patience (endurance) have its perfect work (Jas. 1:4).

Dr. A. T. Pierson once had the privilege of watching pulp and rags being made into paper. He wrote: “What a contrast there was between the heap of filthy rags at one end of the process and the pure, spotless, white paper at the other! What a trial the rags go through before they emerge in this new form! Torn to pieces and ground to pulp, bleached with chloride of lime till all stains are removed, washed over and over; submitted to another bleaching by the action of chlorine and alum; washed again till the pulp is white as cream or snowflakes! Caught upon a wire cylinder, after the severe shaking by the Fourdrinier process, which crosses the fibers and gives compactness and firmness to the fabric, and then passed between and around the hot surfaces which make the paper smooth and even—how like the Divine discipline by which our filthiness is cleansed away; how like the tribulation out of which all they come up who have washed their robes in the blood of the lamb!”

*Persecutions* Paul said, “So that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure” (2 Thess.1:4; see Rev. 13:10; 14:12).

*Suffering* Paul speaks of “enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer” (2 Cor. 1:6). The writer to the Hebrews says his readers “endured a great struggle with sufferings” (Heb 10:32) and Peter says, “For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God” (1 Pet. 2:20).

## The Determination

How do believers endure? What is the key to endurance? The New Testament lists several aids to endurance.

*Scripture* Paul writes, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The Greek word translated “patience” is the Greek word for endurance. Referring to Psalm 69:9, Paul says through the Scripture, the believer sees the Righteous One who bears the reproach for God and is encouraged with hope to endure bearing the weaknesses of the weak brother. We have hope in that we know that by being Christ-like in our attitude and approach to the weaker brother, we will be rewarded (14:10 and 1 Cor. 9:17, 24-27, where rewards, that is, crowns are said to be given to those who give up their right for the weaker brother).

Job is the great example. James reminds believers of the “perseverance of Job” (Jas. 5:11). He lost his wealth, his children, his health, and the support of his wife. Yet he said, “Though He slays me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15).

*The Lord* “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus” (Rom. 15:5). Again, the Greek word translated “patience” is the Greek word for endurance. In this verse, Paul says that God is the source of endurance. God is the source, but we still have to put forth effort. Paul also says to pursue endurance, “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness” (1 Tim. 6:11). The writer to the Hebrews says to run with endurance. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside



every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1-2).

*Hope* Paul makes an interesting statement: “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father” (1 Thess. 1:3). Paul is saying, “Because of your expectation before God that Jesus Christ is coming back, you endure.” To put it simply, they had hope, which produced endurance. As Paul says elsewhere, “If we endure, we shall also reign with *Him*. If we deny *Him*, He also will deny us” (2 Tim. 2:12).

**Summary:** To grow spiritually, you must overcome all obstacles to spiritual growth and preserve by putting forth effort while depending on the Lord.

Sam Mills was a linebacker for the New Orleans Saints from 1986 to 1994 and the Carolina Panthers from 1995-1997. He was a five-time Pro Bowler. After his playing career, he became the line coach for the Panthers. Then, he developed stomach cancer. In the 2003 season, the Panthers met the Cowboys in the first round of the playoffs. In the week before the game, Mills addressed his team and, for the first time, spoke to the whole team about his cancer. He told them that in life, as in football, you have to have a team, which in his case included a medical team. Then he said, “You can give up or choose to fight. I choose to fight.”

## STEPS IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH (PART IV)

What is the ultimate in spiritual growth? To many, the ultimate would be to conquer a besetting sin, such as anger. They feel that they would have arrived spiritually if they could just triumph over anger. To others, the ultimate is knowing more of the Scripture. They think that if they just knew the Bible, they would be better saints. Still others are sure that the ultimate goal is to be so spiritual that they would be of great service, perhaps winning thousands to Christ. Second Peter delineates the steps of spiritual growth. What does he say is the ultimate?

### Godliness

*The Meaning* “To perseverance godliness” (1:6). Godliness is to be added to endurance. The Greek word translated “godliness” means “reverence” (1:3). Believers are to endure with an attitude of reverence toward God. They are to be aware of God in every aspect of life (Green). Hodges says that while in everyday use, this word suggested “piety, godliness, religion” and reverence, loyalty, and fear of God, in the New Testament, it seems to have definite overtones of the awe in which God should be held.”

*The Application* Believers are to add reverence, a God-consciousness to their lives. They are to develop a God-awareness throughout life. In describing Christians who lived centuries ago, a writer said, “Reading these discussions, you get the sense that ‘the sky hung low’ for these people. That is, heaven was a nearby, almost a tangible reality.”

We should be aware of the Lord at the beginning of the day. Someone said, “I used to write in my daily calendar ‘7-7:30 a.m.: Prayer,’ but I passed that up many times. It was one more thing to pass by that day. Now I write ‘7-7:30 a.m.: God.’ Somehow, that’s a little harder to neglect” (Don Postema).

We should be aware of the Lord throughout the day. Wiersbe says that people with this quality of character live above the petty things of life, the passions and pleasures that control the lives of others. They seek to do the will of God; as they do, they also seek the welfare of others.

Barclay appropriately cites Xenophon’s (highly imaginative!) description of Socrates to illustrate the noblest conception of *eusebeia* (the word translated “godliness”) to be found in the pagan world. “He was so pious and devoutly religious that he would take no step apart from the will of heaven; so just and upright that he never did even a trifling injury to any living soul; so self-controlled, so temperate, that he never at any time chose the sweeter instead of the better; so sensible, so wise, and so prudent that in distinguishing the better from the worse.”

We should be aware of the Lord during difficult days. C. S. Lewis said, “God whispers in our pleasures but shouts in pain.” Hodges suggests that “a deepening of our reverence and awe for the living God can come out of the trials of life. Not only can we come to acknowledge His sovereign control over our lives—including His right to send us hard times, but we can also learn to praise Him for the mercies He grants in our deepest times of need. Such attitudes are a part of the humble reverence for our Maker.”

Vance Havner related the story of an elderly lady greatly disturbed by her many real and imaginary troubles. Finally, she was told in a kindly way by her family, “Grandma, we’ve done all we can for you. You’ll just have to trust God for the rest.” A look of utter despair spread over

her face as she replied, “Oh, dear, has it come to that?” Havner commented, “It always comes to that, so we might as well begin with that!”

## Brotherly Love

*The Meaning* “To godliness brotherly kindness” (1:7). Brotherly love is to be added to a reverent attitude toward God. The Greek word, translated “brotherly kindness” is actually the Greek word for brotherly love. Brotherly love is the believers’ mutual love as brethren (Abbott-Smith). The Greek word denotes “warm brotherly affection.”

Green says, “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 the royalty of behavior towards other children of the King, whatever their differences in culture, class, and churchmanship.” He goes on to suggest that love for the brethren involves bearing one another’s burdens and 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 Application* This list explains why there is so little love, even among believers. Hodges points out that brotherly love often “fails or is absent altogether in Christian-to-Christian relationships.” He says “This should not surprise us since ‘brotherly love’ is here presented as one of the two final additions to developed Christian character. And although babes in Christ may experience it intermittently and in measure, consistent, ongoing ‘brotherly love’ is the product of the qualities that precede it in Peter’s list.”

This list also underscores the need for virtue, knowledge, balanced self-discipline, endurance, and a God-fearing attitude before a love for the brethren can exist. As Hodges explains, “In the process of Christian living, few things must endure heavier blows than do ‘brotherly love’ and ‘love.’ People are in so many ways hard to love and even fellow believers are frequently a source of disappointment and trial. No one can crown his Christian experience with consistent displays of love apart from laying the groundwork suggested by the preceding qualities in Peter’s list.”

Someone has written, “If you can start the day without caffeine; if you can get going without pep pills; if you can always be cheerful, ignoring aches and pains; if you can resist complaining and boring people with your troubles; if you can eat the same food every day and be grateful for it; if you can understand when your loved ones are too busy to give you any time; if you can overlook it when those you love take it out on you when through no fault of yours something goes wrong; if you can take criticism and blame without resentment; if you can ignore a friend’s limited education and never correct him; if you can resist treating a rich friend better than a poor friend; if you can face the world without lies and deceit; if you can conquer tension without medical help; if you can relax without liquor; if you can sleep without the aid of drugs; if you can say honestly that deep in your heart you have no prejudice against creed, color, religion, or politics; then, my friend, you are almost as good as your dog.”

At a very low point in my life, I attended church, where the pastor ended every service with the same prayer, “O God, help us to be masters of ourselves that we may be servants of others.”

## Love

*The Meaning* “And to brotherly kindness love” (1:7). Love (agape) is to be added to a feeling of brotherly affection. The Greek word translated love is not an emotion; it is an act of the will,

whereby one seeks another's well-being. Green defines it as "a deliberate desire for the highest good of the one loved, which shows itself in sacrificial action for that person's good."

Green also says that in friendship, the partners seek mutual solace; in sexual love, mutual satisfaction. In both cases, feelings are aroused because of what the loved one is. With love (agape), it is the reverse. God's love (agape) is "evoked not by what we are, but by what He is. It has its origin in the agent, not in the object. It is not that 'we are lovable,' but that He is love."

*The Application* Love is the greatest Christian virtue (1 Cor 13:13). It is the crowning achievement of faith and, therefore, the appropriate climax in character development. The fact that brother love precedes love indicates that love here is toward not just the brethren but to all (Mayor; Hodges). It is not restricted to fellow believers.

"When we have brotherly love, we love because of our likenesses to others; but with *agape* love, we love in spite of the differences we have" (Wiersbe).

In 1524, Martin Luther said, "Among themselves, the merchants have a common rule which is their chief maxim... I care nothing about my neighbor so long as I have my profit and satisfy my greed. What concern is it to me if it injures my neighbor in 10 ways at once? There you see how shamelessly this maxim flies squarely in the face not only of Christian love but also of natural law." Some 250 years after Martin Luther suggested that we are not only justified by faith but that it should permeate all areas of our lives, including enterprise, a young man in Mount Holly, New Jersey, opened a humble tailor shop. Unlike other businessmen, John Woolman refused to purchase any cotton or dye supplies handled by slaves. His commitment to Christian love—with excellence, mind you—attracted customers in droves despite occasions when he could only offer them beige sackcloth. In 1759, Woolman convinced the Philadelphia Quakers to pass the first resolution in the American Colonies not to own, deal, or sell slaves. Why use God's blessings, he reasoned, to buy people captive to chains for personal profit? (Mary Naber. "Christ's Returns: Building an Investment Plan Beyond Profit," *Christianity Today*, 9/3/2001).

Hodges observes, "Like God Himself (John 3:16), we are to love the unsaved. If and when we do, evangelistic efforts will be far more than obedience to the Great Commission."

**Summary:** The steps in spiritual growth culminate in a life of love.

Mayor concludes, "The relation between the seven virtues may be thus stated. Faith is the gift of God already received; to this must be added (1) Moral strength, which enables a man to do what he knows to be right; (2) Spiritual discernment; (3) Self-control by which a man resists temptation; (4) Endurance by which he bears up under persecution or adversity; (5) right feeling and behavior towards God, (6) toward the brethren, (7) towards all." Green says, "Such is the fruit of the tree of faith." He quotes Bengel, who says, "Each step gives birth to and facilitates the next. Each subsequent quality balances and brings to perfection the one preceding."

In an article titled "*The Discipline of the Darkroom*," B. C. Lovelace compares the Christian experience to photography. He says that in taking a snapshot, an image is made on the exposed negative the instant the shutter opens. However, before the picture can be seen, the film must go through the development process in the darkroom. So, too, at the moment of conversion, the light of the Savior floods the heart of the new believer, and Christ's own likeness is indelibly impressed upon his sensitized spirit, but a process of development must follow this miracle of grace.

# THE MOTIVATION FOR GROWTH

Do you want to grow spiritually? If your answer is “No,” I would ask, “Why not?” What would it take to motivate you to grow? If your answer is “Yes,” I would ask, “Why are you so motivated? Why *should* we be motivated to grow spiritually? Asking and answering that question could be a helpful exercise for those who are and those who are not motivated to grow.

## The Possibilities

There are two options. To grow or not to grow, that is the question.

*To Grow* Peter writes, “For if these things are yours and abound you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:8). One option is that believers grow, that is, they add the virtues to their lives that Peter delineates (1:5-7). Peter speaks of these virtues being present and abounding, that is, increasing. He wants believers not to remain static but to “steadily increase” in these spiritual qualities (Hodges). In other words, he wants believers to grow. No matter how much love we have, we can always love more—and more and more (1 Thess. 4:9:10). You can have these characteristics sparingly or abundantly. Have you settled for a little, or do you want a lot of the spiritual characteristics that Peter has listed?

If godly virtues steadily increase in believers, they will not be barren, a Greek word that means “inactive, idle, ineffective.” If you are growing spiritually, you will be active; you will not be idle. Wiersbe says that those who fail to grow usually fail in everything else. Furthermore, if godly virtues steadily increase among believers, they will not be unfruitful and unproductive in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. If you are growing spiritually, you will not only be active; you will be productive. Activity can occur without character development, but fruitfulness cannot (Hodges).

In short, by adding godly virtues to their faith, believers will be neither “idle nor unfruitful” (Mayor) and neither useless nor fruitless. To say the same thing another way, they will be active, productive, and effective; they will be fruitful and useful. Many Pastors exhort believers to get busy for the Lord. I have done that, but Peter is saying that you will not be inactivity or unproductive if you are growing. Does that mean that if you are not active or productive, it is because you are not growing?

*To not Grow* On the other hand, according to Peter, it is possible to not grow. He explains, “For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (1:9). Believers can lack the virtues Peter describes (1:5-7). English translations often reverse the order that appears in the Greek text (NKJV: shortsighted, even to blindness;” NASB: “blind *or* short-sighted;” NIV: “nearsighted and blind”). Literally translated, the Greek text says “blind, being shortsighted” (KJV: “blind, and cannot see afar off”). Why the strange order? If people are blind, how can they be short-sighted? (Green). These are figures of speech. “Metaphors need not be physically compatible to be clear and comprehensible. On a spiritual level, a person can be both ‘blind’ and ‘shortsighted’” (Hodges).

The point is that if *believers* fail to cultivate godly virtue, three things can be said of them. First, they are blind. Unsaved people are said to be blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4), but this passage is clearly referring to believers. The same people who are said to be blind have forgotten

that their sins are forgiven (1:9) and they are called “brethren” (1:10). So, how can believers be blind? While not exactly the same thing, we speak of “blind spots.”

More to the point, believers can be so focused on the material world that they do not see the spiritual world. They can be so obsessed with the earthly that they are blind to the heavenly. They can be so fixed on this life that they do not see the implications of the next life. Having forgotten they were forgiven, they are blind to spiritual truth. These are the people of whom it can be said concerning spiritual truth, “They just don’t get it.” The church at Laodicea is an illustration (Rev. 3:17). Blind people walk in darkness, “left without the guiding light that the knowledge Jesus Christ brings, not to be able to see the way” (Barclay).

Second, they are shortsighted. The Greek word rendered “shortsighted” comes from a word that means “to screw up the eyes, squint.” It suggests willful shortsightedness concerning what lies ahead (Green; Spitta: “willful blindness,” cited by Mayor). If so, spiritually shortsighted believers deliberately refuse to see what is ahead. They “cannot see very far in front of them” (Hodges). They are “unable to see at a distance” (Wiersbe).

Hodges suggests that since this epistle heavily stresses reality and certainty of the Lord’s coming (see 2:11, 16, 19 and 3:4-14), Peter is probably thinking of believers who no longer look ahead to the Rapture. “Instead, their vision is severely limited to the here and now. People who live simply for the present time or for the present world are tragically ‘shortsighted.’”

Finally, they have forgotten they were cleansed from their old sins. “Cleansed” is in the perfect tense, meaning it was done in the past with result in the present. “Old sins” are the sins committed before conversion (Green). Green says this can only mean that they have “deliberately forgotten, put out of their mind” that they were cleansed of their sins. They have spiritual amnesia. Hodges says that “forget” does not mean they could not recall the facts, but that they lacked concern or neglect.

Forgetfulness concerns the believer’s past. Blindness is related to the present, and spiritual shortsightedness is connected to the future (Hodges). The believer who does not add godly Christian traits to their faith will end up with a distorted perception of their past, present, and future. Both vision and memory will be affected.

There is a case on record of a man who forgot he was married. This absent-minded husband, failing to recall he was married, went to his mother’s home after work instead of his own. It was the day after his honeymoon! He was three hours late for dinner because of the distance between his mother’s home and his new apartment. According to the newspaper account, his dinner was burnt and cold when he finally arrived, but his wife was hot. People who forget do not realize where they are or where they are going. They are forgetful, blind, and, concerning the future, shortsighted. On the other hand, if you remember that your sins are forgiven spiritually, you will see clearly and as a result, you will be fruitful and useful.

Philip and Lucille Hitchuk of Newark, N. J. had a son named Paul. Shortly after he was born, they discovered that Paul had a problem with his eyes and would be blind for the rest of his life. Dr. Anthony Caputo, the pediatric ophthalmologist, explained that due to an embryological defect, Paul was born without any pupils to let light into his eyes. Caputo said Paul was born with an extremely rare congenital disease called corectopia. Paul’s pupils were occluded and were located upward and inward toward the nose, hidden by the eyelids. “To use the camera analogy, Paul was born with a lens cap,” he said.

According to an Associated Press article written by Mark Crane, they went through “terrible agony, a real living hell” until they learned that a novel operation on their blind infant son was successful. United Hospitals Medical Center doctors used microsurgical techniques to create

pupils in the baby's eyes. Dr. Caputo performed the delicate operation. He cut a tiny opening in each of the child's eyes, creating pupils in the center of the iris. He also removed the calcified membranes that had developed instead of lenses inside the eyes. Philip Hitchuk said the family had some doubts about the operation. Mrs. Hitchuk said she was "petrified" at the thought of surgery for her child. "But it was either take risks, or my baby would never see."

After the operation, little Paul began to see and according to his parents, "his entire personality changed." "We put him in his crib and he looked at the mobile above it. He laughed and giggled and started playing with it," Philip said.

## The Motivation

*The Conclusion* Peter concludes, "Therefore brethren be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure" (1:10). Peter addresses this conclusion to "brethren," leaving no doubt that 2 Peter 1:9 is describing what is possible for genuine believers (1:12; they were established in the truth). Because believers can end up blind and barren, they should be even more eager and earnest (see "diligent" in 1:5) in developing godly virtues. They should "be still more on guard" (Mayor), "all the more, be diligent" (Hodges). Spiritual growth will not occur "automatically or inevitably" (Hodges).

What Peter described in 2 Peter 1:5-7, namely, adding godly virtues to faith, is here designated as making "your calling and election sure." The calling and election are to salvation (1:3). Technically, God's choosing precedes His calling (Rom. 8:30). Peter reverses the natural order, perhaps highlighting the process from the human point of view. After responding to the call, believers understand they were chosen.

Peter urges them to make their calling and election "sure." Mayor claims the word "sure" means to "certify, confirm, attest." The same word is used in 2 Peter 1:19, where it is rendered "confirmed." In that verse, Peter is saying the transfiguration demonstrated confirmed the prophetic word to others. Does 2 Peter 1:19 mean that the prophetic word was not sure before the transfiguration? Absurd! The verb form of this noun is translated "confirm" (Heb. 2:3) and "establish" (1 Cor. 1:6; Col. 2:7; Heb. 13:9). In other words, believers are to add Christian traits to their faith and validate our choosing and calling *to others*.

Hodges says, "When a Christian develops the character qualities of vv 5-7, he is producing valid evidence for others to observe that God has indeed "called" and "chosen" him. This is similar to James's doctrine of justification by works before men. The unsaved are not likely to believe that we are in God's favor on our own say-so alone. But a life filled with moral virtue and capped with love (v 7) can be very persuasive. As the Lord Jesus put it: 'By this, all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another' (John 13:35)."

Hodges believes that the calling and election are not to salvation but a call to service. He bases his view on the fact that the phrase "calling and election" is in the reverse order from our calling to salvation (Rom. 8:30) and that Jesus uses the order that appears in 2 Peter 1:10 to refer to service (Mt. 20:16; 22:14). He says, "We propose, therefore, that Peter's words do not refer here to a pre-temporal election to eternal salvation, which by its very nature would precede the call to salvation. Instead, all Christians have been given a "royal" summons by God Himself, "who calls [us] into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12). And a supremely significant part of that glory is the privilege of co-reigning with Christ (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26-27; 3:21). But not all Christians are chosen to co-reign! Paul writes: "If we endure, we shall also reign with

Him” (2 Tim. 2:12, italics added); and he also wrote, “and *joint-heirs* with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Rom 8:17b, italics added).”

*Never Stumble* Peter now explains two results of establishing your calling and election. “For if you do these things, you will never stumble” (1:10). “If you walk around with your eyes closed, you will stumble!” (Wiersbe). If you walk around with your eyes open, you will not stumble (Gal 5:16). In the Greek text, the word “do” is in the present tense. As long as believers cultivate Christian character, they will not stumble, fall, or fail spiritually. All believers stumble in many things (Jas. 3:2). Peter seems to have in mind a disastrous coming to grief (Green). Believers who are growing in grace are like a surefooted horse.

*Be Rewarded* Furthermore, Peter adds, “For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (1:11). Those cultivating Christian character will not only *not* stumble now, they will abundantly enter the eternal kingdom later. The metaphor of entry into the kingdom may be taken from the return of the victor in the Olympic games to his hometown. They did not receive him through any of the existing gates in the town wall. Instead, part of the wall was broken down to afford him a special entrance (Green). “Abundantly” means “richly” and clearly refers to rewards in the kingdom (Mt. 6:19-21; Lk. 12:16-21).

The Greek word rendered “supplied” in this verse was translated “giving” in 2 Peter 1:5. Remember the background of this word. It is originally meant to pay the expenses of a chorus. The idea of lavishly furnishing the provisions or needs that may be involved seems to be lodged in the word. We are to make the necessary expenditure to furnish our faith with all of the spiritual qualities that properly belong to it. And if we make that kind of expenditure in our lives, God will make an expenditure at our entrance into His kingdom. A richly furnished entrance into that kingdom will be supplied. God is here seen as repaying the expenditure of our life with a lavish outlay of His own as He prepares to receive us into that eternal home (see Wiersbe).

Some are saved as by fire (1 Cor. 3:15; Wiersbe). Bengel likens the unholy Christian in the judgment to a sailor who just manages to make shore after a shipwreck or to a man who barely escapes with his life from a burning house while all his possessions are lost. In contrast, Christians who have allowed their Lord to influence their conduct will have an abundant entrance into the heavenly city and be welcomed like a triumphant athlete victorious in the Games (Green).

The point is to grow so that you will not stumble now and so you will richly enter the kingdom later. If you grow spiritually, you are better off now and later.

**Summary:** Since God has given believers all they need to live godly lives, especially great prophetic promises, they should confirm their calling by adding godly virtues to their lives so they will prosper now and in the kingdom.

There are many reasons why believers should be motivated to grow spiritually. In 2 Peter 1, several major reasons are given. For example, Peter argues that believers should grow because of what God has done for them in the past. He has forgiven them (1:9) and graciously provided for Christian living (1:3-4). Believers should also grow because of the present. They are better off now if they do (1:8) and they are better off in the future (1:11). As Paul says, “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8).

Robert Manry piloted the smallest ship, a 13-foot vessel named *Tinkerbelle*, ever to sail the Atlantic Ocean. The trip was long and difficult. He dared not sleep in the shipping lanes. The



rudder broke several times. He was washed overboard often, saved only by the rope he had tied to himself. Finally, after 78 days, Manry approached Falmouth, England. He thought only of tying up to some dock, finding a hotel room, and getting some sleep, but an enthusiastic crowd had other ideas. A fleet of about 300 small boats came out to greet him, all blowing their horns in salute. Forty thousand well-wishers lined the docks, cheering him on (*Our Daily Bread*, 12/8/1988).

## YOU NEED TO HEAR IT UNTIL ....

When I was growing up, whenever I left the house, my mother said, “Be careful.” Of course, I responded, “Yes, mother, I will,” thinking to myself, “How many times is she going to tell me that?” When I got a motorcycle, it got worse! Without fail, every time I left the house, we went through the same ritual. My mother would say, “Be careful,” and I would say, “Yes, mother, I will,” wondering if the day would ever come when she would not tell me that anymore. Then, I got old enough to get a driver’s license to drive a car. You guessed it. Without fail, every time I left the house, we went through the same ritual. My mother would say, “Be careful,” and I would say, “Yes, mother, I will.” As a teenager, I felt like I had heard that message enough. How many times does a person have to hear something? Years later, I became a parent and decided that my mother might have had a point. Children need to be constantly reminded of some things.

One of the things I have learned as a pastor is that repetition is one of the most basic and important laws of learning. Spiritually, we need to hear truths over and over again. We need to hear them until—until what? Probing that question can be a profitable exercise. Peter gives us the answer to that question in the first chapter of his second epistle.

### The Reminders of Peter

*The Reminder* Having admonished his readers to live godly lives in light of the coming kingdom, Peter concludes, “Therefore I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know them and are established in the present truth” (1:12). The word “therefore” means this is the conclusion from all that has proceeded, especially 2 Peter 1:11 (Hodges). The original recipients of this epistle were not ignorant of what Peter had just written. He acknowledges that they knew these things. He even says they were “established” in what he told them. The Greek word translated “established” means “to fix, to set fast, establish.” The truth he has just written is “present truth,” meaning it is truth present with them (Mayor; Hodges). Perhaps the false teachers were suggesting that there were truths these believers did not have. Peter says you have all you need (1:3) and you are established in it. Nevertheless, Peter insists they need to be reminded of these things. The truths about which he has just spoken are so immensely important that he would not neglect these truths but would “always” perpetually remind believers of them.

“Preaching is very often reminding a man of what he already knows. It is the bringing back to his memory the truth he has forgotten, or at which he refuses to look, or whose meaning he has not fully appreciated and realized. It often happens that the task of the preacher and the teacher is to say to men: ‘Remember what you know and what you are’” (Barclay).

Reminders re-enforce. Reminders reestablish and, thus, motivate to action. “Readers of this letter knew the truth and were even established in it (2 Peter 1:12), but that was no guarantee they would always remember the truth and apply it” (Wiersbe). When truth recedes to the background of awareness, it is not far from being lost altogether (Hodges).

“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 have 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” (Green).

Now Peter was determined to remind them of these things while he was still alive. He says, “Yes, I think it is right so long as I am in this tent to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me” (1:13-14). “Tent” was a common Greek word for the body (Green). The figure of believers living in a tent underscored life’s temporary and transitory nature. It also pictures life after death. The occupant of the tent will “strike” his tent (2 Cor. 5:1) to move on to somewhere else. To illustrate from grammar, death is not a period that brings life to a full stop; it is only a comma. There is more to come.

In his case, he was aware that the folding of his tent was “shortly.” The Greek word rendered “shortly” has been interpreted to mean 1) soon or 2) suddenly. Both are possible. Shortly or soon is probably the intended meaning. He was over sixty when he wrote (Green). Nero had begun persecuting Christians. As a prominent leader, Peter could see his departure was near (Hodges). After all, the Lord had told him about his death (Jn. 20:18-19). So, while his tent was still pitched, he would use it as a lighthouse to remind believers of what they already knew. As long as he is alive, he is resolved to stir them up, that is, arouse them completely, as from the rest of sleep. “A sleeping church is the devil’s playground” (Wiersbe).

Later Peter adds, “Moreover, I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease” (1:15). The Greek word translated “decease” means “departure, exodus.” Peter was bent on reminding them while he was dwelling in the tent of his body, and after that, he departed from his tent. What did Peter leave behind that would remind believers of these things after his death? The future tense seems to eliminate this book (Green). Many have concluded that Peter had in mind the book we call Mark (Green; Barclay; Hodges). The life of Christ, as recorded in the Gospel of Mark, is the foundation and embodiment of the truths that Peter has written (1:3-4 and esp. 1:11-12). Mark’s gospel reminds us of the things Peter wants us to remember.

Thomas Brooks said, “Books may preach when the author cannot, when the author may not, when the author dares not, yea, and which is more when the author is not.” (Brooks, cited by Thomas).

Knowledgeable believers can and do slumber and sleep, relax and rest. They need to be aroused (see “stir you up” in 1:13), which is done by reminding them that they temporarily live in a tent, which will someday be taken down. They will have either an abundant (1:11) or a barren (1:8) entrance into the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wake up; the King is coming.

Why was Peter so intent on reminding them of these truths? Why was he so determined to do so even after his death? The answer is in 2 Peter 1:16 (“for”).

## The Return of Christ

*Not Fables* Peter now explains (“for”), “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:16a). Peter was intent on reminding believers about the coming Kingdom (1:11) because he was convinced it was the truth! He insists that his lifelong preaching of this truth was not speculation. The message of the coming of Christ in power is not a “cleverly concocted myth” (Hodges). Perhaps the mockers and scoffers (3:3) charged that the teaching of Christ’s Second Coming was a mere, cleverly crafted fable “resting on fictitious prophecies” (Mayor). They denied the promise of His coming (Wiersbe). The false teachers Peter is attacking “no longer believed in the Second

Coming of Christ” (Barclay). Peter defends himself against accusations of false teachers (Green). “Second Peter is above all the letter which seeks to recall men to believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ” (Barclay).

*Personal Experience* On the contrary, Peter claims the coming of Christ is not a fable but a fact. He insists, “but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (1:16b). “We” is a reference to the apostles Peter, James, and John (Wiersbe). They were “eyewitnesses,” a rare Greek word used of the highest degree of spiritual initiation and insight. In the highest, finest sense of the term, the apostle witnessed Christ’s majesty. When did that happen?

Peter explains, “For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such voice came to Him from the excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,’ and we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the Holy Mount” (1:17-18). In other words the apostles saw the “power” and “majesty” (1:16), “honor and glory” (1:17) of Jesus Christ on the Mount of transfiguration (Mayor). Peter claims that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is not a fable but a fact because he and the other apostles saw Christ transfigured and, thus, in a real sense, saw His Second Coming. The transfiguration affirmed the reality of the Kingdom of God (Wiersbe). It was a “foretaste of the triumphant glory of the Second Coming” (Barclay). The Synoptic Gospel relates the transfiguration and the coming of Christ in His Kingdom (Mt. 16:28; 17:1; Mk. 9:1-2; Lk. 9:27, 28; esp. the word “power” in Mk. 9:1). The transfiguration immediately follows the prophecy of Jesus, which says some standing there would not pass from the world until they had seen Son of Man coming in His kingdom, which would certainly seem to indicate that the transfiguration and the Second Coming were linked together (Barclay). “The power which makes provision for a fruitful life, and the coming which rewards it, are both verified in the Transfiguration” (Hodges).

*The Prophetic Word* From personal experience, Peter turns his attention to the prophetic Word, saying, “We also have the prophetic word made more sure” (1:19a). This statement means either 1) We have a more sure word than our experience, namely the prophetic Scripture (Green). In other words, “If you don’t believe me, believe the Scripture.” 2) The apostolic witness makes the prophetic Scripture even more sure (Mayor; Barclay; Hodges). Most commentators follow view 2 (Green, but he takes view #1). By virtue of their eyewitness experience of the transfiguration, the prophetic Scripture now has an authentication they did not have before that encounter. Either way, Peter is declaring that the prophetic Scripture concerning the coming of Christ is sure, a Greek legal term for guaranteed security. These predictions are reliable, dependable, and sure. The Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would be born in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) at the time specified by Daniel (Dan. 9:25).

## The Result in Believers

*Heed* Since the prophetic word is certain, Peter says, “You do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place” (1:19b). The Greek word rendered “heed” means “to turn one’s mind to, to attach or devote oneself to.” Believers would do well to focus and pay attention to God’s reliable predictions. The prophetic Word is like a lamp shining in a dark place. “Dark” is the translation of a Greek word that means “dry, dark, dirty, dismal” (A and G). It appeared in an ancient epitaph with a dark funeral color (M and M). The English word “dismal” comes close to it (Hodges). The world is indeed a dark, dirty, dingy, dismal place over which an atmosphere of death hangs. The prophetic word is a light upon which believers ought to focus.

Until Peter continues, “Until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your heart” (1:19c). Believers should turn their attention to God’s prophetic lamp until the day dawns and the morning star rises in their hearts. “The day” is a reference to the Day of the Lord, the day He rules and reigns on this earth (3:10; Rom. 13:12). The day dawning was a rare expression used of the first streaks of dawn breaking through the darkness” (Mayor). The morning star refers to Christ Himself (Rev. 22:16). When the first streaks of dawn appear, we look for the day star. In other words, both of these expressions refer to the Coming of Christ (Green).

The phrase “in your hearts” modifies both “until the day dawns” and “the morning star.” Both are expressing the effect of prophecy on the heart (Hodges). Thus, Peter is saying to meditate and concentrate on prophetic realities until they are so real that it is as if the day has dawned and the star has appeared. Prophecy was not given to satisfy our curiosity but to illuminate our hearts.

I have heard the Hallelujah chorus of Handel’s Messiah when I almost felt transported by it into the day it speaks. The refrain “He shall reign” repeatedly drives the truth home. When the truth of the future day dawns in your heart, you can no longer be satisfied with the corruption in the world through lust. In this dark, dirty, dismal world, look at God’s lamp and keep your eye on it until your heart shines with its truth. If you don’t, you will be tripped up by the darkness.

“Whatever the precise details, the main emphasis is manifest: we are on pilgrimage throughout our lives in this dark world. God has graciously provided us with a lamp, the Scriptures. We shall walk safely if we pay attention to them for reproof, warning, guidance, and encouragement. If we neglect them, we shall be engulfed by darkness. The whole course of our lives ought to be governed by the Word of God” (Green).

Peter adds, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation” (1:20). This verse has been interpreted in several different ways. It has been taken to mean 1) No prophecy comes from the prophet’s own interpretation, that is, it comes from God (Green). 2) No prophecy is to be interpreted in isolation (that is, by itself without comparing it to others (Hodges). 3) No prophecy is to be understood by private interpretation, that is, by an individual apart from the church (Barclay). The content indicates that Peter is talking about authentication, not interpretation, divine origin, and improper interpretation (Green). Therefore, 2 Peter 1:20 says prophets did not make up their prophecy. Prophecy was not the personal interpretation of the prophet; he did not speak his own words or give his own views.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon summarized it well when he exclaimed, “The Bible is the writing of the living God. Each letter was penned with an Almighty finger. Each word in it dropped from the Everlasting lips. Moses was employed to write his histories with his fiery pen, but God guided that pen. David touched his harp and let sweet Psalms of melody drop from his fingers, but God moved his hands over the living strings. Solomon sang canticles of love and gave forth words of consummate wisdom, but God directed his lips and made the preacher eloquent. If I follow the thundering Nahum and the noise of his prancing horses, or Habakkuk when he sees the tents of Cushan in affliction; if I read Malachi when the earth is burning like an oven; if I turn to the smooth page of John who tells of love, or the rugged chapters of Peter who speaks of fire devouring God’s enemies; if I turn aside to Jude who launches forth anathemas upon the foes of God—everywhere I find the Lord speaking. It is His voice, not man’s ... the words of the Eternal, the Invisible, the Almighty, the Jehovah of the ages. This Bible came from His heart; when I see it, I hear a voice springing up from it saying, ‘I am the book of God—read me. I am God’s writing—love me!’” (*Our Daily Bread*, 5/31/72).

As Peter goes on to explain (“for”), “For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” (1:21). Prophecy did not originate with men but with God. He moved holy men. The Greek word rendered “moved” was used of a ship being carried along by the wind (Acts 29:15, 17). The Holy Spirit filled the words of the prophets and carried them in the direction He wished so that what they spoke and wrote was the word of God (Green). The prophetic Scriptures were not self-inspired; they were Spirit-inspired.

Green says, “It should now be apparent that Peter has been replying to two charges by the false teachers. To their contention that the apostles were purveying myths about Jesus, his power, and coming, Peter says, ‘Not so: we were with him at the transfiguration. We were eyewitnesses.’ He then adduces the Old Testament as a witness who is even more unimpeachable than the apostles and should be common coin to the sectaries and the orthodox. But they respond by rejecting the authority of the Old Testament, denying its divine origin, and saying that the prophets simply produced their own ideas. So Peter strongly reasserts the conviction, common to Jews, Jesus, and Christians alike, that the Old Testament has indeed a divine origin, and when the prophets spoke the prophecies recorded in Scripture, they were men in touch with God who acted as his spokesmen.”

Donald Gray Barnhouse writes, “In my student days in Europe, I left France, where I was studying for several years at the university, and went down to Athens to live for several months in connection with one of my graduate courses in Greek archaeology. At the time, I worked all day in the great museum in Athens. During the day, my young wife and our baby of a year spent a great deal of their time in the courtyard until my day’s work was done, and then the three of us would go to the Acropolis with our picnic supper and walk among the great ruins, and look out over the magnificent scene. One evening, I was sitting on a stone on the western summit of the Acropolis, looking out across the bay of Salamis, with the tip of Akra-Corinth on the far distant horizon. I had in my hands one of the ancient Greek historians and I was reading the account of the battle of Salamis for beneath us on that blue water had been fought one of the decisive battles of the world’s history. There the navy of Greece had destroyed the great Persian fleet and ended the threat of the Orient against the West for several hundred years. The historian told how one of the triremes was fitted with a prow of sharpened metal and how it sheared away the oars of one of the enemy vessels. The slaves on the other side of the vessel kept rowing so that the boat turned around in a circle and the iron blade then sheared away the oars on the opposite side and the ship lay helpless before the wind carried exactly where the wind wished it to be carried. In my memory, there was a faint stirring. It seemed that I remembered those Greek words of a ship being carried by the wind wherever the wind wished to carry it. Suddenly I remembered that it was in a passage of the New Testament. I had my Greek Testament in my pocket and opened it searching for the phrase. Then I remembered these words of Peter and turned to them: “The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (II Pet. 1:21). In other words, these men did not initiate the writing of the Old Testament” (Donal Gray Barnhouse, *Man’s Ruin*, p. 29).

“Thus, we can rely on the apostolic account of the transfiguration because God spoke and we can rely on Scripture because God spoke behind its human authors” (Green).

**Summary:** Believers need to be reminded of the truth they already know concerning the coming of Christ because it is a truth that needs to become a reality in their hearts until it directs their lives.

1. You need to hear the prophetic word preached repeatedly.

2. You need to think about the prophetic word continually.
3. You need to constantly live in the present in light of the future.

I have driven for close to 50 years. During those years, I have been involved in only a few accidents, most of which were not my fault. On the two occasions when I was at fault, I backed into someone who pulled in behind after I looked. Recently, however, I ran into the back of a car. I had just pulled onto the street and was going about 15 to 20 MPH. The setting sun, which was right at the horizon, blinded me. My car, which was old, suffered what looked like minor damage, but because it was old, it was totaled. The good news was that no one was hurt. My mother was right; I need to be constantly reminded to be careful. We all need to be constantly reminded that the Lord is coming back.

E. Schuyler English said, “A man who lived on Long Island was able one day to satisfy a lifelong ambition by purchasing a very fine barometer for himself. When the instrument arrived at his home, he was extremely disappointed to find that the indicating needle appeared to be stuck, pointing to the sector marked ‘hurricane.’ After shaking the barometer very vigorously several times, its new owner sat down and wrote a scorching letter to the store from which he had purchased the instrument. The following morning, on the way to his office in New York, he mailed the letter. That evening, he returned to Long Island to find not only the barometer missing but also his house. The barometer’s needle had been right—there was a hurricane!” (*Our Daily Bread*, 4/28/80).

# BELIEVERS BEWARE

There are dangers in the world. Parents know they must warn their children of dangers such as drugs. Doctors warn their patients and the public about disease. There are spiritual dangers in the world about which believers need to be warned. In fact, these dangers exist in the church. Going to church can be dangerous to your spiritual health! Peter explains this in the second chapter of his second letter.

## The Presence of False Teachers

*Their Presence* “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you” (2:1a). There were false *prophets* in ancient Israel. They claimed that they had a message from God but did not. They claimed to be prophets but prophesied false things. Their prophecy could not be trusted. False prophets were not holy men of God. They were unholy and unreliable. The religion of the false prophets was “easy, comfortable, and popular” (Wiersbe).

Instead of saying that like there were false *prophets* among the ancient Jews, so there *are* false *prophets* among believers, Peter pens, “There *will be* false *teachers* among you.” The counterpart to an Old Testament false prophet will not be a New Testament false *prophet* but a false *teacher*. Peter is not saying there *are* (present tense) false *teachers* among the original recipients of this epistle. He is saying there *will be* (future tense) false *teachers* among them (for a discussion of the future and present tense in this chapter, see Hiebert in *Bib. Sac.* Sept. 1984, p. 257). This suggests that the prophetic gift will largely or completely cease and men will just claim to be teachers. Peter is speaking directly to our day. False teachers are present. When God does His work, Satan produces a counterfeit. “Whenever God erects a house of prayer, the devil always builds a chapel there” (Daniel Defoe, cited by Hiebert, p. 257).

How do we know a false teacher? Isn't it much easier to identify a false prophet? He predicts something and it does not come to pass, but how does a person know who a false teacher is?

*Their Destructive Doctrines* Peter answers that question when he says the false teachers are those “who secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them” (2:1b). These false teachers “secretly bring in” their teaching. The Greek word translated “secretly” means “to lead in by one's side, introduce, to bring in secretly” (the noun form appears in Gal. 2:4). Here, it means “introduce” (Mayor) or “introduce secretly” (Green). It implies that the false teachers “enter the churches concealing the doctrines they actually hold until they are safely a part of the congregation (Hodges).

They introduce “heresies.” The Greek word rendered “heresies” means “to choose, that which is chosen,” hence, “opinion,” especially a peculiar opinion, heresy.” Here it means “doctrine” (Hodges). It is in the plural, indicating that Peter has more than one doctrine in mind.

In the context of 2 Peter, the doctrine denied is the Second Coming of Christ (3:3-4). This verse says that they will deny the “Lord.” The Greek word “Lord” is not the usual word for “Lord.” It is the Greek word from which we get the English word “despot.” It was used to describe a dictator who had absolute power. Perhaps the false teachers Peter has in mind denied the Lordship of Christ. They are also said to deny the Lord who “bought” them. The Greek word



translated “bought” is the Greek word “redeemed.” The verse clearly teaches unlimited atonement (Hodges, who says also see 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Jn. 2:2; 1 Tim. 2:4-6). Christ died even for those who deny Him. Christ died for all, but only those who trust Him will have the benefits of His death applied to them.

Maybe these false teachers denied doctrines pertaining to the death of Christ. False teachers deny the person and work of Christ. They will deny that Christ is God or that Christ became a man, or they will reject the finished work of Christ as the basis of redemption. False teachers today ridicule the virgin birth, claim Christ was not divine, teach His death was not substitutionary, and His bodily resurrection was a myth.

Peter is proclaiming that false teachers will be present in churches! Actually, this should come as no surprise. Jesus taught that unsaved people could be very religious and still not know Him (Mt. 7:21-23).

Their teaching is described as “destructive heresies.” Destructive heresies are “opinions” that are “destructive of true faith” (Green). Any doctrine that denies either the person or work of Christ is destructive. It leads to the ruin of the one who embraces it. False teachers will “bring on themselves swift destruction” (2:1c). For them, denying the doctrine of Christ will be deadly. They will end up in hell (2:17). This will be fully developed in 2 Peter 2:3-9.

Marc Kobrin of Stockton, California, asked *Parade Magazine*, “On 9/11, foreign terrorists murdered more than 3000 people. But my question is: Which American has committed the most murders? Their answer was, “That dubious distinction goes to Jim Jones, the American-born cult leader who orchestrated the 1978 mass suicide of 912 of his followers in Guyana by coercing them to drink cyanide-laced punch” (*Parade Magazine*, 10/19/03). Religion can be deadly.

*Their Deceived Followers* As a result of false teachers being in their destructive doctrine, “many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed” (2:2). This verse is parenthetical; it refers to the “deluded followers” of the false teachers (Mayor). The “many” mentioned in 2 Peter 2:2 are believers! That is the inescapable conclusion of a careful analysis of the context. Verse 1 says these false teachers brought in their doctrine. Brought in where? Obviously, the church! The latter part of verse 2 says the result of the “many” following the destructive ways of the false teachers is the way of truth will be blasphemed. Only believers who once confessed and cling to the truth would be drawn away from it and cause it to be blasphemed.

Believers will follow the “destructive ways” of false teachers. The majority of Greek manuscripts contain a Greek word here that means “licentiousness, excess” (Gal. 5:19). It is “reckless immorality” (Green). These false teachers will be “apologists for a depraved lifestyle” (Hodges). This same Greek word is translated “lewdness” in Jude, “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4).

Barclay says, “They were perverting the grace of God into a justification for sin. They were telling men that grace was inexhaustible and that they were free to sin as they liked, for grace would forgive. They were presenting God’s grace in a way which made grace a reason for sin.” The moral departure of believers from the way of truth will cause the way of truth to be blasphemed. As a result of following false teachers, the behavior of believers will bring reproach to the cause of Christ. The corrupt conduct of Christians causes Christianity to be slandered.

To sum up, false teachers are present. They deny the doctrine of Christ. They deceive believers. They ultimately cause the way of truth to be discredited, and they bring destruction on themselves. They deserve to be judged, which is precisely what will happen to them.

## The Punishment of False Teachers

*The Charge* Peter begins this sub-section on the punishment of false teachers by stating the charge against them. He says, “By covetousness, they will exploit you with deceptive words” (2:3a). The word rendered “by” is the Greek word “in,” which describes “sphere.” The sphere where these false teachers function is not “in Christ;” it is “in covetousness.” Their appeal is to basic human covetousness (Hodges). They “exploit” believers (“you”), a Greek word that was a commercial term that meant “to travel, expensive for business, to make a gain of.” Financial gain is their goal (1 Tim. 6:5). Their motive is personal gain (Green). They are not ministers; they are merchandisers (Wiersbe). Such false teachers deserve to be judged. Someone said, “The greatest thief will rob you of the truth.”

Both the Old and New Testaments speak of false prophets and teachers who perform “ministry” for money. Micah says, “Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD and say, ‘Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us’” (Micah 3:11). Paul warns of “useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of gain*. From such withdraw yourself” (1 Tim. 6:5).

A direct appeal to covetousness would be easily detected. So, they exploit with deceptive words. Their method is deception. The Greek word translated “deceptive” means “to make up, fabricate.” Lies and deceptions are their means of making money. In our day, the appeal might be something like, “It is O.K. to be you; God created you that way.” Satan deceived Eve (1 Tim. 2:14) by quoting the Scripture (Gen. 3:1-6). He questioned God’s Word (“has God said”), denied God’s Word (“You will not surely die”), and substituted his lie (“you shall be like God”).

Barclay says, “Diogenes, the great cynic philosopher, spoke of the false teachers of his day whose method it was to follow wherever the applause of the crowd led. One of the first characteristics of the false prophet is that he tells men what they want to hear and will not tell them the truth they need to hear. His aim is popularity, and his touchstone is applause.”

*The Judgment* False teachers not only deserve judgment but they will be judged. Peter declares, “For a long time their judgment has not been idle and their destruction does not slumber” (2:3b). The judgment on such people is not idle; it is active. It does not slumber nor sleep; it is awake and alive. It has worked in the past; it is at work now and will be operative in the future.

In 2 Peter 2:4-6, Peter lists three examples of God’s judgment: the angels (2:4), the antediluvian world (2:5), and the cities of the plain (2:6).

1. Angels. Peter explains, “For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved for judgment (2:4). Genesis 6 records the sin of some of the angels who cohabited with women (Gen. 6:1-4; see Jude 6). Peter is referring to those angels who sinned (Mayor). The sin of these angles was rebellion (Jude 6) and lust (Gen. 6:1-4; see also Green).

Not all agree that the sons of God in Genesis 6 are angles. Augustine declared that no one should take this story literally. Cyril of Alexandria said that the story could not be taken literally because Jesus says that men will be like angels in the afterlife. There will be no marrying or giving in marriage (Mt. 22:30). Chrysostom said if the story was taken literally, it was nothing short of blasphemy. Barclay says, “The sons of God are said to be good men, who were the descendants of Seth, and the daughters of men are said to be evil women who were the daughters

of Cain, and who corrupted the good men. There is no scriptural evidence for this distinction and this way of escape.”

God did not wink at their sin. He did not spare them from judgment just because they were angels. He cast them into hell. The word Greek translated “hell” (tartarus) only occurs here in the Bible. Barclay says that in Greek mythology, it is the lowest hell. Peter describes it as a place where these angels are in “chains of darkness,” apparently a figure for torment. Although they are in torment now, they await the final judgment later, like a condemned criminal in the county jail awaits his final sentencing and transportation to the federal pen.

2. The Antediluvian World. Peter gives a second example, saying, “And did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness bringing the flood in the world of the ungodly” (2:5). The people of Noah’s day were ungodly, a Greek word that suggests that they had no time for God whatever (Green). When the antediluvian world rebelled against God, He did not spare them either. Instead, He destroyed the world with a flood (Gen. 6:9). In this instance, Peter not only mentions the judgment on sinners, but he also refers to the salvation of Noah and his family. Eight were saved. Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives were not judged. The Old Testament does not say that Noah was a preacher of righteousness, although it does say that he was a just man who walked with God (Gen. 6:9).

3. The Cities of the Plain. Peter’s third example also comes from Genesis. It follows in chronological order the first two. Peter writes, “and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemning them to destruction making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly” (2:6). Sodom and Gomorrah were wicked cities. Peter speaks of living ungodly lives (2:6) of “filthy conduct (2:7) and “lawless deeds” (2:8). Granted, the Law was not yet given, but they had the works of the Law written on their hearts (Rom. 2:12-14) and did that which was contrary to nature (Rom. 1:24-27).

When Sodom and Gomorrah persisted in their ungodliness, God rained destruction on them, turning those cities of the plain to ashes (Gen. 19:27-29). The Greek word translated “turning in ashes” in this verse is unique in Scripture. Dio Cassius used it in AD 79 in his description of the eruption of Vesuvius when Pompeii was buried in lava (Green).

God not only destroyed the cities of the plain, but He also recorded their ruin as an everlasting example to those who came after. (There is documentation outside the Scripture that Sodom and Gomorrah actually existed. Tablets uncovered in Tell-Mardiolph in Syria say the Eblaites traded with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.) They were vast and powerful cities of their day. Today, they do not exist. They are under the Dead Sea.

Again, as with the example of Noah, Peter not only talks about the punishment of sinners but also about Lot’s salvation. “And delivered righteous Lot who was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man dwelling among them tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)” (2:7-8). Genesis does not say Lot was a righteous man. It pictures him as being self-centered (Gen. 13:10-12) and sinful (Gen. 19:1-11 esp. 19:8 and 19:30-35, that is, he got drunk). Lot was spared because he was a believer and because Abraham prayed for him (Wiersbe).

Nevertheless, Peter says that the lawlessness Noah heard and saw tormented his soul, and moral corruption oppressed him. He was shocked by the sin he saw. Are we as spiritually sensitive as carnal Lot? God, by His Grace, delivered Lot when He punished the cities of the plain. Barclay quotes Newman, who said, “Our great security against sin lies in being shocked at it” and adds that the things that should cause shock are “accepted as part of the normal order of things;” they are “regarded as unfortunate and regrettable.”

Green summarizes this section, “Peter concentrates on the pride and rebellion of the angels, the apathy and disobedience of the men of Noah’s day, and the sheer sensuality of the men of Sodom, presumably because these were all characteristic of the false teachers he was opposing.”

## The Deliverance from False Teachers

*God will Judge* In verse 4, Peter began a long sentence he has yet to finish. He said, “If God did not spare the angels.” The expected conclusion would be “then He will not spare false teachers,” but Peter also proclaimed pardon. So, when he comes to the conclusion, it is twofold. He says, “Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (2:9). Peter’s point is God knows very well how to punish unjust, ungodly, unreliable false teachers and He will. If the angels who sinned were not spared, false teachers will not escape. If the entire Antediluvian world was not spared, false teachers will not either. If Sodom and Gomorrah, two of the greatest trade centers of their day, were destroyed, so will false teachers be destroyed.

*God can Save* God also knows how to spare the godly. Thus, the readers are encouraged not to participate in the false teachers’ wickedness. More specifically, believers are to refrain from the temptations mentioned in this very passage, including covetousness (2:3), immorality (2:4), rebellion (2:5), and all ungodliness (2:6). Don’t be like the angels or the people of the plain, but be like Noah and Lot.

God delivered Noah and Lot from the world’s pollution and judgment. Noah and his wife reared a family in a world so wicked their children had no believing friends. According to Peter, the Ark is a type of our salvation in Christ (1 Pet. 3:20-22; Wiersbe).

**Summary:** As there were false prophets in Old Testament times, there will be false teachers today who will lead even believers astray, but know that God will punish false teachers and their ungodliness and will spare the righteous from judgment.

This problem is more common than you might think. Peter says that “many” (2:2) will follow false teachers. You can no more compromise with false doctrine “any more than a surgeon could compromise with a cancerous tumor in a patient’s body” (Wiersbe). The way to escape the false teachers is to believe God’s Word (They denied the Second Coming.), grow (They lived ungodly lives.), and beware.

Pelicans can spot their dinner high above the water and zero in on it with amazing accuracy. They soar overhead, trying to locate a school of fish. Suddenly, they drop their “wing flaps,” aim their long beaks toward the “target area,” go into a “power-dive,” and crash into the water with a tremendous splash.

Some, however, get lazy. Congregating where the fishermen line the bridges and piers, they just bob around on the water, waiting to gobble up any catch that might be thrown back. These he calls “freeloaders.” The problem is that they often pay quite a price. Richards DeHaan writes, “Although endowed with amazing ability to discern the tiniest fish, they just can’t seem to see the many fishing lines stretching from the bridge into the water. Often, they crash right through them—getting all tangled up in the process. What a strange sight to see a fisherman with a pelican on the end of his line! If you watch carefully, you will notice that many birds trail fishing lines from their wings with hooks imbedded in their bodies. All this because they refused to use their abilities and became ‘freeloaders.’”

Some believers are like freeloaders. They are too lazy in their study habits and do not employ the abilities that the Lord has given them to search for the spiritual food that abounds in the ocean of His Word. Instead, they wait for someone else to feed them. Gullible Christians, who just snatch up that which “tickles their ears,” are often “hooked” by these false teachers. Don’t be a “freeloader.” Pattern yourself after the Bereans who “searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

## THE ANATOMY OF A FALSE TEACHER

In his book, *Kids Say the Darndest Things!*, Art Linkletter says, “Children under ten and women over seventy give the best interviews ... for the identical reasons: They speak the plain, unvarnished truth. They dish it out in no uncertain terms, with heartfelt emotion coloring each phrase. No concealing, flattering, hypocritical editorializing.... If you don’t want the truth—better not ask them!” Linkletter interviewed 15,000 youngsters on his “House Party” show in the 1950s. Here are a couple of the best ones:

What does your mom do? Answer: She’s a Sunday School teacher. What does she do for fun? Answer: She plays poker and drinks beer....

Another young man was talking about his Dad’s profession. “My Dad’s a cop who arrests burglars, robbers, and thieves.” Linkletter asked, “Doesn’t your mother worry about such a risky job?” He answered, “Naw, she thinks it’s a great job. He brings home rings and bracelets and jewelry almost every week!”

Those who are supposed to do what is right don’t always do what they are supposed to do. We all know that. It gets worse. Leaders don’t always do what they are supposed to do. For some reason, I’m not sure that I understand, there is a fascination with bad behavior. For example, we are curious about serial killers. What makes a person kill over and over again? If a documentary probes that, I would like to see it. Spiritually, the same kind of thing intrigues me concerning false teachers. What makes them do what they do?

Joseph Caryl, one of the old Puritan Divines, once said, “There are three kinds of lies: a lie told, a lie taught, a lie acted out” (Thomas, p. 108). I understand why people tell lies and act them out, but why would anyone deliberately teach a lie? A person tells a lie or acts out to cover up something he has done that he does not want discovered, but what motivates a false teacher to teach false doctrine? Is he trying to cover something up? If so, what? Why teach a falsehood? Would not just telling a falsehood do? Why teach lies as truth? What is the anatomy of a false teacher? Let’s dissect one to see what makes him tick.

### Despise Authority

*Their Problems* Having declared emphatically that false teachers will be judged (2:4-9), Peter now describes them: “and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority” (2:10). The opening sentence of this sub-section names two characteristics of these false teachers: 1) they pursue unclean fleshly desires and 2) they despise authority. In the Greek text, one article unites these two things together. In the following verses, these two features are developed in reverse order (*cf.* 2:10b-12 with 2:13-14).

*Their Attitude* First, Peter describes their general attitude toward authority, pointing out, “They are presumptuous, self-willed; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries” (2:10b). The Greek word translated “presumptuous” means “bold, daring.” It “denotes reckless daring that defies God and man” (Green). The Greek word rendered “self-will” means “self-pleasing, arrogant.” It was “used for an obstinate fellow determined to please himself of all cost” (Green). Mayor renders this “shameless and headstrong.” Barclay says that if a person is self-willed, “neither logic, nor common-sense, nor appeal, nor a sense of decency will keep him from doing

what he wants to do and what he has decided to do.” He is stubbornly, arrogantly, and even brutally determined in his own way and has no regard for human appeal or divine guidance.

Trench says that self-willed people are those who please themselves and are so pleased with themselves that nothing else pleases them. They are so overvaluing any determination at which they have arrived that they will not be moved from it. They are stubborn and obstinate. They obstinately maintain their opinion or assert their rights and are reckless with the rights, feelings, and interests of others.

Their arrogant pride expresses itself in railing against dignitaries, a Greek word that probably refers to angelic dignitaries in this verse. Some interpret “dignitaries” to mean church leaders (Green, who cites Biggs), but in light of the next verse, the reference is probably to angels.

*An illustration* To demonstrate the height of their arrogance, Peter says, “Whereas angels who are greater in power and might do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord” (2:11). This verse has been called “exceedingly difficult” (Green) because the Greek is ambiguous and the background is unknown. For example, to whom does the “them” refer? A number of interpretations have been suggested. Whatever explanation of the particulars, this verse contrasts the headstrong false teachers and the angels (Bengel; Alford; Mayor; Green).

Peter’s point seems to be that angels, who are greater than the false teachers in power and might, dare not bring insulting condemnations before the Lord against their *inferiors*, but the false teachers arrogantly speak disrespectfully about their *superiors*. Other elaborations, such as Michael not charging Satan over the body of Moses (Jude 9), are speculation.

In contrast to the angels, Peter says concerning the false teachers, “But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of things they do not understand and will utterly perish in their own corruption.” (2:12). The Greek word rendered “beast” means “without reason, irrational.” The false teachers were like irrational creatures who followed the dictates of their passions (Green). Senseless animals were designed by God to be caught and killed for food and clothing. These false teachers were acting like dumb animals in that they were speaking evil things they did not understand. Since they lived like dumb animals, they will end up in the slaughterhouse (Green). False teachers are like animals, not angels. What they are doing is irrational. The fact that they have spoken evil against authorities higher than themselves indicates that they are not submissive to authority; they have made themselves an authority.

Ashleigh Brilliant, that odd vestige of the seventies who scribbled his offbeat humor on hippie postcards, once penned: “All I ask of life is a constant and exaggerated sense of my own importance.” Actor Sir Ian McKellen, who played Gandalf in the *Lord of the Rings*, confesses, “Whenever I stay at a hotel, I always check to see if they have a Gideon Bible and if they do, I tear out a page,” says the openly gay actor. “I turn to Leviticus 18:22 and rip out that page, which is directed against homosexuals.... I think by now, I must have ripped out a few hundred. Who knows? There might be someone who has insomnia...who reads the Bible because they have nothing else to do and who might be especially vulnerable to what I really think is Leviticus’ pornography.”

## **Dominated by Fleshly Desires**

*Carousing* In verse 10, Peter listed two characteristics of false teachers. Having developed one of these characteristics, namely, despising authority, Peter now moves on to the second: “and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with

**you” (2:13).** False teachers not only despise authority but they are also dominated by fleshly desire. More specifically, they consider it a pleasure (Greek: “luxurious”) to carouse in the daytime. The Greek word rendered “carousing” in this verse means “to revel in.” In ancient times, as today, riotous living was carried on at night (1 Thess. 5:7). Even degenerate Roman society frowned on daylight debauchery (Green). Peter’s rebuttal to the charge of drunkenness was that it was too early in the day (Acts 2:15). Yet, these false teachers were not only pursuing fleshly pleasure. They did it unashamedly in the daylight.

Moreover, they apparently attended the love feast with believers at night (see Jude 12, where the word for feast is used of the love feast). There were spots and blemishes on the love feast. Christ Himself is “as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19). His Bride, the church, is to be present to Him “not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.” She is to be “holy and without blemish.” (Eph. 5:27). These false teachers were spots and blemishes. Jude says, “*in your love feast* (Jude 12). They were not a blessing to the assembly but a blemish on it (Wiersbe). The Corinthians were greedy and drunk at the Lord’s Table (1 Cor. 11:21). Green says the Corinthians were immoral at the love feast.

Their fleshly desires are called “their own deceptions.” They are personally deceived concerning their sin. They think things like they will get away with it.

Sin is subject to the law of diminishing returns. Periodic drunkenness at night ceases to satisfy; it is expanded to the daytime. Then daylight drunkenness is not enough; it is extended all the way to the love feast (Green). The pleasure of sin is only for a season. After a while, sin loses its pleasure. When that happens, it takes more and more to satisfy, and even then, the satisfaction is only temporary. Over time, the sinner is less and less able to enjoy the sin.

These false teachers will receive wages of unrighteousness. The word rendered “receive” means “to receive back, to recover.” They will receive an equal return on their investment. They invested their lives in unrighteousness and will receive the wages due them. The wages of unrighteousness is death. (Rom. 6:23).

Living according to the flesh is self-destructive; it is suicidal. Anger produces adverse effects on the body. Drunkards destroy their bodies (sclerosis of the liver). The self-indulgent sabotages the reputation.

*Immorality* There is more. Peter continues the description of their nature. **“Having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, beguiling unstable souls” (2:14a).** For them walking “according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness” (2:10), including sexual sin. Men whose eyes are full of adultery are men who lust after virtually every female they see (Mayor). They view women as potential sexual partners (Green; Barclay). Furthermore, they become so dominated by lust that they “cannot cease from sin.” It becomes impossible for them to look without lust. When they see a woman, they immediately reflect on her likely sexual performance and perhaps on the possibility of persuading her to participate (Green).

Men whose hearts are so filled with adultery that they cannot stop eventually end up “beguiling unstable souls.” The Greek word translated beguiling means “to allure by bait, entice.” The metaphor from fishing is particularly appropriate for Peter the fisherman (2:18 and Jas. 1:14). These false teachers bait, entice, and catch unstable women who easily fall because they do not have their feet firmly planted on Christ (Green). They appeal to immature people.

Stability is critical in spiritual growth (1:12; Rom. 1:11; 16:25). Believers must be established in God’s Word to detect when the Scripture is twisted and people are exploited.

The American Banking Association sponsored a two-week training program to help tellers detect counterfeit bills. The program was unique. Never during the two-week training did the



tellers look at a counterfeit bill, nor did they listen to any lectures concerning the characteristics of counterfeit bills. All they did was handle authentic currency, hour after hour and day after day until they were so familiar with the truth that they could not be fooled by the false.

Peter adds, “They have a heart trained in covetous practices and are accursed children (2:14b).” No wonder these false teachers end up in adultery. They have hearts trained for covetousness. The Greek word rendered “trained” means “to exercise naked, to exercise, to train.” It is the Greek word from which we get the English word gymnasium (Green). The Greek word translated “covetousness” can refer to any kind of excessive craving, but the context here points to sexual covetousness. As the athlete trains his body, so these men have trained their hearts for adultery by repeated practice. What does that mean? They have exercised their heart, that is, their desires, in covetousness, a word that means a desire for more and more. They have *worked at* grasping for more and more sexual stimulation and activity.

Peter concludes that they are accursed children, an expression that simply means they are children of a curse (Gal 3:10, 13). These are men under the curse of God (Green).

*An Illustration* Peter illustrates what these false teachers would be like by pointing to an individual in the Old Testament. He says, “They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2:15). The expression “the right way is a common Old Testament metaphor for obedience to God (Green). These false teachers have forsaken the way of obedience to God. The Greek word rendered “forsaken” means “to leave behind, to forsake.” It was used for sailing by a place. Consequently, like Balaam, they go astray.

Not taking the right road, the way of truth and righteousness (2:2), they wander off in some other direction, going astray from the way they should have taken all because, like Balaam, they love the wages of unrighteousness, that is, they desire, covet, love the wages unrighteousness pays. In short, covetousness, desiring the wrong thing, led Balaam away from the right way and into the wrong way. False teachers are modern Balaams in that they have a controlling covetousness for greed and gain.

Balaam was a covetous, greedy man. When the children of Israel camped in the plain of Moab, Balak, King of Moab, became deeply concerned. (Num. 22:1-4). Therefore, he sent for Balaam to come and curse the Israelites (Num. 22:5-6). Balaam asked the Lord what he should do and the Lord told him *not* to go to Balak and *not* to curse the Israelites (Num. 22 7-12), but when Balak put pressure on Balaam, he decided to go (Num. 22:18-19). His disobedience was due to covetousness (Num. 22:7, 16-17).

Balaam was covetous, “But he was rebuked for his iniquity; a dumb donkey speaking with a man’s voice restrained the madness of the prophet” (2:16). God rebuked Balaam by putting a human voice in the mouth of a dumb donkey. Numbers 22 explains that an angel of the Lord prevented the donkey on which Balaam was a passenger from continuing the trip. When Balaam struck the animal, it spoke, and God opened Balaam’s eyes so he could see the angel of the Lord (Num. 22:21-33). The dumb donkey had more sense than the prophet, whose action is described as “madness.” The Greek word translated “madness” only appears here in the New Testament. The root of this Greek word means to be “beside one’s mind.” “Balaam knew the right way but deliberately chose the wrong way because he wanted to make money” (Wiersbe).

Wiersbe compares and contrasts Noah, Lot, and Balaam. Noah was separated from the world of his day. He was faithful in his walk with the Lord and his witness to the world. He and his family follow the Lord. Lot knew the truth and was pure, but he lived in the middle of the world. Even though he hated the wickedness of Sodom, he lived in the middle of it, exposing his wife

and daughters to godless influences. Consequently, he lost his family. Balaam not only followed the ways of sin. He encouraged other people to sin. Lot lost his family; Balaam lost his life.

## Deliver Nothing Nurturing

*Well without Water* Peter concludes his description of the nature of false teachers by mentioning several other characteristics. These items have something to say about the teachers and the people sitting under their teaching. Peter pens, “These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, to whom the gloom of darkness is reserved forever” (2:17). A well exists to supply water to others, as a teacher exists to teach others, but false teachers are wells without water. Those coming to a well expect it to deliver satisfying and refreshing water. Nothing is more disappointing to a thirsty soul than discovering that the well does not provide. This was a particularly forceful metaphor for people in the Middle East who lived in an extremely dry country.

*Clouds carried away* Peter’s second figure says something similar. Clouds, like wells, promise satisfying and refreshing rain. In areas like the Middle East, where rain clouds were a matter of life and death, people watched with despair as the wind drove the clouds past without giving a drop of rain. “There is noise, motion, and something to watch, but nothing profitable happens” (Wiersbe).

*Eternal Darkness* False teachers who deny the Lord who bought them are like wells without water and clouds driven past by the wind—they have nothing to offer others. They deserve the gloom of darkness reserved forever for them.

In Bassanio’s mouth, Shakespeare puts these words: “In religion, what damned error but some sober brow will bless it, and approve it with a text, hiding the grossness with fair ornament” (Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act III, scene 2).

**Summary:** False teachers despise authority, are dominated by fleshly desires, are driven by covetousness, deliver nothing profitable for others, and are headed for darkness forever.

The root problem is rebellion. After spending years in counseling, my brother, a licensed therapist, concluded, “The problem is rebellion.” Wiersbe points out that “God has established authority in this world, and when we resist authority, we are resisting God (Rom. 13:1ff). Parents are to have authority over their children (Eph. 6:1-4) and employers over their employees (Eph. 6:5-8). As citizens, we Christians should pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-4), show respect to them (1 Peter 2:11-17), and seek to glorify God in our behavior. As members of a local assembly, we should honor those who have the spiritual rule over us and seek to encourage them in their ministry (Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:1-6). Human government is, in one sense, God’s gift to help maintain order in the world, so that the church may minister the Word and win the lost to Christ (1 Tim. 2:1-8).”

Barclay says, “A true servant of God is humble and seeks to serve others (see the contrast in Phil. 2:20-21). The true servant of God does not think about praise or pay because he serves God from a loving and obedient heart. He honors God and the authority that God has established in this world. In short, the true servant of God patterns himself after Jesus Christ.”

# THE VICTIMS OF FALSE TEACHERS

False teachers are abundant; followers of false teachers are even more abundant. For every false teacher, there are hundreds and even thousands of gullible disciples. Why do people follow false teachers? What are the consequences of following a false teacher? Can believers in Jesus Christ be “sucked in” by false teachers?

## Their Preaching

*Their Preaching* Having described false teachers as wells without water and clouds that pass without releasing rain, Peter explains, “For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness” (2:18a). The reason (“for”) the false teachers are like wells without water and clouds without rain is “their words are equally delusive” (Mayor). Like waterless wells and rainless clouds, the words of the false teachers are empty. “Great swell words” translates a single Greek word, which means “excessive weight or size.” These false teachers use big words, and Green calls their discourse “ostentatious verbosity” (Green). Barbieri observes, “A clever way to confuse people is to use words which no one understands. True scholars do not resort to such tactics. Rather they explain in simple terms that which is difficult” (Barbieri). “They know how to impress people with their vocabulary.” There is a large difference between communication and manipulation (Wiersbe). Their fancy verbiage does not amount to anything significant (Green). Their big words are empty. Like a big balloon, their speech looks impressive but contains only air. “Empty barrels make the most noise!”

After listening to Stephen Douglas, Abraham Lincoln said, “My opponent reminds me of a boat on the Mississippi, which had a six-foot boiler and an eight-foot whistle.” Haddon Robinson said, “Liberals say nothing beautifully.” Some preachers are funny. You laugh when you hear them, but after it ends, you wonder what you learned. Some preachers are clever. When you hear them, you are captivated but come away empty. I have listened to preachers and asked, “What in the world did he say?” On the other hand, someone once described a preacher by saying, “He is not what you can call a great orator, but every time he opens his mouth, he says something!”

*Their Promise* With these big empty words, “They allure through the lust of the flesh, through licentiousness” (2:18b). The Greek word translated “allure” is the same one that was translated “beguiling” in 2 Peter 2:14. It means “to allure by bait, to entice.” The bait they use is in the area of the lust of the flesh, more specifically designated licentiousness, a word used in 2 Peter 2:7 (where it is translated “filthy conduct”). It seems to be referring to immorality. The bait they used was a promise of liberty (2:19), but what they had in mind was a perversion of grace (Jude 4). Perhaps they spiritually expressed their sexuality as some second-century heretics did (see Green). These false teachers were using the grace of God to permit sin! Perhaps one current form of this is the churches that permit homosexuality in the name of God being loving.

We are saved by grace; salvation is a gift (Eph. 2:8-9). The grace of God that brings salvation teaches us to deny ungodliness and live godly (Titus 2:11-13). P. T. Forsyth said, “The purpose of life is not to find your freedom but to find your master” (Forsyth, cited by Wiersbe). Wiersbe adds, “Just as a gifted musician finds freedom and fulfillment putting himself or herself under the

discipline of a great artist or an athlete under the discipline of a great coach, so the believer finds true freedom and fulfillment under the authority of Jesus Christ.”

*The Victims* Peter identifies the victims of the false teachers as “the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error” (2:18c). Using big words and appealing to the lust of the flesh, false teachers trap those who have actually escaped from those who live in error. In the opening verse, Peter told his readers that they were given “exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust” (1:4). Those who have escaped the corruption of the world are believers. These are the “unstable souls” of verse 14. False teachers ensnare believers, who, by trusting Christ, have escaped (2:20) from pagans who live their lives in error (Green). Peter’s picture is graphic. False teachers use big, empty words as the fishing line, the lust of the flesh, especially immorality, as the bait to catch believers!

When Roland Hill was going down a street one day, he saw several pigs trailing behind a farmer. “This excited my curiosity so much that I determined to see where the odd procession would end,” says Hill. “To my surprise, I saw the swine follow the man right into the slaughterhouse. I said to him later, ‘Friend, how did you get the pigs to come behind you that way?’ He replied, ‘I had a basket of beans under my arm, and I dropped some as I went along. They followed me just for a few goodies.’ “And so it is,” added Hill, “that Satan has the ‘beans’ of pleasure, lust, and innumerable other sins in his basket. By this means, he persuades multitudes to go his way, leading to the everlasting slaughterhouse of doom!”

## Their Person

*Slaves* There is more. Peter continues, “while they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption” (2:19a). Verse 19 is a parenthesis. The end of 18 speaks of “the ones who have escaped,” and verse 20 picks up that subject again (“they have escaped the pollution of the world”). The battle cry of these false teachers is freedom. They repeatedly proclaim and promise liberty, but they are slaves of corruption. They claim to be servants of God, but they are the servants of sin (Wiersbe). They promise something they do not possess. They talk liberty; they walk in slavery.

Their bondage is a slavery of corruption, a Greek word used several times in the epistle (1:4; 2:12, where it is used twice). It means “decay, destruction, corruption.” There is no liberty in the lust of the flesh, only bondage. Beware of the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13). It promises freedom but ends in bondage. These false teachers are like 300-pound men selling a diet plan or a bald-headed man peddling a lotion “guaranteed to grow hair.”

*Overcome* Peter explains, “for by whom a person is overcome by him also he is brought into bondage” (2:19b). Whoever or whatever overcomes people enslaves them (Mayor). These false teachers were overwhelmed and enslaved by money (2:3, 14, 15), fleshly lust (2:10, 14), and pride (2:10-14; see Wiersbe).

## Their Product

*Overcome* False teachers not only live in bondage, they also produce it in others. As Peter explains, “For if after they have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome” (2:20a). This

verse has been interpreted in two different ways. Some say it describes the false teachers (Alford; Plummer; Mayor), while others contend it refers to the people mentioned in verse 18 (Bengel; Bigg; Hodges). Several factors favor the latter view that these are the same as the people who escaped in verse 18 and they are believers (Hodges). These are “the victims alluded by false teachers away from their former faith” (Stracham).

The individuals of 2 Peter 2:20 have *escaped* the pollution of the world. Using the same Greek word for “escaped,” Peter mentioned in 2 Peter 2:18 (“the ones who have in actuality escaped from those who live in error”). In 2 Peter 2:18, those who had “escaped” were believers. It is only natural to conclude that the ones who escaped in 2 Peter 2:20 are the same believers. Furthermore, they escaped “through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Elsewhere in this epistle, this same terminology is used of true, actual knowledge of Jesus Christ (1:2; 3:18). For Peter, this knowledge is “personal acquaintance” (Green). Those who have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of Jesus Christ are genuine regenerate believers.

If 2 Peter 2:20 is talking about believers, what is the meaning of the last two clauses of the verse? To be “again entangled in them and overcome” is to be entangled again and overcome again in the pollution of the world. The Greek word translated “entangled: is only used twice in the New Testament, here and in 2 Timothy 2:4, where it also refers to believers. It is another fishing metaphor, like bait in 2 Peter 2:14, 18. It means “to be entwined, to be involved.” A believer can be involved, entangled, and overcome by the wickedness of the world. Believers should not be overcome; they should be overcomers. They should not be victims; they should be victors.

*Worse Off* Believers can end up worse off than they were. Peter says, “The latter end is worse for them than the beginning” (2:20b). This is an echo of Jesus’ words (Mt. 12:45; Lk. 11:26). He told of an unclean Spirit coming out of a man and returning to find his former house “swept and put in order” (Lk. 11:25). Then the unclean spirit re-enters, taking seven other spirits “more wicked than himself” (Lk. 11:26). Jesus concluded, “The last state of that man is worse than the first” (Lk. 11:26). Thus, these words, both in the case of Christ and Peter, refer to the spiritual and moral condition to which believers can sink when they go back into the old life. By following a false teacher, believers can end up worse off spiritually and morally than before they began *with that teacher*.

This passage does not say anything about the eternal destiny of the believer. That is secure. Jesus said believers should not perish (Jn. 3:16). The issue in 2 Peter 2 is spiritual bondage. False teachers are “slaves of corruption” (2:19), and believers who follow them are in danger of becoming entangled and overcome by sin again and thus being in bondage to sin again. The issue is their past life, *not* their future destiny (2:22).

Peter explains, “For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, then having known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them” (2:21). The way is the road of righteousness, not the Lord Himself. The individuals spoken of in this verse are believers. The Greek preposition translated “from” implies “that they were once within the realm of *the Holy commandment delivered to them* (i.e., Christians)” (Green, italics). Those who, like the man with the unclean spirit, swept their house and put it in order are worse off if seven unclean spirits return later. Before they knew the way of righteousness, they were slaves to sin. Then, they walk on the road of righteousness. Now, if entangled again in the pollution of the world, they are worse off because they are not only back in bondage (which is definitely possible for a believer; see Gal 5:1), plus they now have worse guilt because they have

known the way of righteousness! The fact that they tasted a righteous life worsens the life of sin. Their guilt and misery are worse.

Peter concludes with a picture of their experience, “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb ‘a dog returns to his own vomit’ and ‘a sow having wallowed in the mire’” (2:22). The first of these proverbs is taken from the book of Proverbs (Prov. 26:11); the second is not. The issue in these proverbs is not the individual’s inner nature. The comparison is between the *actions* of these believers and the actions of a dog or pig. Proverbs 26:11 says, “As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.” As Green explains, “The dog which has got rid of the corruption inside it through vomiting it up cannot leave well alone; it goes sniffing around the vomit again.” The question is, can Christians act like a fools, that is, can they do the same foolish thing repeatedly? Such individuals are worse *because* they *returned* again! As for the pig, many immediately after they are washed off the corruption outside roll in the mud again (Green). “The dupes of the false teachers were cleansed and returned to pollution” (Stracham).

**Summary:** False teachers preach with empty words that appeal to the flesh and promise liberty, but they themselves are in bondage and believers who follow them end up morally worse off than before they followed these false teachers.

The false teachers did not leave them better off; they left them worse off than before they met them. Ronald Reagan asked, “Are you better off than you were four years ago.” He had economics in mind. Perhaps people who follow the teaching of a false teacher should be asking the same question spiritually.

On April 18-22 of 1971, a White House Conference on Youth met at Estes Park, Colorado, and “On the Tuesday after the Conference, the President and his Cabinet reviewed the Conference and its recommendations. As a result of this Cabinet meeting, the President directed all departmental secretaries and agency heads to appoint liaison officers who would coordinate a government-wide response to the Conference proposals,” according to Stephen Hess, National Chairman of the Conference (“Report of the White House Conference on Youth,” pp. 1 and 11). The 310-page report was sent to approximately 26,000 institutional leaders nationwide, asking for their reactions and responses, which gives an idea of the importance of the Conference and its recommendations.

The Conference was attended by 918 people, two-thirds youth between the ages of 14 and 24, and one-third adults. It was supposedly representative of America, though purposely weighted toward minority groups. The conference spoke out on many national and international interest and importance themes. Of particular concern were the recommendations made by the “Task Force on Values, Ethics, and Culture.” Their libertarian doctrine was at the heart of much of the Youth Conference work. They interpreted liberty “as the freedom of all human beings conscientiously to choose their own way of life when their choices do not limit or harm this right of others” (“Report,” p. 9). Further light is cast upon their concept of liberty by their resolution 10.4b on page 243 of the “Report.” “Resolved: The American Civil Liberties Union be commissioned to make a review of all laws in order to guarantee alternative lifestyles.”

Alternative lifestyles are further defined in terms of any type of sexual behavior. This is found under the heading of Sex Roles and Relationships: “Human beings are sexual persons. Ideal sexual relationships are sensitive, concerned, and responsible expressions of human beings. Every person has the right to fully express his or her individual sexuality. Furthermore, any

sexual behavior, when occurring between consenting, responsible individuals, must be recognized and tolerated by society as an acceptable lifestyle” (“Report,” p. 247).

The Task Force on Values, Ethics, and Culture passed a resolution to repeal sexually restrictive legislation: “Resolved: We demand sweeping repeal of legislation, which restricts and represses individual freedoms. Laws, such as those forbidding fornication, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, and so-called ‘unnatural acts’ restrict such freedom. Furthermore, laws restricting or prohibiting abortion or the distribution of contraceptives affect this right. Contraception and education must be available to every person, and abortion is an individual right and choice, a matter to be solely decided by the woman and her physician” (“Report,” p. 250).

One is reminded of the Word of God in 2 Peter 2:19, which says, “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption.”

## WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER A SCOFFER

As we all know, not everyone accepts Christianity. Some are attracted to it but have doubts about it. Others outright deny that it is true. Then, some don't just deny it; they debunk the very idea. Of all the groups we encounter that reject Christianity, the scoffers may be some of the most difficult with which to deal. For starters, no one likes to be laughed at, especially about something near and dear to us as our relationship with the Lord. The other major problem is what they say. They claim to have reasons and logical arguments. Those can cause us to doubt and maybe even deny the truth. What should you do when you encounter a scoffer? You need to know something about the scoffers, something about what they say, and something about the way God works.

### Remember

*Be Mindful* Since Peter's purpose is not just to condemn the false teachers but to remind believers of their responsibility, he turns his attention to the readers. Addressing them as "Beloved," which he does four times in this chapter (3:1, 8, 14, 17), he writes, "Beloved I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder) that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets and of the commandment of us the Apostles of the Lord and Savior" (3:1-2). If this is Peter's second epistle to these believers, what was his first one? Was it the letter we call 1 Peter or another, now lost, letter? While some scholars have concluded that the book we call 1 Peter was not Peter's previous letter to these recipients (Zahn; Sapitta; Green), it is possible that the other letter mentioned here was our 1 Peter. Admittedly, it cannot be proven that the previous letter was 1 Peter, but the basic message of both is the same. Both 1 and 2 Peter exhort believers to live a godly life based on the return of Christ. First Peter is about the soul's salvation, which is motivated by and realized at the coming of Christ. Second Peter enjoins believers to escape the corruption of the world through lust by being motivated with the promise of the return of the Lord. Thus, in both epistles, the Second Coming of Christ motivates godly living (Hodges).

Peter wrote both 1 and 2 Peter to stir their pure minds and remind them of what they already knew (1 Pet. 1:25; 5:12; 2 Pet. 1:12-15). Plato used the phrase "pure minds" to mean "pure reason," that is, unaffected by the seductive influence of the senses (Barclay). It has been taken to mean "uncontaminated reason" (Barclay), "uncontaminated by the poisonous principles of the libertines" (Mayor). Twice in these epistles, Peter tells his readers his purpose is to stir them by reminder (1:13; 3:1). "It is possible to have a pure and sincere mind and yet have a bad memory!" (Wiersbe).

We need to be reminded of spiritual truth. People today want something new; they desire novelty. Granted, too much repetition may be boring, but the reality is that we tend to forget and consequently, we need to be constantly reminded. Dr. Johnson said, "It is not sufficiently considered that men more frequently require to be reminded than informed" (Green). When Einstein was asked if he had a notebook to record his new ideas, he replied that he hadn't gotten many new ideas.



Peter wrote to remind them of the words spoken by the holy prophets and the commandments of the apostles, which indicates that the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament are put on the same level (Green). Both received revelation from the Lord and both wrote Scripture. Some Greek manuscripts (TR) have “us,” and others have “your” (MT; CT). Some who take the “your” reading understand it to mean “your missionary” (Mayor), but even if the “your” reading is correct, this is still a reference to the Apostles (see Green).

The Apostles of whom Peter speaks are the apostles of the “Lord and Savior.” To call Jesus Christ “Lord” means He is God. He is also the Savoir, “not only Savoir from the past (1:1-4), and in the present (2:20), but for the future. To deny the Second Coming of Jesus is to deny Jesus as Savior” (Green).

From what follows, it is obvious that the content of the reminder is at least the truth of the return of Christ. Perhaps, by the words of the prophets, Peter means the prophecies of the Second Advent (1:19-22 and passages in the Old Testament such as Isa. 5:19; Jer. 17:15; Ezek. 12:22), and by the commandment of the apostles, he has in mind command and lives a godly life (2:21). If so, this verse gathers together prophecy and the command to holy living in light of prophecy (Hodges).

The lives and lies of the false teachers are in stark contrast to the walk and talk of the prophets and apostles. The false teachers walked according to the flesh (2:10; 3:3); the prophets and apostles were holy men of God (1:21; 3:2). The false teachers denied the Lord (2:1) and lured and led others into unrighteous living (2:18-19). The prophets and apostles wrote to teach us that the Lord will return, so we should live godly. Peter’s purpose is to warn believers about the false teachers and remind them that they should be godly in light of the Second Coming of Christ (3:9-12, esp. 3:14).

*Be Informed* Before Peter reminds believers of the promise of Christ coming, he tells them there is something they need to know: “knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lust and saying ‘where is the promise of his coming?’” (3:3-4a). Part of Peter’s purpose and part of what believers need to know is that in the last days, scoffers who live according to the flesh will deny the promise of the coming of Christ. Some say the phrase “in the last days” in the New Testament refers to the entire Christian era from the first advent to the second. There is a sense in which the phrase is used that way in some passages (Heb. 1:2). Yet the New Testament also predicts events that will occur just prior to the coming of Christ and in some, the “last days” definitely refers to that period (Mt. 24:11, 24; Jas. 5:3; etc.).

In chapter 2, Peter described false teachers (2:1). Now he speaks of scoffers, those who mock spiritual truth, especially the promise of the coming of Christ (3:3). False teachers were described as among those who “walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness” (2:10). Scoffers likewise are those “walking according to their own lust” (3:3). No doubt, the mockers of chapter 2 are the false teachers of chapter 2 (Green).

Scoffers are people who treat lightly things that ought to be taken seriously. In this case, they scoffed at the return of Christ. Peter, as well as others, preached that the return of Christ was imminent (1 Pet. 4:7). These critics were “scoffing at the very idea of the return of the Lord, the judgment of the world, and the establishment of the glorious kingdom” (Wiersbe). No doubt, the people of Noah’s day scoffed at the idea of a coming flood and the citizens of Sodom scoffed at the possibility of fire and brimstone falling from heaven (Wiersbe).

Living according to the lust of the flesh and denying future events, especially future judgment, regularly occur together. Is there not a connection?” Those living in sin deny prophetic events because of their lifestyle. Is this not Peter’s point? This is the first explicit

reference to “promise” since 2 Peter 1:4, where he spoke of “exceeding great and precious promises” through which believers share in the divine nature. The promise he had in mind is now identified as the promise of Christ’s coming. Peter teaches that the promise of the Second Coming motivates us to live godly lives (3:14). It is no wonder he is concerned that believers who live *sinful lives* will mock the Second Advent. By denying the validity of the promise of the coming of Christ, they cut the ground from under godly living (Hodges). “Cynicism and self-indulgence regularly go together” (Green). “If your lifestyle contradicts the Word of God, you must either change your lifestyle or change the Word of God (Wiersbe).

By the way, the existence of scoffers is proof of the thing they deny. Their presence is a sign of the end (1 Jn. 2:18; Mayor). “Their presence is proof that the Word they deny is the true Word of God!” (Wiersbe).

Of course, mockers will not say, “I don’t believe in the coming of Christ because I want to live as I please.” Their explanation (“for”) is “For since the Fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation” (3:4b). Who are the “Fathers” of whom they speak? There are two possible answers. Either they are the first Christian leaders like Stephen, James the Son of Zebedee, James the Just, and others who had died by the time 2 Peter was written in AD 64 (Heb. 13:7; see Westcott on 1 Jn. 2:13), or they are the Old Testament fathers (Mayor; Green). In support of the latter is the fact that every other reference to “the fathers” in the New Testament means Old Testament fathers (Acts 3:13; Rev. 9:5; Heb 1:1; etc.), but in this passage, fathers seem to refer to the first Christian leaders (Hodges).

The scoffers support their skepticism of the Second Coming by pointing out that since the fathers died, ever since creation, nothing has changed. In other words, the universe is an unchanging system where things like the upheaval of the Second Advent do not occur. God does not intervene. Therefore, they reason, the promise of Christ’s coming is unreliable.

Deist said something similar, claiming the universe operates by natural laws; God does not interfere with them. Evolution (Green) and modern geology are based on the concept of uniformity. Uniformitarianism postulates that the present process in nature should be projected into the past. “All things continue as they were from the beginning” is their promise. The mockers whom Peter speaks are basically uniformitarians (Hodges); they postulate that the past and present process in nature will be the process of the future indefinitely. Doubting and denying the Second Coming for whatever reason is not new. It has existed in the past and it exists today (1 Tim. 4:2; 2 Tim. 3).

*Be Reminded* Peter’s explanation of the scoffer’s skepticism is vastly different than theirs. He says, “For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water” (3:5-6). The mockers used observation and “reason” to reach their conclusion. Peter begins with the Word of God. By His Word, God created the heavens and the earth. That is the point of verse 5. Genesis 1 records the creation of the heaven and the earth. It repeatedly states, “Then God said” (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11; etc.). God created by His Word. The phrase “out of water” refers to the terrestrial waters of Genesis 1, out of which the dry land appeared (Hodges). “In the water” (Greek: “through the water”) refers to the celestial waters above the firmament (Mayor; Hodges). By the Word, God formed the earth out of water and sustained it through water.

God also destroyed the earth. That is the point of verse 6. In the Greek text, the phrase “by which” is plural. God flooded the earth with water above and under it, and it perished (Hodges).

According to Genesis, the fountains of the deep opened and the windows of heaven were opened (Gen. 7:11).

Peter's point is that contrary to the argument of the scoffers, things have not always continued as they were. God has intervened. He took the initiative to create, and God intervened to destroy it. God is both the creator and judge of His world.

Turning his attention from the past to the future, Peter goes on to say, "But the heavens and earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." (3:7). The same Word, the Word of God, that informed us that God intervened in the past with a flood also instructs us that He will intervene in the future with fire. (Deut. 32:22; Isa. 29:6; 30:30; etc.) The ungodly perished in the flood (3:6) and the ungodly will perish (perdition in 3:7 comes from the same root as perish in 3:6) in the fiery judgment of the future.

The scoffers reasoned, "all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (3:4) and, therefore, the promise of Christ's return will not be fulfilled (3:4). Peter answers: your premise is wrong, "All things have not continued as they were from the beginning." God has intervened in the past. Furthermore, your conclusion is also wrong. Christ will return. God will judge. The earth will be destroyed by fire. We have God's Word on it. We have a sure word of prophecy.

"Your hopes are dealt on a wrong idea of what actually did happen in history" (Barclay). Froude, the great historian, said that history is a voice that sounds across the centuries and that, in the end, it is always ill with the wicked and well with the good (Barclay).

Did these scoffers just not know the truth? Was their problem ignorance? No. Peter's explanation of their problem is that they "willfully forget" (3:5). How do people "willfully forget"? They choose to neglect data. They "shut their eyes to this fact;" they "deliberately close their eyes" (Mayor). They deliberately ignore the evidence. Actually, this is common. So-called "thinkers," including philosophers, liberal theologians, and even scientists, are selective and deliberately refuse to consider some data (Wiersbe).

The problem is not mental; it is moral. The issue is not a lack of information but a lack of willingness. They do not want to accept the reality of the coming of Christ and future judgment because they wish to continue in their sin. Thus, they deny the Second Coming of Christ because they willfully reject the Word of God.

## Don't Forget

*God's Time* Believers not only need to know that scoffers deny the promise of Christ's return because they willfully reject God's word (3:8-9), but they also need to know several other factors they must not forget (3:8). Peter wrote to remind them of what they knew so they would be mindful of them (1:12; 3:1-2). Therefore, he now says, "But beloved do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day" (3:8). Peter is now going to answer the question, "Why has Christ taken so long to return?" By reminding them of several things they should not forget.

For one thing, God's sense of time is different than ours. For Him, one day is as a thousand years. What happens in one day can be worth a thousand years. Time is significant. Furthermore, for Him, a thousand years is as one day. This part of verse 8 is borrowed from Psalm 90:4, which says, "For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the

night.” What man considers a long time is a short time in God’s sight. In light of eternity, a thousand years is like a mere day (Green). Time is short.

*God’s Patience* Believers should also not forget that: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (3:9). When someone makes a promise and it is not fulfilled in what seems like a timely manner, it is automatically assumed that there is something wrong with the one making the promise. That’s the way people reason and reckon when faced with a delay. If there is too much slack between promise and performance, there must be a problem. Either the one making the promise is powerless or careless; he or she is either unable or unwilling to perform as promised.

To apply such logic to God’s promises concerning the future is a mistake. The Second Coming of Christ is delayed not because God is impotent or indifferent. It was not because God was unable or unwilling to act. “He was not tardy or off schedule!” (Wiersbe). He was simply patient and compassionate.

Wiersbe points out that God could have created the universe instantly, but instead, He preferred to do it in six days. He could have delivered Israel from Egypt in a moment, but instead, he invested 80 years in training Moses. He could even have sent the Savior much sooner than He did, but He waited until the fullness of time had come (Gal. 4:4).

God does not want anyone to perish. He wants all men, women and children to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). God would like to show mercy toward all (Rom. 11:32). That is the reason He waits to fulfill His promises.

He desires that all repent, that is, change their mind. This is the only occurrence of either the verb “repent” or the noun “repentance” in Peter’s epistles. No object for repentance is expressed in this verse or implied in the context. Therefore, the only available evidence for determining the meaning of the word “repentance” by Peter is Peter’s use of the word in the book of Acts. In the book of Acts, the meaning of Peter’s use of repentance is a change of mind about Jesus Christ.

For example, on the day of Pentecost, “Peter said to them, ‘Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38). In the context of this sermon, the issue is not their sins of sexual immorality or stealing. It is their attitude toward Christ. Peter charged his listeners with thinking that Christ was a common criminal. He tells them to “repent,” that is, change their minds about Christ. “From regarding Him as an impostor, a false Christ, they were now to believe in Him as the true Messiah” (Gloag).

In his book *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*, Williams Evans says, “Thus, when Peter, on the day of Pentecost, called upon the Jews to repent (Acts 2:14-40), he virtually called upon them to change their minds and their views regarding Christ. They had considered Christ to be a mere man, a blasphemer, an impostor. The events of the few preceding days had proven to them that He was none other than the righteous Son of God, their Savior and the Savior of the world. The result of their repentance or change of mind would be that they would receive Jesus Christ as their long-promised Messiah” (Evans, p. 140).

Ryrie concurs. He writes, “But if repentance means changing your mind about the particular sin of rejecting Christ, then that kind of repentance saves, and of course, it is the same as faith in Christ. Peter asked the crowd to do this on the day of Pentecost. They were to change their minds about Jesus of Nazareth. Formerly, they had considered Him to be only a blasphemous human being claiming to be God; now, they changed their minds and saw Him as the God-man Savior

whom they would trust for salvation. That kind of repentance saves, and everyone who is saved has repented in that sense” (Ryrie, p. 139).

In Acts 10, Peter preached at Cornelius’s house. He told them that “whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). Then, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word” (Acts 10:44). In other words, in the middle of the sermon, the moment that they heard the message of forgiveness by faith in Christ, they trusted Christ, which is proven by the fact that the Holy Spirit fell on them.

When Peter returned to Jerusalem, he explained his part in Gentiles coming to Christ (Acts 11:4-17). Peter concluded by saying, “If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He* gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17). Notice what the Gentiles did was believe in Christ (Acts 10:43-44) and in reporting this to the believer at Jerusalem, Peter spoke of “when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 11:17). Thus far in this story, nothing has been said about repentance. The response of the believers in Jerusalem was, “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (Acts 11:18). Peter told the people assembled in Cornelius’ house that whoever believes Christ receives the remission of sins (Acts 10:43). In reporting the incident to the Jews in Jerusalem, Peter said that the people in Cornelius’ house received the same gift we did “when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 11:17). Yet, the Jews in Jerusalem call what happened in Cornelius’ house “repentance” (Acts 11:18). Therefore, what has been described as faith (Acts 10:43; 11:17) is now called repentance (Acts 11:18). Commenting on this passage, Chafer says, “repentance, which is included in believing, serves as a synonym for the word *belief*” (Chafer, vol. 3, p. 377).

*God’s Promise* In the meantime, be assured God will fulfill His promises. Peter says, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (3:10). In the Greek text, “will come” is emphatic. God will do as He promised. “Delay does not mean non-fulfillment” (Green). The Day of the Lord is an Old Testament prophetic term that designates the coming of the Lord in judgment to establish His Kingdom. It includes the Tribulation, the Second Coming, and the Millennium (Zech. 1:7, 14-18; Isa. 13:10-13; 24:19; 34:4; 44:1-4; 56:16; Micah 1:4). The beginning of the Day of the Lord, that is, the Tribulation, will come unexpectedly like a thief in the night (Mt. 24:43, 44; 1 Thess. 3:2). People will be talking of peace and safety “when suddenly the day of God’s wrath begins” (1 Thess. 5:3, 9). They are caught completely unaware. Nothing present warned them of this cataclysmic interruption of natural events. “The coming of Christ will be as sudden, as unexpected, and as disastrous to the unprepared, as a thief stealing everything from your house in the middle of the night (Green).

Once the Day of the Lord begins, several things will occur. For one thing, “the heaven will pass away with a great noise” (3:10). The Greek word rendered “great noise” means “roar.” It is an expressive term used only here in the New Testament. Elsewhere, it was used for the swish of an arrow through the air, the hissing of a serpent, the rushing of mighty waters, the rumbling of thunder, the roar of a fire (Barclay; etc.). The meaning here is probably “disappear in a roar of flames” (Green). The image is of a crackling fire (Hodges). When the atomic bomb was tested in the Nevada desert, more than one reporter said the explosion had a “cracking sound” (Wiersbe).

The elements will melt with fervent heat (Isa. 34:4; Mal. 3:19). The very elements of the earth will dissolve and be destroyed and that with a great fire. The world and the works in it will be burned up. The elements of the earth and the works of the wicked will be burned entirely.

Arrogant people think, “All things have continued as they were since creation and will continue indefinitely. The earth will endure eternally. Not so, says Peter. Everything will be destroyed by fire!

Many have pointed out how precisely Peter’s language fits what we now know of matter and atoms and, especially, the breakup of atoms. McGee said, “When the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima, a flood of light fell on this chapter.” Indeed, the Greek word translated “elements” means “elemental substance” and we now know that the elemental substance of all matter is the atom. The Greek word translated “melt” means to “loose, to untie.” Peter describes that when the elements (atoms) are untied, there is fervent heat and a great noise. It has been said that this “is a picture which in an astonishing degree corresponds to what might actually happen according to modern theories of the physical universe” (Bo Reicke, cited by Green).

The Tower of Pisa in Italy has stood for over 800 years. As you know, it is leaning. At one point, scientists reported that the 179-foot tower moves about one-twentieth of an inch a year and was now 17 feet out of plumb. The word “Pisa” means “marshy land,” which explains why the tower began to lean even before it was completed. The Tower of Pisa is built on a marsh. The whole earth is resting on a soft, not-so-solid foundation, including the pyramids of Egypt, the Rock of Gibraltar, and the Rocky Mountains.

**Summary:** When you encounter scoffers, remember they willfully forget what God said because they want to live according to the flesh and don’t forget God will fulfill His promise.

In the meantime, be ready to answer the hope that is in you (1 Pet. 3:15). The logical corollary to the truth of this passage is that believers should use the time before the coming of Christ for the preaching of the gospel (Green).

Early in his ministry, Pastor White was asked to visit a respected Christian in the community by the name of Mr. Jenkins. The man had been in poor health for some time, and it seemed the end was near. When the minister arrived at his home, he found him in quite a distressed state of mind. Mr. Jenkins said, “I’m 87 years old now, and all my life, I’ve been memorizing and claiming the promises of God. But this morning, when I awakened, I couldn’t remember even one of them. What am I going to do?” The young preacher thought for a moment and replied, “You may have forgotten God’s promises, but do you think for one moment God has forgotten them?” As the elderly gentleman thought about that, a smile crossed his face. He knew the answer very well, and it brought comfort to his soul. Pastor White quoted promise after promise from the Bible. Finally, the dying believer said, “I’m so tired. I’ll just go to sleep now and trust God to remember His promises.” Shortly afterward, he slipped quietly into the presence of the Lord. His soul was at perfect peace because he had found comfort in knowing that even though he had forgotten the promises, God would not.

# THE FUTURE DETERMINES THE PRESENT Part I

The title of this message is “The Future Determines the Present.” That is the simple, single truth of this message. To suggest that the future determines the present is rather obvious, isn’t it? When you get up in the morning, what you anticipate happening that day determines what clothes you wear that day. When you are driving the car and you see that the traffic ahead is slowing down, indicating that it’s going to stop in the near future, you apply the brakes. In the evening, when you see the clock indicating that it will be bedtime in a short time, that future event determines what you do now. You prepare for bed. Daily, the future determines the present. That may sound like a simple truth and it is, but when applied spiritually, it is profound. This is a concept that should affect the way you live daily—beginning today.

## “The Earth is Eternal”

*View of the Future* After demonstrating that the false teachers are wrong, Peter draws a conclusion. “Therefore since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness” (3:11). With all due respect to Peter, to highlight a point, let’s change that to read, “Since all these things will not be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be?” That is the way the false teachers change it. They said, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation” (3:4). Based on a false interpretation of the past, they drew a false conclusion about the future. They concluded that the earth was eternal!

*Life in the Present* Who were these people? In chapter 3, they are called “scoffers” (3:3). They are the false teachers of chapter 2. One indication of that is that both the false teachers of chapter 2 and the scoffers of chapter 3 is that both walk according to the flesh (3:3; 2:1, 10). There is no question, but in 2 Peter, your view of the future affects the present.

Paul put it like this, “If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage *is it* to me? If *the* dead do not rise, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” (1 Cor. 15:32). If God does not fulfill His promises, if Christ does not return, if the world continues forever as it has in the past, we might as well eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.

When men reject the belief that creation has a goal and history has a climax, there are moral consequences. Barclay illustrates this from epitaphs on ancient tombstones. “I was nothing; I am nothing. So thou who art still alive, eat, drink, and be merry.” His belief led to hedonism. “Once I had no existence; now I have none. I am not aware of it. It does not concern me.” His view took him to apathy. “Charidas, what is below? Deep darkness. But what of the paths upward? All a lie. And Pluto? (The god of the underworld). Mere talk. Then we’re lost.” His doctrine produced despair.

To Peter, as Moffatt puts it, “It was impossible to give up the hope of the advent without ethical deterioration” (Moffatt, cited by Barclay).

## The Earth is Temporal

*View of the Future* Needless to say, that is not what Peter teaches. He concludes: “all these things will be dissolved” (3:11). The Greek word translated “dissolved” means “loosen, dissolve, break up, destroy.” Peter elaborates on this in the next verse. “Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved being on fire and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (3:12-13). According to Peter, the present world will be replaced with a new world.

Is the Day of God (3:12) another title for the Day of the Lord (3:10)? Although that is possible (Mayor), it is more likely that they are different. Second Peter 3:10 speaks of events that will take place “in” the Day of the Lord, whereas 2 Peter 3:12 refers to looking for it “because of” (that is, an account of) the Day of God (Hodges). The events mentioned are not in the Day of God, but we are to be motivated by its coming. What is the Day of God? The Day of the Lord is climaxed by the destruction of the earth. The Day of God commences with the new heaven and the new earth (3:13), in other words, the eternal state (1 Cor. 15:24; Hodges). So, believers should live godly lives because the wicked world will be destroyed and a new heaven and earth will be established in which righteousness dwells.

Wiersbe contrasts “the Day of the Lord,” the Day of Christ,” and “the Day of God.” According to him, the Day of the Lord is the Day of Judgment that climaxes with the return of Christ to the earth. The Day of Christ relates to the coming of Christ for His church (1 Cor. 1:7-9; Phil. 1:10; 2:16). The Day of God is when God’s people enjoy the new heavens and the new earth.

At any rate, in the future, “the heavens will be dissolved being on fire and the elements will melt with fervent heat” (3:12). Earlier in this chapter, Peter said, “The heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (3:10).

As was pointed out, the Greek word rendered “great noise” in 2 Peter 3:10 means “roar.” It was used of the swish of an arrow through the air, the hissing of a serpent, the rushing of mighty waters, the rumbling of thunder, the roar of a fire (see Barclay; etc.). The image is of a crackling fire (Hodges). When the atomic bomb was tested in the Nevada desert, more than one reporter said the explosion had a “cracking sound” (Wiersbe). The very elements of the earth will dissolve and be destroyed and that will a great fire (Isa. 34:4; Mal. 3:19). It was also pointed out that Peter’s language precisely fits what we now know of matter and atoms and especially the breakup of atoms.

Imagine sitting in front of a fireplace with a brightly burning fire. You throw in a small stick and, in a matter of minutes, if not seconds, it catches fire and quickly burns to a crisp. That is the picture Peter paints of what will happen to the earth!

Furthermore, there will be a “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (3:13). Righteousness will be a permanent resident there. It is a stranger and pilgrim here (Hodges). John describes this in Revelation 21-22.

*Life in the Present* Well, if that is the case, how shall we then live? In these brief verses, several different words are used to describe how we should live. In verse 12, Peter says believers should be “looking for and hastening” the day of God. The Greek word translated “looking” means “to wait eagerly, to be expectant.” It describes an attitude of excitement and expectation (Wiersbe). The Greek word rendered “hastening” means “to hasten, accelerate,” or it can mean



“desire eagerly.” Those who take it to mean “hasten” concluded that the believer can actually hasten the coming of Christ by prayer and/or evangelism (Mayor; Green; Barclay; Wiersbe). It is better, however, to interpret this term as “desiring eagerly” (Hodges).

It is one thing to have the doctrine of the Second Coming in mind; it is another to have the expectation of His appearing in your heart. The question is, are you looking backward or forward? Are you looking to the present or to the future? If your answer is the future, how far into the future? Tomorrow? Next week? Next month? Next year? The next decade or so? The Second Coming of Christ? The new heaven and the new earth?

In verse 11, Peter says believers should live “in holy conduct and godliness” (3:11). If the material world is to be dissolved, no one should live for it. If the Lord returns and melts matter, we would be well advised to live for Him, which means living a holy, godly life. Peter began His epistle by talking about godliness. The same Greek word that is rendered “godliness” in 2 Peter 3:11 is used in 2 Peter 1:3, 6-7. It means “reverence.” Believers are to be aware of God in every aspect of life (Green) and hold Him in awe (Hodges). Every believer has everything necessary to live a godly life. He needs to be diligent in growing by adding virtue to faith, knowledge to virtue, etc. (1:5-7). Part of the motivation for doing that is the promises God gave of the future (1:4, 3:4, 9, 13). Knowing what will happen to the earth in the future, we do not live for material things in the present but for the spiritual and the eternal things in the future (1 Jn. 2:17).

In verse 13, Peter says that righteousness dwells in the new heavens and a new earth. Satan is the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4), the ruler of this world (Jn. 12:31). Hence, there is unrighteousness. When God rules, there will be righteousness (Mayor). Therefore, we should live righteously now.

The point that Peter is making is that knowing that this earth will be replaced with a new one, we should be eagerly looking for Him to return, which motivates us to live a conscious life.

During the week I prepared this message, my wife Patricia flew to Philadelphia to speak. Knowing that she would return on Sunday afternoon, I spent the days of her absence with Patricia-consciousness looking for her arrival. All Believers should live like that, looking for the Lord to return.

**Summary:** If the earth is eternal, live as you please, but if the earth is temporal and the Lord is coming back, live a godly, righteous life.

Practically, the future should determine the present. For years, when people asked me what to do, I said, “Telling what your goal is, and I’ll tell you what to do.” For example, when a young man asked me what seminary to attend, I responded, “What do you plan to do after you get out of seminary? The type of ministry that you plan to go into after seminary determines what seminary you should attend.” The future should determine the present. As a financial advisor, I told people, “Tell me what your future goals are and I’ll tell you where you should put your money now.” The future should determine the present. As a pastor, I often ask people with whom I am counseling, “What is your goal?” If you tell me your goal for the future, I will tell you what you should do in the present.” The future should determine the present.

Spiritually, the future should determine the present. “When is it that flesh indulges itself, except that there is no thought of the near coming of Christ” (Calvin). The future should determine the present.

The future should determine the present. If, on the other hand, God does perform all He promised, Christ does return, and this old earth will melt like a sheet of plastic in a bonfire, we ought to live holy, godly lives. The future should determine the present.

Remember the faithless steward that our Lord described in Matthew 25? For he said, “My Lord delays His coming.” Then he began to beat his fellow servants. Then, he began to eat and drink with the drunkards. First, he lost his expectancy; next, he lost his charity. Lastly, he lost his self-control. This is an inevitable moral process (Hodges).

Someone has said, “Now that is the point. The knowledge that everything will be burned up someday should totally change our perspective on life. What do we give ourselves to in view of that fact? It ought to change our attitude toward our clothes, furniture, houses, buildings, land, cars, and all the things in which we invest our time, money, effort, and thoughts. As stewards, we ought to take care of them, but Peter’s point is: Let us not become preoccupied with them because they will all burn up someday. How do we react when a piece of furniture gets gouged or a favorite dress gets torn?”

During the Middle Ages, the monks had skulls inscribed with “Sumus moribundus” (we are destined to die) on their desks. They kept the skulls there as reminders of the transience of life, the certainty of its end. It helped them gain the right perspective and focus on life. There is a connection between conviction and conduct (Green).

## THE FUTURE DETERMINES THE PRESENT Part II

All of us look forward to something sometime. A small child looks forward to daddy coming home so he can play with him. Students look forward to the summer when they don't have to go to school. The bride-to-be looks forward to her wedding day. Men past middle age look forward to retirement. Looking forward to the future often affects the present. A bride may be looking forward to her wedding, but you can believe if she is having a traditional church wedding, she is busy in the present preparing for that event. The things to do are endless: secure the church, decorate the church, plan the reception, pick out dresses, flowers, and photographer, etc. Books have been written on all there is to do.

The Scriptures admonish believers to look forward to the future. If you look at the future through biblical binoculars, you will see the Second Coming of Christ, the destruction of the earth, and the establishment of a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Needless to say, the future determines the present. The question is, "How." A book has been written about that; it is called 2 Peter. At the conclusion of 2 Peter, Peter tells believers how looking forward should affect the present. The first thing he says is be separated unto the Lord. (3:11-13), but that is not all he has to say.

### Be Diligent

*Looking to the Future* For the third time in this chapter, addressing the recipients as "beloved," Peter says, "Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace without spot and blameless" (3:14). Obviously, the exhortation is based on what has been stated previously. The "therefore" and "these things" could refer to the immediately preceding statement in 2 Peter 3:13 concerning the new heaven and the new earth (Mayor; Green). It is also possible that the connection is to everything said in 2 Peter 3:11-13 or even 2 Peter 3:1-13 (Hodges). The expression "found by him" (3:14) suggests that the Lord's return is, at least, included. Peter is saying God will fulfill His promises, Christ will return, the earth will be destroyed and a new heaven and a new earth will be established.

*Be Diligent in the Present* Therefore, looking forward to all these things, be diligent. The Greek word rendered "diligent" means "hasten, hurry, be zealous, eager, make every effort." Peter used the same word in 2 Peter 1:5 and 2 Peter 1:10. Don't be indifferent or idle; be industrious concerning your spiritual life. Work on your spiritual life so that He will find you in peace, without spot and blameless when He comes.

There are two types of peace in the Bible: peace with God and the peace of God. Peace with God is a harmonious relationship between the individual and God, which happens when that person trusts Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life (Rom. 5:1). Beyond that, there is the peace of God, a subjective peace, that is, the tranquility of heart, a serene soul. How do believers obtain and maintain the peace of God?

Isaiah says, "You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose* mind *is* stayed *on* You, Because he trusts in You" (Isa. 26:3) and Paul adds, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil.

4:6-7). Peter is saying that you are to be diligent to maintain that peace so that when the Lord comes, He will find you in that state (Lk. 18:8).

Furthermore, believers are to be spotless and blameless. Paul says that Christ “loved the church and gave Himself for her that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27). If that is to become a reality, believers have to cooperate with the process. They must be diligent (Jas. 1:27; 1 Jn. 2:28). By the way, the false teachers were “blots and blemishes” (2:13; Green).

The small daughter of a pastor often “tuned in” on his theological discussions. One day, she heard him talking about the church “militant,” which is how theologians distinguish believers on earth from those who are now resting in Heaven. A short time later, while visiting an aunt in a distant city, she attended a different Sunday school. After a word of welcome, the teacher asked the youngster the name of the church where she was a member. “I belong to the church diligent,” the girl replied. Of course, she meant to say, “The church militant.”

## **BELIEVE THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD IS SALVATION**

*God's Patience* The exhortation to be diligent to in peace, spotless, and blameless in the present hinges on the belief that Christ is coming in the future, but these believers were faced with skeptics and scoffers who delighted to point out that as yet He had not come. Peter speaks directly to that, saying, “and account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (3:15a). The Greek word, translated “account” means “suppose, believe, consider, think.” The reference to “the longsuffering of our Lord” looks back to 2 Peter 3:9. The scoffers had misunderstood and misrepresented the fact that the Lord had not returned (3:3-4). Peter explained that the delay was God's patience to give people time to repent (3:9). Now, he tells believers to believe that the patience of God is the salvation of people, meaning that God's patience is intended to lead to their salvation (Mayor; Green). As the Lord waits to return, people are getting saved.

*Paul's Wisdom* Peter reminds them that Paul wrote that to them, “as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you” (3:15). Peter calls Paul “our beloved brother.” That is significant because Paul once publicly rebuked Peter (Gal. 2:14). Now, many years later, Peter did not harbor any kind of a grudge against Paul for his public rebuke of Peter's inconsistency (Mayor). Peter recognized that Paul's wisdom was divinely imparted, not innate.

To what Pauline epistle does Peter refer? There are two basic answers. If Peter is alluding to the fact that Paul taught that the patience of God leads to repentance, this is a reference to Romans 2:4 (Barclay; Hodges). If Peter had Paul's teachings for holy living in mind, especially in light of prophecy, it could refer to many of Paul's letters (Green). There are other possibilities. For example, Lenski believes this refers to a lost letter. Kistemaker says, “It appears that Peter's initial reference is to Romans 2:4 but secondly to all of Paul's letters” (Simon J. Kistemaker, “The Canon of the New Testament.” JETS 20/1, Winter, 1977, p. 8; Kistemaker cites F. F. Bruce, “Origins of the New Testament Canon,” *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974, p. 10). The determination of the original recipients of 2 Peter is a factor in explaining 2 Peter 3:15. If 2 Peter 3:15 refers to Romans 2:4, does that mean 2 Peter was written to Rome? Some say, “Yes” (Mayor; Plummer). Others say not necessarily. Romans was probably a circular letter (Green). If that is the case (or if 2 Peter 3:15 is a reference to Eph

4:30-5:5), there is no difficulty assuming that 2 Peter was addressed to the same Asia Minor believers as 1 Peter. (3:1).

*Paul's Epistles* Evidently, there were "scoffers" mocking the fact that the Lord had not returned and they were twisting Paul's letters to support their view (Hodges). For Peter goes on to say, "as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things in which are some things hard to understand" (3:16a). Peter broadens the reference to Paul's writings and includes "all his epistles" and he put them on the same plain as Scripture. This reference to the Scripture is a reference to the Old Testament (Green) and, no doubt, the New Testament. After all, Peter just called Paul Scripture. Surely, he would also call Mathew, Mark, Luke, John, and James Scripture. All of them had written before this time. In 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul quotes Deuteronomy and Luke as Scripture.

Peter concedes that Paul wrote some things "hard to understand," 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" (Green). The utterances of Greek oracles were always ambiguous. The classic example is of the king about to go to war. When he consulted the oracle at Delphi, he was given the answer, "If you go to war, you will destroy a great nation." He took this as a prophecy that he would destroy his enemies, but he was so utterly defeated that he destroyed his own country by going to war. This was typical of the ambiguity of the ancient oracles. Peter uses this word of the writings of Paul. They have things in them that are as difficult to interpret as the ambiguous utterance of an oracle (Barclay). Even some learned and stable people with spiritual discernment struggle with things Paul said (Wiersbe).

D. L. Moody once said, "I am glad there is a depth in the Bible I know nothing about. I venture to say that if I had lived for ages on earth, I would only have touched its surface. I pity the man who thinks he knows all the Bible, for it is a pretty good sign that he does not know himself. A man came to me with what he felt was a very difficult passage and said, 'Mr. Moody, how do you explain it?' I said, 'I don't explain it.' 'But how do you interpret it?' 'I don't interpret it.' 'Well, how do you understand it?' 'I don't understand it.' 'But what do you do with it?' 'I don't do anything with it.' 'You don't believe it?' 'Yes, I believe it.' There are lots of things I do not understand." Moody explained that there were things about his body and nature that he did not understand, so "Why should I expect to know everything spiritually."

Peter adds, "Which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the scripture" (3:16). Peter's complaint is that the "untaught and unstable" twist Paul's epistles. In the Greek text, "untaught and unstable" are united together with one article. The one group is both unlearned and unsettled. Peter used one of these words earlier to describe the victims of false teachers (2:14). The Greek word translated "twist" means "to twist or torture," that is, "stretch on a rack." These ignorant individuals twisted and tortured Paul's words like a victim on a rack to force them to say what they wanted them to say. Granted, Paul wrote some things that are hard to understand, but only the unstable twist them (Hodges). Some people torture the Word of God (Wiersbe).

What are the things in Paul's teaching that could be twisted into something destructive? Barclay suggests that Paul's doctrine of *grace* was twisted into a justification, and even a reason, for sin (Rom. 3, 6) and Paul's doctrine of *freedom* was twisted into an excuse for license (Gal. 5:13). Many have concluded that Peter is referring to people who twisted Paul's doctrine of justification by faith to mean that once justified, a man could live in sin without impunity (Rom. 3:5-8; 6:1; Green). After all, Paul did preach that believers were free from the Mosaic Law (Rom. 6:14; Gal 3:24, 25; 5:1).

A picture of the Leaning Tower of Pisa hung on the wall of an office in New York. The office owner noticed that it persisted in hanging crooked, even though he straightened it every morning. At last, he spoke to the lady who cleaned up the room each night, asking her if she was responsible for its lopsided condition. "Why, yes," she said. "I have to hang it crooked to make the tower hang straight!" Similarly, some twist the Scriptures to justify their own opinions or make their imperfect lives appear right (*Our Daily Bread*, 10/31/68). We must adjust ourselves to the Bible; never try to adjust the Bible to ourselves!

Peter's assessment is that they twisted Paul's writings and the rest of Scripture to their own destruction. In attempting to destroy Scripture, they destroy themselves. The rejection of eternal life results in eternal death (Wiersbe).

**Summary:** In light of what the Scripture says about the Second Coming of Christ, believers should be diligent in being peaceful, spotless, and blameless and believe the delay is an opportunity for people to be saved.

If you believe that the future determines the present, you will be at peace and present the gospel.

God will not ask what kind of car you drove, but He'll ask how many people you drove who didn't have transportation. God will not ask the square footage of your house, but He'll ask how many people you welcome into your home. God will not ask about the clothes you had in your closet, but He'll ask how many you helped to clothe. God will not ask about your social status; He will ask what kind of class you displayed. God will not ask how many material possessions you had, but He will ask if they dictated your life. God will not ask what your highest salary was, but He will ask if you compromised your character to obtain it. God will not ask how much overtime you worked, but He will ask if your overtime was for yourself or your family. God will not ask how many promotions you received, but He will ask how you promoted others. God will not ask what your job title was, but He will ask if you performed your job to the best of your ability. God will not ask what you did to help yourself, but He will ask what you did to help others. God will not ask how many friends you had, but He'll ask how many people you were a friend to. God will not ask what you did to protect your rights, but He will ask what you did to protect the rights of others. God will not ask in what neighborhood you lived, but He will ask how you treated your neighbors. God will not ask about the color of your skin, but He will ask about the content of your character. God will not ask how many times your deeds matched your words, but He will ask how many times they didn't. God will not ask why it took you so long to seek salvation, but He will lovingly take you to your mansion in heaven and not to the gates of Hell.

## THE FUTURE DETERMINES THE PRESENT Part III

In all the years that I have preached, I have always wanted to do something that, until now, I have never done, that is, preach the same truth over and over, back to back, until the congregation so got it they never forgot it. Finally, I got to a passage that did it, and I had no choice but to say it repeatedly. The truth of the last half of 2 Peter 3 is that the future should determine the present. I have said that for two messages in a row and I get to say it again. That is the principle that Peter teaches, but he doesn't do it by sounding like a broken record. Instead, he teaches the same general truth with different specifics. In 2 Peter 3:11-13, Peter said that if the earth is temporal and the Lord is coming back, believers should live a godly, righteous life. In 2 Peter 3 14-16, he taught that in light of what the Scripture says about the future, believers should be diligent to be peaceful, spotless, and blameless and believe the delay is an opportunity for people to be saved. Peter is not finished with this truth. He has more to say.

### Be on Guard

*Know* For the fourth and final time in this chapter, Peter addresses his readers tenderly as beloved and draws a final conclusion: “You therefore beloved since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness being led away with the error of the wicked” (3:17). The word “therefore” assumes the exhortation of 2 Peter 3:14 (Mayor); it picks up the theme of verse 14, from which had been sidetracked (Green). Tenderly yet firmly, Peter concludes that they have been forewarned by both him and the apostle Paul.

*Beware* Therefore, they must now beware lest they fall from their steadfastness. The Greek word rendered “beware” means “to guard, watch.” Believers are to “be constantly guarding” themselves (Wiersbe). To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Believers are to be constantly on guard lest they fall from their steadfastness. The Greek word translated “fall” was used of a navigator falling off from a straight course (Acts 27:19, 26, 29). The Greek noun translated “steadfastness” occurs only here in the New Testament and it means “setting firmly, firmness, steadfastness.” The believers to whom Peter wrote were steadfast (2 Pet. 1:12). They were established believers. The same root in verb form is rendered “strengthened” where Jesus told Peter, “But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Lk. 22:32). That Greek verb actually means “to fix, make fast, to confirm, establish.” It is used in Luke 9:51, Acts 18:23, Romans 1:11, 16:25, 1 Thessalonians 3:2, 13, 2 Thessalonians 2:17, 3:3, James 5:8, 1 Peter 5:10, 2 Peter 1:12, Revelation 3:2.

At the beginning of Romans, Paul said, “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established” (Rom. 1:11). He wrote as if he would do this work. At the end of Romans, he said, “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 16:25).

Paul told the Thessalonians that he “sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith” (1 Thess. 3:2), but later he told them, “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in

holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints” (1 Thess. 3:12-13; see also 2 Thess. 2:16-17, 3:3).

Peter says, “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*” (1 Pet. 5:10). Now he says, “You therefore beloved since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Pet. 3:17).

Peter wrote to steadfast believers, yet, he warns them to beware, that is, watch out, be on guard against being led astray with the error of the wicked and thus fall from their steadfastness. The Greek word translated “error” can mean either “error” or “wandering.” (it is used in 2:7 of the men of Sodom). The Greek word translated “wicked” means “lawless.” It refers to those who violate the law of nature and conscience and only appears here in 1 Peter 2:7. The false teachers speak evil of the authorities that seek to enforce God’s law and the world (2:10-11).

The phrase “the error of the wicked” can refer to the error, that is, the teaching, or the example, the life of wicked, lawless men. Teaching and lifestyle are undoubtedly involved; therefore, these believers must beware. Green says, “Error has many attractive faces by which even the most experienced may be beguiled.” Barbieri put it like this: “Error has many attractive faces which can deceive even the more mature believer.”

Peter said these believers were “established in the present truth” (1:12). Yet he tells them to beware lest they fall away. Believers cannot fall from their salvation, but they can fall from their steadfastness (Wiersbe). Even established believers can fall away. The Greek word rendered “being led away” was used of Barnabas being carried away by wavering Jewish believers at Antioch (Gal. 2:13). It suggests that if they keep too close company with such people, they will be led away (Green). Even a Barnabas can fall from the truth and wreck his life. Believers beware!

Are you established in the Lord? What would it take to move you? James Agate once declared that his mind was not a bed to be made and remade but that, on certain things, it was finally made up (Agate, cited by Barclay).

## Grow

*Grace* Peter continues, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (3:18). The prayer of 2 Peter 1:2 is repeated (Mayor). Peter’s point is that believers must guard and grow. The Greek word translated “grow” means “to increase, to become greater.” As has been said, “The Christian life is like riding a bike. Unless you keep moving, you will fall off” (Green). Believers are to increase “in,” not “into” grace. They are already in the sphere of grace; they just need further development. As believers depend on the grace of God, they grow.

In a sermon on 2 Peter 3:18, Charles Haddon Surgeon made the point grace does not grow; you do. He said, “There is no such thing at all as growth in grace. If you understand the word grace as signifying free favor, and the love of God towards his people, there is not, and there cannot be, any growth in that at all. ‘The moment a sinner believes and trusts in his crucified God,’ he is, by the grace of God, there and then justified and complete in Christ Jesus. And if he lives till his hair is grey, he will never be more justified, and never be more beloved, than he is the very first moment in which he believes in Christ. As soon as ever I have a vital connection with the Lamb of God, I am ‘in grace.’ Let me live on, let my grace grow, let my faith increase, let my zeal become warmer, let my love be more ardent, yet I shall not be more ‘in grace’ than I



was before. God will not love me more, He will not have a deeper and a purer affection in His heart to me than He has the very first moment when I turn to Him; nor will His grace the less justify me, or less accept me, the first moment when I come to Him with all my sins about me than it shall do when I stand before the throne. And they are at any one time as much justified as they are at any other time. Give me to be justified today, then I was justified yesterday, and I shall be justified tomorrow. As soon as I put my trust in the Savior, I became complete in grace; so far as that was concerned, I was made perfect in Christ Jesus. I cannot be more than perfect, and, therefore, I cannot in that respect grow in grace; I cannot receive more justifying mercy; I cannot receive mere pardoning grace; for I have had it all at once and have so become perfect in Christ.”

“He goes on to say the “text does not say anything about grace growing; it does not say that grace grows. It tells us to ‘grow in grace.’ There is a vast difference between grace growing and our growing in grace. God’s grace never increases; it is always infinite, so it cannot be more; it is always everlasting, bottomless, and shoreless. It cannot be more and, in the nature of God, it could not be less. The text tells us to ‘grow in grace.’ We are in the sea of God’s grace; we cannot be in a deeper sea, but let us grow now we are in it.”

Salvation is by grace (Eph. 2:8). Once in Christ, by the grace of God, believers must grow in grace (2 Pet. 3:18), but how is that done? A professor once said to me, growing in grace is to “grow in my realization of His sufficient to meet my insufficient” (Hodges). Wiersbe has said, “Growing in grace often means experiencing trials and even suffering. We never really experience the grace of God until we are at the end of our own resources.”

Paul put it like this. “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly, I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

Believers are strengthened by grace (2 Tim. 2:1-4). God’s grace can enable us to endure suffering (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Grace helps us give when giving is difficult and (2 Cor. 8:1ff). Grace empowers believers to sing when singing is difficult (Col. 3:16). God gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5; see Wiersbe).

Grace when the sun is shining, Lord;  
Grace when the sky is black,  
Grace when I get the unkind word;  
Grace on the too smooth track.  
Grace when my duties all go wrong;  
Grace when they seem all right;  
Grace when ‘tis gladness, praise, and song;  
Grace when I have to fight.  
Grace when the saved ones don’t act saved,  
And lay all blame on me;  
Grace when the help I’ve asked and craved  
Seems oft denied by Thee.

Grace when the midnight hours I tell;  
Grace when the storm is nigh;  
Grace when I'm healthy, strong, and well;  
Grace when I come to die." (Anon.)

*Knowledge* Believers are to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The phrase "of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" can either modify 1) grace and knowledge or 2) just knowledge. Both are possible. Jesus Christ, of course, is the source of grace and knowledge. It is more likely that here, Peter has in mind that believers are to grow in the grace of God and knowledge *about* Jesus Christ. (In other words, the genitive is objective and goes with knowledge; see 1:5.)

At the same time, believers need to increase their knowledge *about* Christ and *of* Christ, that is, their personal acquaintance with Him. Some believers grow in the knowledge of the Word of God but not in knowledge of the God of the Word. Some understand grace; they have knowledge of grace, but they are not very gracious.

Wiersbe says, "Knowledge without grace is a terrible weapon, and grace without knowledge can be very shallow. But when we combine grace and knowledge, we have a marvelous tool for building our lives and for building the church." He adds, "It is one thing to "know the Bible," and quite another thing to know the Son of God, the central to the Bible."

Grow in grace and knowledge of Christ is the safeguard against being led away from Him, who is the truth (Green). Spurgeon said that Peter put verse 17 before verse 18 "as if the one must be the means of the other."

*Glory* The closing doxology is appropriate. The false teachers detracted from Christ's glory by a wicked life and from His glory later by denying His return. Growth in grace and knowledge glorifies Jesus Christ in time and eternity. So, beware of being led astray because if you are led astray, you will not grow. God is glorified when His children grow in grace.

As Charles S. Kettering once observed, "If you buy a fiddle today, you can't expect me to give a concert in Carnegie Hall tomorrow!" A.B. Simpson says: "There are some spiritual conditions that cannot be accomplished in a moment. The breaking up of the fallow ground takes time; winter frosts are as necessary as spring rains to prepare the soil for fertility. God has to break our hearts to pieces by the slow process of His discipline and grind every particle to powder, and then mellow us and saturate us with His blessed Spirit until we are open for the blessing He has to give us. Oh, let us wait upon the Lord with brokenness of heart, openness of soul, and willingness of spirit, to hear what 'God the Lord will say.'"

That's true, but if you buy a fiddle and hope to play, you must practice. In the case of salvation, God gave you the fiddle, you must play, depending on Him for the power to do so.

Someone has said, "Let Diotrephes say, "It is good for me to have the preeminence" (3 Jn. 9); let Judas say, "It is good for me to bear the bag" (Jn. 12:6); let Demas say "It is good for me to embrace this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10); but let every true child of God declare with David, "It is good for me to draw near to God" (Ps. 73:28).

Dr. Bonar said he could tell when a Christian was progressing. In proportion to his growth in grace, he would elevate his Master, talk less of what he was doing, and become smaller and smaller in his own esteem until, like the morning star, he faded away before the rising sun. Jonathan was willing to put himself in the background so that David might be pushed forward, and John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30).

**Summary:** In light of what the Scripture says about the Second Coming of Christ, beware of being led astray from growing in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

If you are not growing in grace, it is a disgrace. In a small church and in a small town, an old farmer often described his Christian experience by saying, “Well, I’m not making much progress, but I’m established!” one day, when he was hauling logs, his wagon wheels sank up to the axles in mud. Trying as he would, he could not get the wagon out of the mud. Defeated, he sat on top of the logs, viewing the dismal situation. A neighbor, who attended the same church as the old farmer, happened to come that way. He stopped, surveyed the situation, and said, “Well, brother Jones, I see that you are not making much progress, but you must be content, for you sure all well-established.

## A REMINDER OF GOD'S GREAT PROMISES

In one of his works, Robert Louis Stevenson has a character saying, “I have a grand memory for forgetting” (Stevenson, *Alan Breck*, chapter 18). We all have grand memories for forgetting. Children have to be constantly reminded of things like “put up your toys, hang up your clothes, clean up your room.” Husbands must be told, “Remember to pick up laundry, the bread and milk, and the kids.”

Since we all have grand memories for forgetting, God wrote one whole book of the Bible to remind us of something we already know but tend to forget. What is the one thing we know we tend to forget and God wants us to remember? What book was written to remind us of it?

Second Peter was written as a reminder (1:12, 13, 15; 3:1, 2; see also 3:8, 14, 17). An examination of the passages where Peter said he wrote to remind them reveals that he wanted to remind them about prophecy (see “these things” in 1:12, which refer to the coming of Christ; see also 1:11, 1:16; 3:1-2, esp. 3:4). More specifically, Peter desire that his readers be reminded about the coming of Christ.

He begins his epistle talking about “exceeding great and precious promises” (1:4) and the only promises he mentions specifically in the book are the promise of Christ coming (3:4) and the promise of a new heaven and new earth (3:13). So the subject of 2 Peter is the promises of prophecy. It is a reminder of God’s great promises to have His Son return and to remake the heavens and the earth. Why is it so important for believers to remember God’s prophetic promises? That’s what 2 Peter is all about.

Second Peter is basically in the form of an ancient letter, but not all the elements of that form are present. It does not contain a thanksgiving or a prayer. It does have a salutation, body, and benediction. This epistle actually has a prologue (1:3-11), body (2:12-3:13), and conclusion (3:14-18). In the salutation, Simeon Peter identifies himself as the author who is a slave and yet an apostle of Jesus Christ. (1:1). He sends this letter to those who had obtained faith in the sphere of divine righteousness or equal value with the apostles and he greeted them with a desire that their grace and peace be full in their knowledge of God and Christ (1:1-2).

In this prologue, Peter declares that God has given all believers all they need to live godly lives (1:3, 4). More specifically, believers know God (1:3) and have His exceeding great and precious promises that Christ will return (1:4; 3:4) and that there will be a new heaven and new earth (1:4; 3:13). The purpose of these promises is to motivate believers to partake more and more of the divine nature (1:4). Therefore, he urges believers to be diligent to add godly virtues to their lives (1:5-7) so that they will prosper now and in the kingdom (1:8-11). The great promises of God concerning the future make godliness possible and profitable.

### The Promises of Prophecy

*The Reminder* Peter wrote to remind believers of the truth they knew. On the one hand, believers know Christ is coming again to set up His Kingdom. They know that in light of that, they should live godly lives, but they tend to forget. So Peter explains that he wrote to remind them of the truth they already knew. (1:12-15).

*The Reality* Peter assures us that the message of the coming of Christ is not a fable (1:16). It is the truth. He was an eyewitness of the transfiguration. He saw the glory of Christ with his own eyes. (1:16-18). His experience certifies the prophetic word that needs to become a reality in our hearts until it directs our lives (1:19-21). The prophetic word is reliable.

Thomas Nelson Publishers launched a new advertising campaign for the New King James Version of the Bible with the slogan, “You can build your life on it.” The prophetic word has been confirmed (1:19). You can build your life on it.

## **The Perversions of False Teachers**

*Their Judgment* There is another problem and, therefore, another reason why believers need to be reminded about the coming of Christ and the need for godly living. There will be false teachers today as there were false prophets in Old Testament times (2:1-2). These teachers will not only come, they will be followed (2:2), but they will also be judged (2:3). God will punish false teachers and ungodliness and will spare the righteous from judgment. (2:4-9).

*Their Nature* What makes these false teachers tick? Peter explains that they despise authority (2:10-12), are dominated by fleshly desires and driven by covetousness (2:13-16), deliver nothing profitable for others and are headed for darkness forever (2:17).

*Their Danger* Why do people—even believers (2:3)—follow false teachers? Peter answers that false teachers preach with empty words that appeal to the flesh. (2:18). They promise liberty (2:19), but they are in bondage (2:19). The danger is that the world can overcome believers (1:20) and end up morally worse off than before they met these false teachers. (1:20-22).

So beware. These false teachers speak “great swelling words of emptiness” (2:18). We describe certain types of individuals who are given to boasting, bragging, and exaggerations as being “full of hot air.” Actually, heat puts air in motion, causing the wind to blow. Tornadoes are caused by hot air from below meeting cold air from above, and in their wrestling, they tumble to the earth, bringing havoc and destruction,

Freedom is not the right to do as you please but the liberty to do as you ought.

## **The Pronouncement of the Scoffers**

*Scoffers* Peter wrote the second epistle to remind believers of the command to live a godly life in light of the coming of Christ (3:1-2), but believers need to know that not only will false teachers lure believers into ungodly behavior, scoffers, who like false teachers live according to the flesh, will mock the promise of His coming (3:3-4) because they willfully reject the Word of God. (3:5-7).

*God* Therefore, it is even all the more imperative that believers not forget that God is patient and compassionate now, but He will perform as promised. (3:8-10).

Christ will come as a thief in the night. Dr. M. R. DeHaan says, 1) A thief comes at night when all is dark. 2) A thief comes when people in houses are fast asleep. 3) A thief comes and is gone before anyone knows he has been there. 4) A thief takes only that which has value and bothers not with the trash (*Our Daily Bread*, 8/23/1957).

When DeHaan wrote that article, he said, “Never has the world outlook been so dark as today.” It was dark then; it is even darker now. Militarily, Russia was a threat. America was preparing for a nuclear war by building bomb shelters. Today, it is worse; we are trying to

prepare for terrorists. The difference is between cancer located in one organ of the body that has not spread and cancer that has metastasized throughout the body. Morally, the world is worst. For the first time in the history of the civilized world, we have same-sex marriage!

DeHaan also said, “Today, the great mass of Christendom is fast asleep in the vain hope of a ‘better world’ by religious ethics and man’s progress.” He applied the thief being gone before anyone knows to the fact that the Lord will come in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. He concluded by saying that when Jesus comes as a thief, He will take only those who have value, that is, believers who His own blood has purchased.

*Believers* Because this wicked world will be destroyed and a new heaven and new earth will be established in the future, believers should live godly lives in the present (3:11-13). In light of what the Scripture says about the coming of Christ, believers should be diligent to be blameless (3:14), count the delay of Christ’s coming as an opportunity for people to be saved (3:15-16), and beware of being led astray from growing in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (3:17-18).

**Summary:** Believers need to be reminded of God’s great prophetic promises so they will be diligent in growing in grace and godliness, remembering that false teachers and ungodliness will be judged and scoffers are simply wrong.

There are two promises in chapter 3: the Second Coming and the new earth. The exceeding great and precious promises are motivations for godly living. We need these promises to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust (Hodges).

As I preached through the last part of 2 Peter, I kept repeating, “The future determines the present.” After one of those messages, we all went to the fellowship hall for coffee and cookies and I began to eat cookies. Some dear fellow, I forgot who, hub my tummy and said, “The present determines the future.”

That is absolutely right, not only with cookies going to waste but with all of life. Remember Peter says, “For if these things are yours and abound, *you will be* neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things, you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (1:8-11).

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