

2 Peter Bible Study #1: Introduction

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 1:1-2

1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Introduction

Aside from Jude, St. Peter's epistolary writing may be considered the most sparse and direct in the New Testament. Tradition has it that St. Mark's Gospel is actually a product of collaboration between John Mark and the Apostle Peter,¹ but the collaborative aspect to the Gospel's authorship means that 1 and 2 Peter are the only two written by the Apostle *alone*.² This means that, while Sts. Luke, John, and Paul are the most voluminous of writers and command most of the Christian's time, the Petrine Epistles (along with St. James, St. Jude, and the author of Hebrews) function as an expansive commentary on what has been taught previously.

As with the Apostle's first letter, 2 Peter remains practical and focused on his topics. These center on sanctification, rebuttal of false teachers, and the return of Christ. In the same fashion that 1 Peter has a recurring motif of *Exile* for the Christian nation, 2 Peter employs a motif of *Preservation*; this is to say, that one must take an active part in guarding the faith and salvation which God has granted them. This motif is brought to light in relation to the issues of moral fortitude, false teaching, and patience in light of the Second Advent's (seeming) delay.

Authorship and Dating

The same arguments which defend Petrine authorship of 1 Peter apply to 2 Peter. The first verse identifies the author as "Simon Peter,"³ and we have no reason to assume the writer is lying. To demonstrate false authorship, or *pseudepigrapha*, one must have evidence of this being the case. There is no accusation leveled against the letter as having a false author within the first two centuries of its writings, and nor are there any historical mistakes within the text. The author does not refer to events which transpired after St. Peter's death, and nor does he mention people or heresies which arose centuries after the Apostles had all been martyred.

Objections briefly surveyed and answered

Eloquence

The case *against* Petrine authorship relies on the same hackneyed silliness that was employed against 1 Peter. According to the critics, the language appears "too eloquent" for a Galilean fisherman, as though a fisherman doing ministry in Greek for 35 years would be incapable of learning!

Identification of False Teachers

The critics also posit that the author is directly attacking the Gnostics, who would not be a fully formed movement until long after St. Peter's death. This is not a justifiable position, as the Apostle never names the heretical movement, and nor do the false teachers he attacks comport with standard Gnosticism; instead, following the description he gives, one gets more a sense that

1 <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/good-reasons-to-believe-peter-is-the-source-of-marks-gospel/>

Whereas this article presents the internal evidence for St. Mark *collecting* passages from St. Peter's sermons, the fact that they were traveling companions indicates that the second Gospel is a product more of dictation and discussion.

2 Of course, Silvanus assisted with writing 1 Peter, but the message is from the Apostle first and foremost.

3 "Simeon" being a variant spelling of the same name.

he is attacking Nicolaitanism (as we shall show through the series). If Gnostics are not named directly as Irenaeus does in *Against Heresies*, then at *best* the opponents St. Peter writes about may be characterized as “Proto-Gnostics,” which had been a target of St. Paul’s for the letter to the Colossians.

Patristic Witness

Among the Apostolic Fathers there are few, if any, direct quotations, leading the scholarly critics to believe that the document was written very late; however, the Apostolic Fathers have been found to allude to 2 Peter,⁴ and they were in the habit of calling out against pseudepigrapha when it was found. The Apostolic Fathers do not mention every single verse of every single New Testament document either, let alone conform to modern methodologies like citing chapter and verse; when similar language is utilized, it can by and large be legitimately taken as Patristic witness.

Stylistic Differences

The final objection to Petrine authorship is that of stylistic difference. The line goes that 1 Peter and 2 Peter are undeniably different in linguistic pattern, diction, and referential habit, therefore necessitating different authors. The premise is true but the conclusion is not: 1 Peter tends to quote Old Testament verses directly, while 2 Peter tends to allude to them without relying on direct quotations. Further, since much of the language is shared with the Epistle of Jude, it stands to the critics’ reason that the author of 2 Peter must be an individual recruiting the name of Peter to bolster his authority while plagiarizing from Jude.

The critical failure of this argument is found in one key detail: St. Peter does not employ an amanuenses for 2 Peter. There is no mention of a scribal assistant, most likely because the Apostle is in a dungeon somewhere in Rome preparing for death. This means that Silvanus or some other assistant is not going to be present to help him phrase things, organize his thoughts, and so forth. By virtue of writing this Epistle *alone*, his tone and diction will be distinct from his first letter. As far as St. Jude is concerned, there is nothing to say that the two men did not collaborate together, possibly when one was able to visit the other in prison, to write their respective Epistles. One can imagine St. Jude offering a few slips of parchment to St. Peter through the bars of his cell, trading ideas with him for the sake of ease in writing.

Occasion

The dating of the letter is late, likely a number of weeks or months before St. Peter was martyred (before 68 A.D.). He refers to his impending death in the text,⁵ suggesting that his circumstances dictated the aforementioned lack of an amanuenses. Thus he gives us the context and occasion for writing: it is his final will and testament. What does the Apostle wish for Christians to focus on after his death? As we mentioned, three key topics: seeking virtue, rebuffing false doctrine, and holding on to the hope of Christ’s return. There were many false voices in his day offering perspectives on the Return of Christ: some said He had already returned, some said He wasn’t going to return, and others said He would return within the lifetime of those living in the first century A.D. Given the background in Exilic thought from his first Epistle, St. Peter spends the latter part of his second Epistle encouraging Christians to *hold strong* and never give up hope, for Christ will return exactly when He wishes to.

4 Robert E. Picirilli, “Allusions to 2 Peter in the Apostolic Fathers,” <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0142064X8801003304>

5 2 Pet.2:12-14

2 Peter Bible Study #2: Outline and Structure

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Introduction

As with any other book in Scripture, we understand the message the author conveys more deeply if we search for the structure the author employs.

2 Peter Structural Outline

1:1-2 – *Greeting*

Sanctification and Virtue (1:3-11)

1:3-4 – God empowers the believer.

1:5-8 – The empowered believer seeks virtues.

1:9-11 – The importance of seeking the virtues.

Sanctification and False Teachers (1:12-2:22)

1:12-15 – St. Peter's Motivations

1:16-21 – The Authoritative Litmus Tests

2:1-3 – The nature of false teachers introduced

2:4-10a – The Fate of the false teachers

2:10b-22 – The nature of false teachers elaborated

Sanctification and the Second Advent

3:1-7 – Condemnation of the Scoffers

3:8-10 – The Truth about the Second Advent

3:11-18 – Seeking virtue in light of the Second Advent

St. Peter's Thesis

We have identified a motif of *Sanctification* which permeates the whole of 2 Peter. It is inescapable. The Apostle teaches in no uncertain terms that the believer is cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work of increasing their holiness over time during this life.

-The first section (1:3-21) exhorts the Christian to seek the virtues *after* God has “granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness,” knowing that they become “partakers of the Divine nature” by God's promises.¹ What God has done already for the Christian, the Christian sees as motivation to further improve. In other words, we must take an *active role* in sanctification.

-The second section (1:22-2:22) exhorts the Christian to *protect* their sanctification by following the teachings of the Apostles rather than false teachers. After establishing his own authority, St. Peter teaches his readers what they are to look out for in heretics so that they may be avoided.

-The third section (3:1-18) advises that the way in which one is to prepare for Christ's return is to “be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace.”²

Every single verse in 2 Peter is predicated on the notion that Christians work with God in the advancement of their holiness. We are exhorted through this letter to seek to please God, to disregard those who would lead us to sin, and to patiently wait for the Second Advent, being found as devout servants absolved of their sins.

1 2Pet.1:3-4

2 2Pet.3:14

2 Peter Bible Study #3: St. Peter's Self-understanding

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 1:1-2

1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Introduction

We have discussed the authorship, dating and occasion of 2 Peter and verified that it was indeed written by its titular author. We have also identified the motif of sanctification as it applies to seemingly unrelated topics as we formulated an outline for the Epistle. Now we can begin discussing the greeting verses and continue on to the main body of the Epistle's text.

Vs.1a

Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

The author identifies himself as “Simeon Peter” as opposed to “Simon Peter.” The names “Simon” and “Simeon” are the same. St. Peter is referred to as “Simeon” by James during the Jerusalem council,¹ so this introduction is not without precedent. Both are variant spellings of the Hebrew name שִׁמְעוֹן, or “Shimon,”² which is itself derived from שָׁמַע, “Shema,” meaning “to hear.”³ Meanwhile, the name “Peter,” from the Greek word Πέτρος,⁴ means “stone,” as being a stone that one may pick up. There are eighteen verses in Scripture which refer to this Apostle as “Simon Peter,” suggesting that his birth name “Simon” and the name given to him by Christ, “Peter,”⁶ are to be taken together as one. 2 Peter 1:1 is the only Scriptural instance in which the Apostle refers to himself as “Simeon Peter,” confirming this pairing and its attendant significance by employing it in this introduction. This is significant in that when the two names are taken together they mean “listening stone,” or “stone that hears,” suggesting that while he was a leader of the early Church, he did not act on his own authority or for his own glory.

St. Peter also refers to his vocation in a similar fashion to his name: it is twofold. On the one hand he is a δοῦλος, or slave.⁷ On the other, he is an ἀπόστολος, or Apostle.¹⁰¹¹ A slave is bound property of his owner; an Apostle is a messenger commissioned to represent someone with authority. This taken with his twofold name tells us much about how the Apostle saw

1 Acts 15:14

2 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8095.htm>

3 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8085.htm>

4 Transliterated “Petros,” Strong's #4074.

5 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4074.htm>

6 Matthew 16:18

7 Transliterated “Doulos” Strong's #1401

8 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1401.htm>

9 The word has been translated into English as “servant” going as far back as the King James version on account of the spectrum of treatments which could apply to any human chattel. Our best guess as to the translation strategy here is that, since Christ does not see those who see Him as *merely* property, it is not correct to refer to them with a word that suggests as much. In the first century, a slave could be seen as a beloved member of a family on the one hand, or be treated as he was not a person on the other; since Christ loves and cares for all who serve Him, this term is preferred over “slave.” Later translations often say “bondservant” for accuracy, since the prefix “dou” comes from the Greek term “Deo,” which means to grasp or bind; they seem to be approaching a middle-ground between “slave” and “servant” so as to maintain the chattel aspect of the term without sacrificing the benevolence that Christ shows.

10 Transliterated “Apostolos,” Strong's #652

11 <https://biblehub.com/greek/652.htm>

himself. In a word, Simon the fisherman of Bethsaida¹² was made a slave to Christ Jesus so that he may become the Apostle St. Peter. He embraces both roles, becoming Simeon Peter, the slave and Apostle of Christ.

Vs.1b

To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

St. Peter addresses those who have “obtained a faith” by God's righteousness which is equal to his own. This obtaining is not done by some sort of accomplishment: the word for “obtained” is λαχοῦσιν,^{13,14} meaning to have actively received by the casting of lots. The casting of lots was utilized in the Old Testament and early Pentecost era¹⁵ to determine the will of God: what appeared to humanity to be mere chance was accepted as God's decision. In other words, the Apostle speaks of “obtaining” that faith equal to his own, not as an achievement but as something we receive on account of God's initial act; we may feel as though our faith is the result of happenstance, but it is truly our Lord converting us. Thus St. Peter addresses the audience in a thoroughly monergistic fashion. After all, it is by the righteousness of God that the audience has received faith, not their own righteousness or capabilities.

In what sense is the faith of his audience equal in value and prestige to his own? This is St. Peter writing, who is historically held in highest esteem by most denominations. Yet despite his elevated status he is not so arrogant as to claim that this makes him “special” in any way: after all, he tempers his title as Apostle by calling himself a slave. Though he has great authority, he does not see himself as being superior in any way to other faithful Christians: at *most* he is “Primus Inter Pares,” or first among equals. It is as though he were to say “I am here to bring a message, yes, but I am no better than you. Like you I have received faith by the transforming work of our Lord, but in the manner of eyewitness rather than by the Gospel proclaimed.”

On a brief note, the phrase “our God and Savior Jesus Christ” would be translated formally from the Greek, “The righteousness of the God of us and our Savior Jesus Christ.” This is certainly a declaration that Jesus Christ is God, given that the word “righteousness” is in the *singular* as a noun, whereas if God and Christ were two different beings the Apostle would have used a plural noun – “righteousnesses.” Not only does he use the singular noun and genitive case for both God and Christ, his later discussion on the Transfiguration and his eagerness to call Jesus “Kyrios,” or Lord means that contextually his message is clear. Jesus Christ is proclaimed to be Divine in the very first verse.

Vs.2

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

“Grace” is a common Greek greeting which was rendered in epistles in the Roman empire. “Peace” was common among Jewish greetings. Since the Apostolic Era was characterized by the first inclusion of Gentiles into the Body of Christ (as well as the breaking off of nonbelieving Jews), there was a period of adjustment by which both Gentile and Hebrew Christians were discovering that they were to get along by virtue of both receiving salvation.¹⁶ Thus Apostolic epistolary greetings were characterized by both as a means of recognizing that both groups were accepted in the Church, and that their mutual reception of Grace and Peace from the Lord our God meant one Body united in Christ. Per

12 John 1:44

13 Transliterated “Lachousin,” Strong's #2975

14 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2975.htm>

15 Acts 1:17

16 Ephesians 2:11-22

the second verse, these are magnified and advanced in the congregations when Christians together rightly devote themselves to Jesus.

2 Peter Bible Study #4: The Empowering of the Believer

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 1:3-4

3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, **4** by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Introduction

After greeting the churches and giving a sense of his self-image (Simon and Peter, slave and Apostle), now the Apostle begins to discuss his message. Unlike St. Paul's Epistles, St. Peter is direct; he gives no updates on his ministry, greets no one in particular, and speaks on no contemporary issues. He gets right into the message on account of his imminent martyrdom, making this Epistle something of a last will and testament. Yet lest anyone misunderstand his message as some sort of "ladder of divine ascent" works-salvation screed, he starts it with a soteriological proclamation.

Vs.3

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence

The first matter which St. Peter wants to bring to our awareness is the distinction between life and godliness. Regarding life, he means eternal life in Christ. He cannot be speaking of physical life on the material plane, as he is not writing to the dead after all. We have our eternal life by the Divine Power of God, *not* by our own godliness. Yet godliness *is* important to the Christian, and it is gained the same exact way as our conversion: the Word.

St. Peter says that it is by God's power and through the knowledge of Him who calls us that we are granted all things for life and godliness. The *act* is His grace poured upon us: the *means* is our receiving the message He wants us to hear. This is the message concerning Christ, by which we come to faith.¹ As we are saved by Grace Alone through Faith Alone, the Apostle can say that we receive everything pertaining to life by virtue of this knowledge. We cannot know who saves us except by the Word after all, let alone receive the promises given to us in Baptism. The same goes for godliness, or being more devout, prone to good works, more virtuous, etc.

Now before we start thinking that St. Peter is advocating salvation by intellectual assent, we must recognize how he employs the word. The word ἐπίγνωσις is not just "head" knowledge, but a more personal and interactive perception and recognition of something by personal experience.²³ It might be better rendered "recognition," nearly synonymous with faith, that faithful part of the believer which certainly *learns* about Christ from the Word, but also *identifies* and *confesses* His Divinity, humanity, Passion and Resurrection for our eternal life. The Christian does not have ἐπίγνωσις solely because he had information stuffed into his brain; the Christian has ἐπίγνωσις because he *believes* the Word of God that brought him to faith.

Vs.4

by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of

1 Romans 10:17

2 Transliterated "Epignosis," Strong's #1922

3 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1922.htm>

sinful desire.

By this faith and recognition one receives the promises of God which grant us forgiveness, cleansing, and eternal life – *to start*. These promises are also delivered in the Sacraments, received by faith and by which we become “partakers of the Divine Nature.” That phrase is not to say that we become gods ourselves, but instead that we receive the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence, the forgiveness of our sins, and union with Christ Himself.⁴ Far be it from him to reject the inherent unity, the oneness in God's nature⁵ and violate the First Commandment by believing in the addition of other gods through apotheosis.

As for escaping corruption, remember that it is not our own corruption that we escape but rather the corruption that has resulted from our concupiscence (that is, sinful desire). If the corruption were the same as the concupiscence, then we would be in quite a sore spot, as the presence of any sin whatsoever would mean we are not saved. Thankfully, the corruption referred to here is the result of our indwelling sin, the depravity of mankind. Prior to one's regeneration by Baptism, a human being is twisted in his nature that he is incapable of doing anything without sin *Coram Deo*. Simply put, all of his motivations and desires are toward sin.⁶ When we are regenerated, our nature is changed and we become entirely new,⁷ freed from the bondage of sin and death and *finally* able to begin doing what is right in our Lord's eyes.

This is the basis of the entire Epistle of 2 Peter. By faith in Christ we receive the Grace of our Lord which saved our souls and makes us entirely new. We are finally, on account of this regeneration, able to seek our Lord and what pleases Him; though we shall still be sinners until our death or Christ's Return, we are no longer subject to being *completely* evil as we once were. Remember, St. Peter declares in his first Epistle that the Christian is elevated, being made ontologically above the non-believer.⁸ Now it is time to discuss a plan of living within that paradigm, even when taken out of 1 Peter's Exilic motif. What does one do when they are not under the persecutory pressure that the churches in Asia Minor were going through? In such case we may not rest on our laurels, but must continue seeking God. That means following the threefold path of sanctification as we discussed in the outline: harboring virtue, rejecting false dogma, and holding fast to our Savior.

4 Acts 2:38, Romans 6:4-6

5 Deuteronomy 6:4

6 Genesis 8:21

7 2 Corinthians 5:17

8 1 Peter 2:4-10

2 Peter Bible Study #5: The Virtues

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 1:5-8

5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, **6** and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, **7** and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. **8** For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction

After introducing himself, St. Peter began his second Epistle with a soteriological statement best summarized as this: God empowers believers by regenerating them through faith and the Grace with which He applies all of His promises. Godliness is the *result* of salvation, not the prerequisite for it. But now the question is “what now?” How shall a Christian man conduct his spiritual life after being regenerated? If he has been given everything necessary for godliness, then it would be foolish of the believer to assume that he can rest on his laurels and do nothing on account of it. The Christian should be shown to love his neighbor more, be more honest and generous, avoiding sin more stridently while increasing in devotions. In order to help facilitate this, St. Peter advocates for *virtue ethics*.

A virtue is a good character quality which a man may possess, which contributes to his general excellence, or ἀρετή.¹² This is the first thing with which St. Peter advocates we supplement our faith, an honest seeking after excellence in our lives. From there he gives more specific virtues which we ought to seek after, all of which play a part in the continued fruit-bearing of our lives. The very first thing which a Christian must seek, then, is to *be a better person*, embarking on a spiritual, mental and physical quest for self-improvement without sacrificing love for neighbor. This is important to remember – St. Peter is not telling us to be so self-involved that we do not love our fellow believers or show proper dignity to the outsider, for then he would betray the central tenets he taught in 1 Peter! Yet a large priority is present for the Christian to seek becoming a better Christian, and that is what this passage is all about.

Vs.5-7

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

One might wonder why faith must be supplemented. After all, if it is by faith that we are justified by God, why not leave it at that? Why not simply allow the Holy Spirit to work sanctification in us and do the work of improving us Himself? The answer is as simple as this: if you are regenerate, then you are expected to do these things. Our Savior did not shed His precious Blood so that we could be worthless layabouts sitting around until we are brought to Heaven. In no place does Scripture conceive of a believer as being a coma patient waiting around to die. As St. Paul says, “you were bought with a price,”³ therefore the Christian must seek to be more virtuous.

The virtues are thus, and explained by the context of devotion:⁴

1 Transliterated “Arete,” Strong's # 703

2 <https://biblehub.com/greek/703.htm>

3 1 Corinthians 6:20

4 Each of these virtues could be a study in and of itself. In doing so however, we would end up spending so much time outside of 2 Peter that we could not justifiably place them in a Sunday School series *on 2 Peter*.

- Virtue, or ἀρετή, as a general earnestness and good-faith desire to harbor personal excellence.
- Knowledge, being well-studied in matters of the Christian faith (namely the Word of God).
- Self-control, having mastery over one's passions so that one does not fall into sin.
- Steadfastness, or the ability to endure difficulties in the Christian life without falling into sin.
- Godliness, emphasizing personal piety and devotion to our Lord.
- Brotherly affection, having a fraternal bond with other Christians and preferring their company. Esprit de Corps for brothers in the faith.
- Love, or Agape, seeking out the good of others for their own sake, having no tangible benefit to oneself from the act.

Much ink has been spilled in explaining *how* one goes about seeking these virtues, since St. Peter does not explain the methods himself. The reason for this, we believe, is that not every Christian operates in the same way. Each of us has the freedom and ability to seek to garner these virtues in his own way, lest the Church produce “cookie cutter Christians” whose non-differentiation from one another results in structural weakness for the Church. Not all of us are called to the same vocations within the Body of Christ,⁵ so we are all called to find ways to do it (provided of course that we do so without sinning).

Note that St. Peter does not give an *exhaustive* list of virtues. These are not the only virtues for us to seek, only the most important ones. For instance, *courage* is a fantastic virtue that is extolled in Scripture as being an asset to any believer, yet St. Peter does not mention it. Joy is a dispositional virtue that is unmentioned, though in other places the New Testament literally commands us to rejoice!⁶ We do well to think of the Apostle's list as our starting point, one to which we return over and over again during our earthly sojourn.

Vs.8

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

By “ineffective,” the Apostle speaks of the lazy Christian. By “unfruitful,” he speaks of the Christian with nothing to show for his faith. In other words, he relates to us that seeking out these virtues prevents *spiritual stagnation*. If one is lazy or unfruitful, then he will find himself frustrated by his own sins, often falling into despair, or perhaps unaware of his own destitution. In other words, to fail to seek this self-improvement opens one up to an inferior relationship with God and vulnerability to attacks by the devil. In the next pericope, the Apostle will go in greater detail concerning the risks that are inherent to a lazy devotional life.

5 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

6 1 Thessalonians 5:16

2 Peter Bible Study #6: The Stakes

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 1:9-11

9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. **10** Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. **11** For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Introduction

St. Peter has given a virtue list which grants the Christian a means of actively participating in his sanctification. Not only sanctification but also *preservation* is accomplished in part with the believer's efforts, for "if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹ Yet it is not just healthful and beneficial to foster these good qualities, but *wise*. St. Peter brings to our attention the pitfalls and dangers of ignoring them, exhorting us to continue on in our efforts.

Vs.9

For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

Someone who has neglected to engage in virtue-seeking will be "nearsighted." He cannot see his spiritual state clearly. Such an individual shall forget that he was forgiven, likely not recognizing the benefits of Baptism nor the plenary nature of the Atonement. Note here what the Apostle is *not* saying; he is not claiming that someone who neglects this is *damned*, nor is he saying that their former cleansing is undone. But someone who has this shortsightedness is necessarily going to have a bad conscience over their sins, and potentially despair in light of it.

Contrition over our sins is a necessary aspect of penitent faith. We do well to hate our sins, weep over them, and rightly fear God's wrath as a result of them. But when we hear the Gospel and receive absolution by any of God's provided means (Confession, the Eucharist, remembrance of our Baptism), we ought not *forget* that we have been forgiven. The man who seeks virtue in obedience to this Apostolic exhortation will be less prone to sin and guilt over time; he shall not be made perfect until the Resurrection, but his life will be marked with far less turmoil than the man who does not do so. Those who neglect virtue-seeking are *more* prone to sin, leading to greater guilt, fear, etc. This is not to say that the active devout Christian will not sin (for we all do), but he shall have an easier time getting back on track in his walk with the Lord.

Vs.10

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Most interpreters have an instinct to apply this to the doctrine of predestination. To see this verse leads to confusion in both language and application. The word for calling is κλησιν,²³ having the connotation of *invitation*. One who is called by our Lord is invited to believe in Christ

1 1 Peter 1:8

2 Transliterated "Klesin," Strong's #2821

3 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2821.htm>

Jesus for the salvation of their soul; it is the universal call brought forth to all humanity by the Atonement, as the Savior promised would happen.⁴ The word for election is ἐκλογὴν,⁵⁶ or *choosing*. At first glance then, assuming that election here is in reference to an “election of Grace” by which God chooses who shall be saved before He even created the earth, it makes no sense – the “military muster” which the Lutheran Reformers denied.⁷

If salvation is a matter of calling, it cannot be predetermined: an invitation is not an abduction. If salvation is a matter of predetermination, it is not an invitation, for one could theoretically refuse an invitation. If St. Peter were applying both concepts in a soteriological sense, then the verse literally means that the believer must force assurance of a predetermined outcome to which he was invited by his own diligence. It would thus present the absurdity of a salvation by works mixed incoherently with a calvinistic understanding of election.

In order to understand what St. Peter is truly saying, we must recall that he just mentioned lazy believers as being *blind* to the fact that they were already cleansed from his sins. Such an individual forgetting his cleansing would also forget that God had invited him to salvation in Christ – who even by His title “Anointed One” is the true Elect. A neglectful believer would thus also doubt his part in the Elect, forgetting his Baptism and union with our Savior. This is what the Apostle means by “fall” in this verse – to backslide and despair on account of one's destitute spiritual life.

Conversely, someone who maintains the quest for the virtues is all the more aware of God's gracious invitation to salvation, and rejoices to be part of the Church all the more. The believer is part of the Elect by being united to the Elect One, Jesus, in Baptism.⁸ And if the believer is thus united to Christ, they are part of the Body which is “predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”⁹ Thus the Apostle *remains* on the topic of sanctification. We might reword this verse as follows:

“Be diligent to strengthen your faith in God's invitation to salvation and your unity with Christ, being remade in His Image. By doing so patiently and faithfully, you shall not backslide as the lazy believer might.”

Vs.11

For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The believer taking an active role in cooperating with the work of the Holy Spirit in advancing his holiness and character is the “way” the Apostle is mentioning. By so doing, he is “richly provided” his entrance into Heaven and the New Earth upon the Resurrection. He is not saying that only those seeking virtue will go to Heaven though: there are those who are saved by the “skin of their teeth,” so to speak, having come to the Lord with struggle and resistance and endless revisiting of sins. We should doubt that the thief on the cross was so pious that he earned Heaven!

But the devout believer nonetheless has an easier experience of the Christian life. His life might be marked with persecutions and trials, but they do not deter him from faith. He might be poor, but his trust brings him joy in the Lord; he might be beset with harsh relationships, yet he will focus most on his relationship with God. A richly provided entrance means one unhindered by the consequences of neglectful living.

4 John 12:32

5 Transliterated “Ekloge,” Strong's #1589

6 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1589.htm>

7 Formula of Concord, Epitome XI.9

8 Galatians 3:27

9 Romans 8:29

2 Peter Bible Study #7: St. Peter's Motivations

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 1:12-15

12 Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. **13** I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, **14** since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. **15** And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

Introduction

St. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians primarily to give a defense of himself, his Apostleship, and his ministry against a group commonly called the “super-apostles.”¹ Unsurprisingly, this is the same situation St. Peter finds himself in as he pens his second Epistle. Yet as his martyrdom is looming in the near future for him, we have a sense from his language that the presence of false teachers did not bother the Apostle as much as it did for St. Paul; the latter seems to have been the bigger target for them than St. Peter, given 2 Corinthians' implication that the “super-apostles” actively went to churches founded by St. Paul.

Yet while St. Peter will have much to say about false teachers in 2 Peter, that is *not* the occasion he has for writing, or even his prime motivation. While St. Paul has the temperament and habitude of a theologian among the Apostles, and St. James' writing reflects that of a polemicist, St. Peter is more *pastoral*. He does not forsake truth for its own sake, but also never forgets that the truth is revealed to believers *for their benefit*. This motivation is made explicit in our reading today, and therefore precedes the transition to discussing the Apostle's qualifications.

Vs.12

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.

It is not sufficient for someone to hear about a doctrine, virtue, commandment, or history only once. Even if someone should already know these matters by heart, “the heart is deceitful above all things.”² Since the previous verses (2Pet.1:9-11) discuss the risks of lacking the virtues and the reward for seeking them, it is evident that St. Peter holds to a “use it or lose it” mentality. If you are not growing in sanctification, you are likely receding. That is, if we are not actively seeking self-improvement and being reminded of the good that we ought to be fostering, then we shall slide into vice. Such is the nature of Original Sin – not an original *guilt* for sins which we have not committed, but a twisting of human nature such that even believers are tempted from within, and must be diligent to engage in struggle to overcome, both by confession, receiving the Sacraments, and conscious personal effort.³⁴⁵ Though St. Peter recognizes his audience as being catechized, they must *still* receive these lessons again for the sake of their continued progress.

Vs.13-14

I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the

1 2 Corinthians 11:5

2 Jeremiah 17:9

3 For more information, the doctrine of Original Sin is covered in the second article of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology.

4 <https://thebookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/article-ii/>

5 <https://thebookofconcord.org/apology-of-the-augsburg-confession/article-ii/>

putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.

The motivation for writing this Epistle is to assist believers in continuing their part in sanctification. The *occasion*, however, is St. Peter's impending martyrdom. The dating of 2 Peter being close to his death (circa 64-68 A.D.) lets us know that he is likely in a prison awaiting a sentence from emperor Nero, again according to tradition. Yet even if all the traditional accounts of his martyrdom are untrue – perhaps by dating, perpetrators, etc., all we know is that he was martyred⁶ – he was still aware of its impending occurrence. It could very well be that the Apostle is simply aware that he could die at any point at the near future on account of his age.

We do not require much from “Tradition” to figure this out. During Christ's earthly ministry, Simon Peter was old enough to be a full-time fisherman, be married,⁷ and take responsibility for his mother in law;⁸ this means he would have fulfilled a threshold of adulthood by the time he was called to ministry in 30 A.D., between 16-30 years old. By the time he was martyred, we can add 31-35 years to this, placing him at advanced middle age to old age, the time in which men typically die. He knew this to be the case, whether he was in a Roman dungeon or not. Either way, it is clear that death is on his mind, causing him to pen this Epistle as his last will and testament.

Vs.15

And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

The Apostle's hope is that the churches he writes to (and indeed, all churches enduring even to this day) may be fully realized in catechesis. To memorize, internalize, and practice the matters of the Christian faith so as to be able to recall every lesson and live according to it. This reveals more of his pastoral outlook and selflessness. Instead of spending all his time trying to survive his trials or escape death, he prefers to focus on the spiritual well-being of Christians. There is no better way he can accomplish this than by penning a tract that – if it is adhered to by believers – ensures a continued, dynamic and growing faith.

6 John 21:18-19

7 Luke 4:38-39

8 Luke 5:1-11,

2 Peter Bible Study #8: The Litmus Test

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 1:16-21

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. **17** For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” **18** we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. **19** And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, **20** knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. **21** For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

The structure of 2 Peter is unique. After briefly introducing himself, St. Peter begins asserting the need for believers to seek out virtues. Only after doing so does he discuss his motivation to help Christians stay strong and fruitful after his impending martyrdom. This centralizes the motif of sanctification throughout the Epistle; St. Peter wants his audience paying attention to his *teaching*, not fretting over his death.

But as he progresses the letter's topic from virtue ethics to defense against false teachers, a matter of qualification becomes necessary. Why listen to St. Peter and the Apostles over the other teachers of their day – Nicolas, Simon Magus, the judaizers, the “super-apostles,” etc.? What gives *authority* to the man telling us to seek these specific virtues? Today's passage provides clear guidelines and answers.

Vs.16-18

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

Cleverly Devised Myths – It appears that St. Peter is using the phrase of some accuser. This could be the standard talking point of the Pharisees, to claim that the Apostles were utilizing “cleverly devised myths” in order to bring people to Christianity. On the other hand, he could also be anticipating the accusation made by future outside groups; after all, to this very day there are scoffers which claim that the whole of the Christian message is simply made up.

Eyewitnesses of His majesty – Here the differentiation is made between the Apostles and the false teachers which lob this accusation. This is consistent with St. Peter's previous given qualifications for the office of Apostle, that whoever would be chosen for the Twelve must have traveled with them for the duration of Christ's ministry, *starting* with the Baptism of John.¹ It is that eyewitness status which gives them authority, even over the “lesser” Apostle St. Paul, who was given his office “as to one untimely born.”²

1 Acts 1:21-23

2 1 Corinthians 15:7-9

Holy Mountain – As an example of the things they witnessed, St. Peter offers up the Transfiguration as a highlight of the great revelations entrusted to him and his associates.³ In doing so, he highlights that our Lord entrusted to himself the revelation of Christ Jesus. By witnessing these things and hearing our Heavenly Father's voice, St. Peter is given the confidence of God Almighty to spread the message which Christ has for all peoples. This makes him among the few truly trustworthy authorities in religious matters.

Vs.19

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,

Until Christ returns, the Church is in her great Night, or state of Exile. The “day” is the moment of our Lord's Second Advent, in which He shall make us perfect in an act of final sanctification. Yet while we are in the dark night of persecution, exile, longing and tribulation, we have a light which guides us: the Word of God. St. Peter holds that the Word, namely the Old Testament and the inspired writings of the New at the time,⁴ are superior to his own experiences and Apostolic authority.

Let us reiterate: the Apostle, to whom Christ gave the authority and mission to proclaim the Gospel to all nations, holds to and teaches *Sola Scriptura*. He says plainly here that the Word of God is “more fully confirmed” than his own experiences – or any other Apostolic tradition, for that matter. What he might say or establish concerning church usages, traditional methods of doing things, etc., none of that surpasses the Word of God which is our light in this present darkness. If this is the case, then Scripture is the only valid source of dogma and morals.

Vs.20-21

knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The false teachers do not have the Apostolic authority, experience, or mission; more importantly they do not have valid understandings of the Word of God. They only have their personal opinions, gathered either from reason or sensation, which they proclaim. They might claim that they *interpret* the Word of God, but they lack the sense to understand that mankind does not have the right to possess his own “interpretation” of Scripture. Bolstering his argument, St. Peter adds that not even the *prophets* gave their own opinions on matters; they wrote what God told them to.

It is the task of the exegete to find the meaning of a given passage or verse in the Bible *without* employing his own reason, experience, emotion, or opinion. If at any time he inserts these into his work, he is no longer doing real interpretation but rather *opining* on matters where he is not permitted. It is for this reason that Lutherans like ourselves trumpet the plain literal meaning of Scripture as supreme; we concur with Luther, who said “let Scripture interpret Scripture,” and if we must speculate we have to make it explicit to all who hear us.

³ Mark 9:2-13

⁴ 2 Peter 3:15-16 demonstrates how the Apostle understood that Scripture was being written in his own lifetime.

2 Peter Bible Study #9: The Nature of False Teachers

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 2:1-3

1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. **2** And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. **3** And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Introduction

2 Peter begins with an introduction, moves to a grand statement of the Gospel's power in our lives, then exhorts us to seek after the virtues as a means of self-improvement for the sake of spiritual growth. These matters are considered self-evident, worth bringing into the reader's mind first and foremost, and it is only after them does St. Peter begin to discuss his qualifications as an Apostle. We get a sense from the text that he prefers to speak about the more important matters of Biblical truth than to discuss himself or his own authority. He briefly mentions having seen the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus, and then at once moves on to the superiority of Scripture over his own experiences and all human interpretation.

Yet the previous passage we went over, in which St. Peter brings up his and the Apostles' qualifications, was *necessary*. False teachers began to arise within the Church, carrying off souls in wayward directions. When 2 Peter was written, the main parties of false teachers consisted of the judaizers, proto-agnostics, docetists, and antinomians;¹ they are addressed respectively in Galatians, Colossians, 1 John and Romans.² Yet while these four Epistles argue against the specific schools of heresy and warn Christians to avoid them, St. Peter decides to talk about the nature of false teachers *as* false teachers, rather than discussing their specific doctrines. What actually motivates them? What do they have in common?

Vs.1

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

The children of Israel had to deal with false prophets in the Old Testament; so too shall the Church have to contend with false teachers. Like false prophets, they insinuate themselves into the Body and *secretly* do so, whether that is through deceptive evangelism or by climbing the institutional ladders in the Church. We must note that the Apostle is *guaranteeing* that these heretics will come; it is prophetic, much in the same way that St. Paul prophesied the coming of false teachers in Acts 20:26-35, counseling the Ephesian elders on how to proceed in light of the inevitable.

We must note that this dynamic has not changed in over two thousand years. When the mormon “missionary” says “of course we believe in the Trinity!” in the back of his mind he means that he believes in a confederation of three separate gods who were at one point sinful

1 Judaizers demanded that Gentile Christians be circumcised and obey the Law for justification; proto-agnostics held to a panoply of anti-material views; docetists believed that Christ's body was an illusion and thus He did not truly die on the Cross; antinomians believed that believers could sin freely.

2 Among other New Testament passages, of course.

human beings; he simply neglects to mention this belief of his in order to keep you from shutting down the conversation or properly calling him to repentance. When a “liberal Christian” claims to believe in the inspiration of Scripture in one conversation, while denying it in another, he harmonizes the two by redefining inspiration. Like the judaizers and the docetists, the Apostolic pronouncement is that they shall be destroyed.

By saying they are “even denying the Master who bought them,” this is a clear statement that Christ died even for those who shall go to hell for all eternity. His blood paid for their sins just as much as it paid for the sins of those who shall live eternally. While St. Peter is mentioning this on behalf of the larger point he is making, we see this as a sign that the calvinist doctrine of “limited atonement” (in which they believe Christ did not die for anyone but the elect) is patently unbiblical.

Vs.2

And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.

By “sensuality,” the Apostle does not mean that all false teachers are necessarily *sexually* perverted or lewd, although plenty of them are. He uses the term ἀσελγείαις,³⁴ which has a stronger connotation of *licentiousness*. The licentious one believes he may act freely to do as he pleases, lacking restraint in favor of his own will; this attracts people to his cause, who admire his boldness or seek the same kind of license. The Christian does not believe that his own interpretations of Scripture are necessarily valid, preferring to allow the text to speak for itself; the heretic believes that his interpretation of all reality, including the text of Scripture, is infallible. He does not question himself, is unlikely to admit when he is wrong, and would rather attack the truth of Scripture than reform his ways. This can result in sins of a public nature, assuredly. It can also result in a more sneaky, sinister means of subversion, in which his outward life is clean but his thoughts and teachings are tainted with blasphemy.

Once more, this is observed throughout the entirety of Church history. Men like Arius went about enticing rough sailors at the docks and had them perform violent acts; Donatus appealed to disaffected Christians with his hyper-stringent understanding of the faith, appearing to be faithful while urging his followers toward violent martyrdom; mohammad promised riches, drunkenness and women to those willing to fight on his behalf; the borborite gnostic sect engaged in sexual sacramentalism. Though charles taze rusell appeared to live a clean life, he too marked his ministry with an endless array of false teachings which demanded people conform to *his* doctrines in the Jehovah's Witnesses. Today's false teachers are no different, being animated by the same self-willed licentious spirit.

Vs.3

And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

As St. Peter just advocated for the supremacy of the Word of God at the end of the first chapter, this includes the witness of the Old Testament. Amos, Jeremiah, and Michaiiah and others had struggled against false prophets; these were typically court “yes men” who conjured up false prophecies that told the king whatever he wanted to hear.⁵ It is likely that he is thinking of this type of heretic when he speaks of greed, as exploitation with false words for money is *exactly* what the false prophets did. So too do we see the same dynamic played out in the so-called “prosperity gospel,” with the televangelists promising great earthly riches to those who

3 Transliterated “aselgeyais,” Strong's #766.

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/766.htm>

5 1 Kings 22:1-12 is a great example of this type of “prophet.”

fund their ministry.

God has long condemned those who would lie to get their way, especially those who would entice their neighbors to follow after heretical teachings. This verse is not positing that God pronounced a sentence of damnation on these teachers from eternity past; such would make them victims instead of perpetrators, with all their works determined and damned before they were even born. It is better to speak of this “condemnation from long ago” as being condemnation according to the Law. The First and Second Commandments are violated by these heretics, for each of them puts himself in the place of God and teaches dogmas as Christian which are not Christian, thus taking God's Name in vain. So long as the man decides to teach something in error, he is condemned from the moment he decides that his thoughts are what he shall teach.

2 Peter Bible Study #10: The Fate of False Teachers

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 2:4-10a¹

4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; **5** if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; **6** if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; **7** and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked **8** (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); **9** then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, **10a** and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Introduction

Having introduced the topic of false teachers, now it is the time to describe their *fate*. In short, the Apostle applies the same moral weight to heresy that the Old Testament applies to wicked nations, angels, and individuals. In so doing he encourages the churches that they, like the Old Testament saints, are being preserved and shall also be delivered.

Vs.4-6

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

There are three examples given which demonstrate that a terrible and destructive fate awaits those who teach falsely.

The first is those angels which sinned. There have been speculations that St. Peter is referring to intertestamental literature, as the parallels between here and St. Jude's Epistle are unmistakable and St. Jude refers back to the apocryphal book of Enoch.² However, it is more likely that St. Peter was privy to the same information that St. John had in the book of Revelation, which states that the devil has been chained for the purpose of no longer deceiving the nations, utilizing the same "chain" and pit imagery.³ The book of Enoch posits a single sin which angels committed, meriting eternal punishment: that of trading natural secrets and skills for marriage with human women.⁴ St. Jude and St. Peter, however, do not specify entirely: St. Jude points to their rebellion against established hierarchy, while St. Peter simply points out their sins. Given that the devil and his angels are sinning against God and the Church *continuously*, making it superfluous to point out any single sin that they committed as being particularly egregious. The point is, like these fallen angels the false teachers are slated for judgment.

1 The second half of verse 10 begins the next passage, which will be covered in the next lesson.

2 Jude vs.14

3 Revelation 20:1-3

4 Enoch is a mostly fictitious account and commentary on Genesis 6:1-4

The second is the entirety of the ancient world, which perished in the flood except for Noah and his family. Genesis 6 recounts that mankind's wickedness had increased on the earth to an extreme degree, one which has never since been observed. Because Noah was spared, and he is referred to as a "herald of righteousness," the Christian may take comfort in knowing that despite our own sins, the Church is counted as being the "Herald of righteousness" here on earth, and the congregations together form the new Ark in which believers are safe from God's wrath. After all, in the Divine service we hear Absolution, the forgiveness of our sins: wrath does not long remain with those who have true faith in Christ.

The third example is that of Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities destroyed as described in Genesis 19. The men of Sodom are shown being so wicked that they attempted to rape angels through violent sodomy. Gomorrah, presumably, was no better than Sodom, as God judges both cities by raining fire and sulfur down on them until they were all dead. The same severity of judgment is reserved, not just for the heretic but *all* nonbelievers, *all* of the wicked. And for all eternity.

Vs.7-8

and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard);

At first it appears odd that St. Peter would mention Abraham's nephew Lot. Why bring up the man who foolishly decided to *live* among the wicked in Sodom and sinfully offering his daughters to the men there? The point he is making is more salient when we realize he is using Lot as an encouragement for believers. Both in the first century and in the twenty-first, believers are similarly tormented by the surrounding pagans and their unholy ways. This dynamic has hardly ever changed. In the first century, Roman pagans and Jews surrounded Christians on all sides, publicly sinning against our God constantly. Today, there are endless temptations and public celebrations of sin by the secular world. Even in the Renaissance, church attendance was so low among Europeans that "folk magic" and attempts to perform black magic were everywhere. Like Lot and his family, the Church is always small, isolated, and persecuted; also like Lot, God promises deliverance. Yet more like Lot, God promises deliverance in spite of believers having sins of their own!

Vs.9-10a

then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

The point of this passage is to *encourage* believers. St. Peter earnestly desires to tell us that God's judgment is a point of edification, *comfort* even, for all Christians. Not just because it means our deliverance either, as Divine wrath brings about the justice we have craved for thousands of years. Note that St. Peter speaks of "defiling passions" - that is, homosexuality - and despising authority. False teachers almost universally bring about perversions in sexual matters, corrupting entire church bodies, or they destroy churches through unrighteous schism.

Recall that St. Peter is not condemning *all* departure from authority. If he was, then he would never have departed from the religious authorities in Jerusalem, those who sat "on Moses' seat."⁵ The Apostle is condemning those who rebel against authority *unrighteously* with evil motives, those who rebel for the sake of false doctrine, sexual immorality, or self-willed eisegetical interpretations. May we in the Catacomb Synod never be guilty of such!

2 Peter Bible Study #11: The Character of False Teachers

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 2:10b-22¹

10b Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, **11** whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. **12** But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, **13** suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. **14** They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! **15** Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, **16** but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

17 These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. **18** For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. **19** They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. **20** For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. **21** For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. **22** What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

Introduction

St. Peter has gone into detail concerning the nature and fate of heretics. He has spoken on what they do and what will be done to them. But in this passage he enters a passionate discussion on their character and the state of their souls. The false teacher is not *just* someone who teaches falsely, else the Apostle may have spoken of them as the lost sheep for whom Christ held great compassion.² He speaks not of a simpleton led away by error or a misled layman in a cult, but of the *leader* that brings both of them astray. The five year old child that attends an Armstrongist church is not as culpable as Herbert W. Armstrong.³ It is these men and women, who serve as the origins of various damnable beliefs that the Apostle dedicates his harshest words. Heresies are "gates of hell," and Christ had personally informed St. Peter that there would be such struggle.⁴ Thus he engages in this invective.

Vs.10b-14

10b Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, **11** whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. **12** But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming

¹ The second half of verse 10 begins this passage, the first half was part of the last lesson.

² Matthew 9:36

³ Armstrong's cult denies the Trinity, denies the physical resurrection of the dead, and claims one is saved by works. Armstrong was also known, as St. Peter predicts, to live in total opulence.

⁴ Matthew 16:18

about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, **13** suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. **14** They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!

The false teacher is not only unduly arrogant, he is also *bold* enough to speak from his own lofty inventions. He brings up angels for the sake of comparison. A non-fallen angel would know that he is not God, and thus could never blasphemously assume God's sole position as Judge. The heretic, on the other hand, is not like an angelic being but an animal; he acts on his feelings and appetites instead of any sort of wisdom. Angels have knowledge and power, yet remain humble before the Lord; false teachers have no knowledge and very little power, yet elevate themselves in their own imagination *above* God.

In enticing “unsteady people,” certainly the heretics does the devil's work. But unlike the nonbelieving jews and pagans who persecute the Church out of rage,⁵ St. Peter describes these false teachers who originate from within the Church as a kind of “happy warrior.” They are not members of a false religion, but those using Christianity to *create* a false religion. They are an enemy within which does greater damage than whatever pagans could accomplish. They tempt believers to sin, rob them of tithe money, steal men's wives, and are found carousing everywhere: all this in addition to leading people to damnation, their chief sin. In indignation, St. Peter proclaims them to be “accursed children.”

Vs.15-17

15 Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, **16** but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

17 These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.

In 2 Peter 2:1, the Apostle writes that they even go so far as to deny “the Master who bought them.” Continuing on the note of apostasy, St. Peter gives us no room to assume that they were never Christians in the first place. These are men who forsook “the right way” to go after Balaam's path. Balaam was a mercenary prophet, one who despite knowing the true God utilized his prophetic gifts for money.⁶ Like Balaam who was killed in battle,⁷ the judgment of destruction is promised on them as well.

They are called “waterless springs” because what ought to be there, namely true faith and good behavior, is not present. They are called “mists driven by a storm,” because they are volatile in their doctrines and liable to change them at any time. Mohammad famously changed the teachings on how Christians and jews must be treated; Joseph Smith changed his doctrines several times. The former married more wives than he permitted others to have while the latter drank in public while demanding others be teetotalers. Unstable dogma, unreliable behavior.

Vs.18-22

18 For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. **19** They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. **20** For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. **21** For it would have been better for them

⁵ Acts 7:54-60 (the stoning of St. Stephen) and Acts 19:23-41 (the riot in Ephesus) illustrates their experience of angry persecutors.

⁶ Numbers 22-24

⁷ Numbers 31:7-8

never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. **22** What the true proverb says has happened to them: “The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.

The “sensual passions of the flesh” are not merely sexual lusts, as some might presume. It is licentiousness that the Apostle speaks of, a firm longing to do as one pleases or to live as one desires. While this applies chiefly to the debauched antinomian teachers like Nicolas,⁸ it may also include the judaizers, who practically worshiped the Mosaic Law and suffered from an extreme sense of pride. We must concede however that the language describing defilement, vomit, and mire means this is chiefly about those who flaunt moral strictures entirely. One may imagine a man getting so drunk that he vomits on his girlfriend, only to then proudly proclaim “Praise Christ I can do this without guilt now!” Or perhaps someone with a sexual sin deciding that “Jesus just wants us to love one another” is an excuse for continuing in his sodomy.

St. Peter says that the apostate and the heretic would have been better off to not have known “the way of righteousness” than to have embraced it and turned back to false belief. As to why this is the case, we must look to the nature of apostasy. Any ignorant pagan may be converted if they do not resist the transforming power of the Word. But the state of those who fall away is such that they *remember* various parts of their catechesis; this makes any potential return to the faith difficult for the backslider and impossible for the apostate. They know the Scriptures to some degree, but decide to make up arguments against Biblical teaching so they don't have to believe it. Christ is not some unknown figure to them like He is to the pagan, but instead they make Him an enemy; the repentance necessary for their return to a state of Grace is thus much less likely than a pagan converting for the first time. While the parable of the Prodigal Son shows us that returning to faith after backsliding is *possible*,⁹ we note that it took the total humiliation of the son in the story, having to keep company with pigs, to turn him around. St. Peter is likely thinking of this parable while penning his Epistle, noting the filth mentioned in the state of the runaway son.

Thus the Christian is not only exhorted to avoid false teachers, but also to cling to Christ all the more closely.

8 Revelation 2:14-16, note that Christ compares Nicolaitism to the sin of Balaam the same way St. Peter speaks of false teachers.

9 Luke 15:11-32

2 Peter Bible Study #12: Condemnation of Scoffers

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 3:1-7

1 This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2 that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, 3 knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. 4 They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” 5 For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, 6 and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. 7 But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Introduction

It is not enough to condemn false teachers from within the Church, or to merely warn Christians of their impending presence. There are others outside of the Church entirely, nonbelievers, who take it upon themselves to mock Christianity and peel us away from Christ. St. Peter refers to them here as “scoffers;” though his language suggests a cynical group of first century jews who made life hard for believers, he applies their behavior in such a way that the passage applies throughout the centuries to all Christians. This passage briefly addresses the scoffers and rebukes them as a transitional way of introducing his discussion on the Second Advent.

Vs.1-2

1 This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2 that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,

The Apostle believes in the power of reminders, even for those who are already well aware of the topic. Just as the first chapter spoke of reminding believers about their pursuit of the virtues,¹ so believers may be strong against the attacks coming from both inside and outside the Church. There is no such thing as a Christian who does not need to be reminded of the central doctrines of the faith. No one is so used to eating “solid food” that they shall never again drink milk!² It is for this reason that theologians like Luther constantly instructed believers to not only consistently study the Word, but also for them to consistently return to the *catechism* as well. We must be *reminded*.

We also note what it is that St. Peter wants us to remember. In particular, it is “the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.” This is among the few mentions of prophet and apostles together as constituting that which Christians read: in other words, the Scriptures. How does one define the Scriptures? They are the writings of the prophets, the Apostles, and their associates (that is, in cases like Hebrews

1 2 Peter 1:12-13

2 Hebrews 5:11-14

or the message of Nebuchadnezzar³ these were writings recognized by prophet and Apostle to be inspired). The Scriptural test of what is Scripture or not is whether something is written by an Apostle, a prophet, or one whom they recognized as inspired; should a document *claim* to be written by any of these yet contradict what is already recognized as Scripture, then it is not Scripture and the author is a fraud. Such non-canonical books may be helpful for our historical understanding (e.g., 1 Maccabees), or turn out to be heretical nonsense (e.g., the “Secret Book of James”); if any book goes against that which St. Peter says we must retain for our reminder, it is to be discarded.

Vs.3-4

3 knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. **4** They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”

There is a theory posited in liberal theological circles that the first century Church believed the Eschaton would happen in their lifetimes. The idea is, the Apostles were so crazed in their belief that Christ would return before their deaths that they went into a missionary frenzy which resulted in their martyrdom. This theory is rebuffed by these two verses, which constitute a prophecy of *future* scoffers who arrive *after* the death of the Apostles. Their taunt against Christians is “ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” The only potential referent to the word “fathers” would be the original “Church Fathers,” the Apostles. It could not be the Biblical patriarchs, for those who would assert that would be silly to say nothing Divinely initiated happened after Abraham died! St. Peter, in his day, knew that though Christ could come back at any moment, believers are to live as playing the *long game*; each of us must live our lives embracing the day-to-day pursuit of virtue and faithfulness.

It would seem that the scoffers belong to some Jewish or Judaizing camp. They are shown by this prophecy to be interacting with Christians, accept that the world was created, and refer to the New Testament community as “the fathers,” rather than simply as early Christians. There is some Christian-adjacent thought to their view, but one which rejects the promise that Christ would return. Instead, they taunt those who believe in what Christ said plainly, the oracles of the prophets, and what the Apostles taught concerning the Second Advent.

It is no surprise that St. Peter's prediction has been fulfilled multiple times throughout every generation. Every new generation includes those who disbelieve Christ's promise to return, and usually from within some group in the Church or from some group of nonbelieving Jews. Recently “Preterism” has arisen, which claimed that Christ returned in a spiritual way in 70 A.D. And that there is no general Resurrection to look forward to. Typically this either comes with some pronouncement of universalism (also known as the “pantelist” position), or more commonly some form of works-based Judaizing based on an imagined need for new covenants with God.

Vs.5-7

5 For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, **6** and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. **7** But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

The Apostle switches to the present tense, denoting that the “scoffer” personality was already present in his day as he wrote. Their key mistake, one which enables their taunting and

3 Daniel 4

non-belief, is that they deny the power of the Word of God. By God's pronouncement, the universe was created, and by His pronouncement the world shall be destroyed. The implication is that since Christ is Divine, His Word has the same authority as the Father's; when He says He shall return, He means it and will not go back on His promise.

Here the Christian, taunted and afflicted by the scoffers, doubters, skeptics, heretics and nonbelievers, is encouraged to hold close to the faith. A single man objecting to what we believe in is just that – a man. He has no authority by his derisive insults to change the content of Christian dogma; God has the ultimate authority to *enforce* what He says shall happen. We are under no obligation to believe what someone says to us just because they say it, no matter how intelligent or snobbish they sound. Yet God binds our consciences to the Word, which *is* true no matter how much we may doubt.

St. Peter contrasts water and fire. It is out of water that creation was formed, presumably because water was the first substance God created *ex nihilo*. Water was also used to *re-shape* the earth at the Deluge. The next judgment, however, is that of fire. All of Creation shall be burned in order that a new Creation may be formed; those who do not repent shall be incinerated forever, the same way that those who did not believe Noah's witness were delivered to drowning. The description of the Last Day here is meant to add a moral and religious imperative to our faith, warning us lest we listen to the scoffers and find ourselves undergoing the judgment for which they are reserved. And so we understand why St. Peter is so interested in keeping our faith fruitful by way of reminder!

2 Peter Bible Study #13: The Second Advent

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 3:8-10

8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. **9** The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. **10** But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Introduction

St. Peter has transitioned the discussion away from false teachers and toward the Eschaton by means of rebuking the scoffers that deny Christ's return. It seems that in the first century discussion concerning the Second Advent had come to a head, with St. John penning Revelation, St. Peter writing this Epistle, and Jude's writing on similar topics. Previously, St. Paul addressed it in First and Second Thessalonians against those who claimed that Christ had already returned. Needless to say, eschatology was a hot-button topic being fiercely debated when the Apostles were teaching. Now St. Peter weighs in, first with dogma and following with practice.

Vs.8-9

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

The scoffers claim is that Christ's return is simply taking too long to believe. St. Peter replies by reminding us that God does not operate according to our sense of time. What appears to be a long time for us may be an instant for our Lord, and vice versa. This is on account of God existing outside of time, in such a mysterious fashion that we cannot describe it adequately with words.¹ Therefore what appears to be a delay of the Second Advent is no delay at all; God will enact Judgment Day when it is time, for He keeps His promises. If it appears to be late, the fault is with us and not Him.

The reason for the apparent delay is not that God is being *slow*, but rather that He is being *merciful*. The repentance He seeks is a deliberate turning to Christ and away from false beliefs, trusting in Jesus as our true Savior – it is nothing more nor less than this. The chief goal of our Lord in the timing of the Second Advent is to permit as many people to engage in this repentance, ie. to be saved, as possible. He *wants* all people to be saved, and the more time between now and Judgment day, the more people will be saved, so the “delay” has been pre-planned. The Church must respond by spreading the means by which men are converted, namely preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments.

Of course, this runs counter to the calvinist theological position of “limited atonement,” which claims that Christ only died for the elect. But one cannot claim that “all should reach repentance” actually means “all [of the elect] should reach repentance,” as that would be inserting meaning into the text rather than reading it plainly.

Let us put this another way. If the Atonement was limited in scope, then St. Peter would be lying by claiming it was the merciful patience of God informing His timing for Christ's

¹ See the article on “Divine Eternity” at verylutheran.biz for more information on God's timelessness.

Return. For that matter, since Grace in the calvinistic understanding is irresistible, then there would be no *possibility* for any of the elect to “perish” at all, making such a desire on the part of God to be fiction. Making matters worse, the calvinistic doctrine of “double predestination,” which states that God decrees the damnation of the non-elect, renders this verse incoherent – that God would not wish any to perish while actively willing their perishing! If we are to read this text plainly, without any prior systematics inserted into it (thus doing violence to Apostolic writ), then we have to confess that it is a *real* patience on God's part for those who are not in the Body of Christ, because He loves all of them and offers a real salvation to them.

Vs.10

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Multiple places in Scripture speak of Christ's return as being comparable to a thief coming in the middle of the night, meaning that no one will expect it; we must be ready.² This is no ordinary home invasion however, as Christ returns for *the Eschaton*. His first coming to earth was in the Incarnation with the mission being to save that which was lost.³ St. Peter here states a second time that His Second Coming will be for wrath against the ungodly and to purify, by fire, the entirety of the world. This starts with the complete obliteration of the celestial bodies, from stars and planets to comets and asteroids.

Speaking of the exposure of the works done on the earth, this is applicable only to those who are to be sent to the lake of fire. Ezekiel's oracle makes it clear that those who live in penitent faith, turning away from their sins, shall not have their offenses “remembered against them.”⁴ While we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,⁵ Jesus Himself says plainly in the “Sheep and the Goats” teaching that this is done corporately.⁶ The good deeds of the saints are recounted and not their sins, while the sins of the damned are recounted and not their sins. This is the great revealing which St. Peter mentions before he begins discussing the practical matters concerning being ready for the Return of our Lord.

2 Matthew 24:43, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 5:4, Revelation 16:15.

3 Matthew 18:11

4 Ezekiel 18:21-22

5 2 Corinthians 5:10

6 Matthew 25:31-40

2 Peter Bible Study Conclusion: Unifying the Epistle

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

2 Peter 3:11-18

11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, **12** waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! **13** But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

14 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. **15** And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, **16** as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. **17** You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. **18** But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Introduction

For the conclusion to his Epistle, St. Peter masterfully weaves together the three seemingly disparate topics which have been presented to the reader. The focus of the text has always been on sanctification, but without explaining the connections between seeking virtue, avoiding heretics, and holding fast to Christ's promise to return. The sum of his writing at the end of this chapter is thus:

Having our hope secured in the Second Advent of our Lord, we seek virtue that we may be found pleasing to Him on Judgment Day, and we rebuke false teachers that our faith may not be found to have been in vain.

Vs.11-13

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The Eschaton approaches, and so the rhetorical question is raised, “what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness.” Our answer of course is *devout*, serving God and living according to His ways while holding fast to faith in our Lord Jesus. Whenever the topic of the End Times comes, there is always a sort of nervous question in the back of the believer's mind regarding the times, circumstances and events surrounding it. We are tempted to build shelters, stock up on various supplies, and keep up with the news to be as prepared (mentally and physically) as possible. But one is not prepared for the return of Christ by reading a newspaper, despite what our dispensationalist friends may say. Here St. Peter makes it clear that *faithfulness* is the key to being truly prepared.

Yet the Apostle adds a motivation for the believer by adding that we are “waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.” This leads us to ask whether Christians may truly *change* the date of Christ's return by our own lives. There have been comments claiming that this

is only apparent to human perception, and that the date of Judgment Day is actually fixed by the will of God, unchanging – but such is patent eisegesis, inserting meaning into the text so as to contradict its plain meaning. The truth is, when we pray “thy Kingdom come” and act in accordance with God's Will, indeed the return of Christ is hastened. It is the same dynamic as the times in which God changes course of action with the intercession of Moses during the golden calf debacle, King David's census, etc. This does not mean that we *determine* when Christ will return, only that the exact day appears subject to change. We ought not get big heads over this, nor believe that we are pushing God around; to the contrary, the Apostle reiterated that we are “waiting for new heavens and a new earth,” not immanentizing the Eschaton.

Vs.14

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

This waiting does not merely consist of seeking virtue, but also seeking to be “without spot or blemish, and at peace.” We are to do our best to obey the Ten Commandments and avoid sin, for to sin is to find ourselves blemished by our iniquities. Knowing that we shall fail in this endeavor, for no one is without sin, so we must flee to Christ for forgiveness and renewal; Scripture promises that in doing so there is cleansing from all unrighteousness.¹ A Christian who has assurance of his salvation, understanding that Baptized believers shall be saved, will do this.²

Vs.15-16

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

The Lord's patience is salvation in the sense that He mercifully does not judge and destroy us immediately after we have sinned. Apparently St. Peter read Romans, in which St. Paul speaks of “the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience,” and that such is “meant to lead you to repentance.”³

Rejoicing at this patience leads us to a confusing situation, in which we are to be “hastening” the return of our Lord and looking to Judgment Day as deliverance, while at the same time counting the delay of the Parousia to be such mercy as to be equated with salvation itself. How does the Christian do both at the same time, wishing for Christ's return while also celebrating that it hasn't happened yet? We turn once more to St. Paul, who balanced both joys in this fashion, recognizing that “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”⁴ Both desires are at tension, yet recognized as valid for both St. Paul and all believers.

Regarding St. Paul, it is declared here that his writings are Scripture, albeit *advanced* in their presentation. St. Peter was aware as he wrote this Epistle that the New Testament was in development by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but he confesses his own limitations in the matter of personal interpretation. Of course this rings true no matter who reads the Pauline Epistles, that they are written in a dense, logical format; entire books could be written as commentary for single verses. This ought not dissuade anyone from reading St. Paul's works, but rather that one ought to be catechized and familiar with the basics before trying to do “deep dives” in his Epistles; after all, as the Church's first systematic theologian, he is more of a compiler and

1 1 John 1:8-9

2 Mark 16:16

3 Romans 2:4

4 Philippians 1:23-24

presenter of dogma than one who discovers dogma or has it revealed to him. His works are inspired for our edification, but they do not present anything particularly *new* doctrinally speaking – hence the proclivity of unstable people to develop false doctrines from his letters.

Vs.17-18

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Tying in the three topics of the Epistle and showing them to be written in logical order, St. Peter urges Christians to grow in grace and knowledge so that we may rebuff lawless men, and thus be safe in our earthly sojourn until Christ brings us to eternity with Him. It appears then that his exhortation in the first chapter to pursue virtue is not *just* for the sake of being more pleasing to God, but also that we may more strongly refuse the words and deeds of heretics; thus our faith is maintained and growing, that we may enjoy eternity with our Lord Jesus when He returns.