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## 2 Peter

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# Remember Christ's Provision

## 2 PETER 1:1-4

**Main Idea:** Jesus has provided everything we need to grow in his likeness as we wait for his return.

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Every self-respecting sports fan knows the story of how Vince Lombardi, the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, started every season. He gathered his players together and gave them what became one of his most famous speeches. With a football in hand, the feared and revered coach would walk to the front of the meeting room, take a moment to gaze over the group of assembled players, hold out the pigskin in front of him, and say, “Gentlemen, this is a football.” After describing the importance of the football as if no one on his team had ever seen one, he then would lead the team outside and show them the field. He would explain the out-of-bounds lines and the end zones and then remind the players that the football was intended to go across the end-zone line. Lombardi knew the importance of reminding his players about fundamentals . . . even the seasoned athletes. No doubt that emphasis played a huge role in his winning five NFL Championships—including Super Bowls I and II—during his tenure with the Packers.

Peter apparently also knew something about the importance of reminding people about fundamental truths. He wrote his second

letter to equip the members of his flock to face and overcome the subtle spiritual deception of false teachers who were assaulting the church. But instead of giving them new information to mount their defense, the apostle simply wanted to remind his readers about the truth of the gospel they had already been taught (see 1:12-15; 3:1-2). He wanted to bring some things to their remembrance that were sufficient to protect and preserve them after his life was over.

The importance of remembering makes 2 Peter a timely and critical word for today's Christian. The explosion of television, radio, publications, the Internet, social media, websites, blogs, podcasts, and other forms of mass media makes heretical teaching easily accessible and widely received. Our rock star Christian culture provides false teachers with coliseum-size audiences who are eager to hear some new thing or have some new spiritual experience. And lack of discernment, fear of rejection, and misunderstanding of love leads the church to be reluctant to expose contemporary heretics. Instead of countering them, we welcome them into our fold, or at the very least just ignore them in the name of politically correct tolerance (MacArthur, *2 Peter*, 2). Numerous Christians today are doing nothing short of exchanging the truth for lies (cf. 1 Tim 1:19; 2 Tim 2:16-18). Consequently, we are in desperate need of being reminded about gospel truth to help us wage this war.

That's why it's so surprising that the book of 2 Peter had to fight its way into the canon of Scripture. Some books of the Bible have had to work harder than others to gain entrance into the canonical kingdom. They've had a little harder road to travel to make it into the catalog of Holy Scripture. Second Peter is one of those books; it's taken some hits along the way. Not a few Christian leaders have questioned its inclusion in the canon. "At the Reformation it was regarded as second-class Scripture by Luther, rejected by Erasmus, and regarded with hesitancy by Calvin" (M. Green, *2 Peter*, 19). But in the end the letter made the cut, and the church recognized its apostolic authorship, authoritative content, crucial role in the canon of inspired Scripture, and relevance for the church in every age.

Second Peter opens with the commonly used letter form of New Testament times. It included a reference to the writer and the recipients and then a greeting in the form of a blessing. Like other New Testament authors, Peter extended a theological description of the writer and the recipients as well as a specifically Christian wish for those receiving the correspondence (Vaughan and Lea, *1, 2 Peter*, 142).

## The Background

### 2 PETER 1:1

#### *The Writer of the Letter*

This letter begins in a similar fashion to most first-century epistles: “Simeon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ.” The apostle Peter is the stated author of the book in verse 1, and there’s no good reason for us to think otherwise. In light of the numerous internal references (1:1,14,16-18; 3:1,15), it would be difficult to see how another author could have avoided ethical compromise with any Christian conviction at all. Additionally, there are some striking similarities in both vocabulary and doctrine between 1 and 2 Peter, as well as with Peter’s speeches and sermons in Acts (M. Green, *2 Peter*, 47–48).

However, many have argued against Petrine authorship through the centuries. Opposing views have included: (1) the claim that the letter is pseudepigraphical, a writing published after Peter’s death to honor him and to say what he might have said in a difficult situation; (2) its unpopular status among the church fathers; (3) the author’s perceived dependence on Jude; and (4) the suggestion that Peter’s reference to Paul in 3:15 indicates a time when a collection of Paul’s writings had been made, which certainly would have been after Peter’s lifetime. But none of these arguments have been able to overshadow the more natural and literal understanding that the apostle Peter is the one who penned the letter.

Peter introduces himself as “Simeon,” a designation rarely used in the New Testament for the apostle (see Acts 15:14). The term is the Hebrew spelling for the name *Simon* and a possible indication of the authenticity of the letter (Vaughn and Lea, *1, 2 Peter*, 142). Peter also calls himself “a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ.” The word *servant* is *doulos* in Greek, which means “slave” or “bondservant.” Peter, no doubt, is tempering the authority of his apostolic office with the personal humility that he learned through his own denial of Christ Jesus. Now he confidently can present himself as both the servant and the ambassador (*apostolos*) of his Lord.

A related issue to the authorship of 2 Peter is its source, specifically the close relationship between Peter’s letter and the letter of Jude. Vaughan and Lea say, “There is such extensive agreement between Jude and 2 Peter that some common linkage is almost certain” (*1, 2 Peter*,

138). There are three primary views regarding the specific nature of this relationship. First is the proposal that Peter copied Jude. Proponents of this view cite Jude's fresh writing style and the probability that the longer letter would have taken its cue from the shorter one. Second, perhaps Jude copied Peter. This perspective leans on Peter's use of the future tense in forecasting the work of false teachers (cf. 2 Pet 2) in contrast to Jude's use of the present tense. Advocates of this view also say that someone with the status of an apostle wouldn't likely draw from a less prominent source like Jude. Third, some propose that both writers drew from a common source. This case is rooted in the differences in language, ideas, and order between the two letters. Such a common source could have been a document that condemned heretical doctrines that promoted antinomian ideas and prophesied the fate of their false heralds (M. Green, *2 Peter*, 72).

Regardless of who drew from what source, the similarities between the two letters are notable. Both letters provide similar descriptions of false teachers (see 2 Pet 2; Jude 4-19), although they develop their treatments differently. Peter gradually ramps up to addressing the issue of false teaching, while Jude comes out of the gate hammering on the heretics. But they basically address many of the same things that characterized the false teachers. First, false teachers denied the lordship of Christ (2 Pet 2:1; Jude 4). Second, they defiled the Christian love feast, practiced immorality, and influenced others to do the same (2 Pet 2:10,12-14; Jude 16). Third, they manipulated people with their speech to the end of financial gain (2 Pet 2:3,14; Jude 16). Fourth, they masqueraded as either visionaries or prophets to support their contentions (2 Pet 2:1; Jude 8). Fifth, they were headstrong and caused divisions that reflected their feelings of superiority (2 Pet 2:2,10,18; Jude 19). While I lean toward believing that Jude copied Peter, I think these similarities are the details that are most notable for us, simply because they help us better understand the issues being addressed in both letters.

### *The Origin of the Letter*

Just like the uncertainty of the original source of 2 Peter, we really don't have any indication of its specific time and place of writing. While Peter chose not to mention these details, it likely was written from Rome shortly after his first letter and shortly before his death (see 1:14-15). That would put the date sometime prior to AD 68. More than for the specifics of this bibliographic information, Peter's greater concern

obviously was for the believers to whom he was writing and the grave danger they were facing.

### *The Recipients of the Letter*

Like the place and time of writing, there's no solid evidence to identify clearly Peter's recipients. They're just referred to as "those who have received a faith equal to ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ." His seemingly intimate address, however, indicates that he wrote the letter to a specific group of people as opposed to a general audience (e.g., 1:10,12-15; 3:1,14). While it's possible that he was writing to Christians in the same provinces as he did in 1 Peter (see 1 Pet 1:1), this second letter seems to have a more Gentile flavor. It doesn't have any specific quotations from the Old Testament like the first letter, although it does have several references to Old Testament events (2:5,6,7,15).

What we do know about the people receiving this letter is how Peter felt about them. They were a people who had "received a faith equal to" the apostles, a faith that was just as precious as the salvation Jesus had given to his earliest and closest followers. The word "received" comes from *langchanō*, which means "to obtain by lot." Peter reminded his readers that their faith that was equal to that of the apostles was a gift of God's grace (Vaughn and Lea, *1, 2 Peter*, 142).

This glorious, exalted, and unmerited standing is theirs—and ours—"through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ." It could not have come in any other way. Helm rightly says,

Our ability to stand before God someday as rescued and reclaimed persons depends entirely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He alone has flown through this world without falling. He alone can and did make atonement for sin. Thus he alone can bring us home. (*1 & 2 Peter*, 187)

The equal privilege between apostles and all of us who have followed them is only due to the work of Christ on the cross.

Peter calls Jesus both "God" and "Savior." Scholars have debated whether he's distinguishing God and Christ or if he's calling Jesus God. Some have suggested the former, citing the supposed distinction in 1:2 as support, as well as the close conjunction between "God" and "Savior." But the absence of the Greek article before "Savior" suggests that both terms refer to Jesus (see also John 1:1; 20:28; Heb 1:8). "Peter is taking

the term ‘Savior,’ an Old Testament name for Jehovah, and is boldly applying it to Jesus” (Vaughn and Lea, *1, 2 Peter*, 143). It is the God of the universe who has made believers righteous, and his name is Jesus!

### *The Reason for the Letter*

The absence of the specific identity of the readers doesn’t in any way cloud the clarity of Peter’s reason for writing. A key idea introduced in this salutation shows us where Peter is headed in his letter. First, the idea in 1:1 of his readers receiving an equally strong faith provides a foretaste of the themes of *falling* and *strengthening* that unfold in the words that follow. Peter will exhort his readers to “make every effort to confirm your calling and election, because if you do these things you will never stumble” (1:10). Peter was familiar with what it meant to fall. On that dark night before Jesus’s crucifixion, he told his disciples, “Tonight all of you will fall away because of me, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered” (Matt 26:31). To that pronouncement Peter immediately retorted, “Even if everyone falls away because of you, I will never fall away” (Matt 26:33). Do you remember Jesus’s response to Peter’s confident claim? “Truly I tell you, tonight, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times” (Matt 26:34). And so Peter did. He knew what it meant to fall.

However, Peter also knew what it meant to get up again after you fall. In Luke’s account of that same conversation, we find Jesus telling Peter, “Simon, Simon, look out. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32). The word “strengthen” is *sterizō*, which means “to stand,” “to set fast,” or “to fix firmly.” And so Peter did. In 1:12 of this current letter, he will say, “Therefore I will always remind you about these things, even though you know them and are established in the truth you now have.” The word “established” here is *sterizō*, the same word as “strengthen” in Luke 22:32. And a negative form of this same word (*asteriktos*) will show up again in 2:14 where he warns that false teachers will “seduce unstable people.” Then to top it all off, Peter will close his letter by using another form of the same word (*sterigmos*) to exhort his readers to “be on your guard, so that you are not led away by the error of lawless people and fall from your own stable position” (3:17). So three times we’ll find variations on the same word—translated “established,” “unstable,” and

“stable”—that Jesus used in Luke 22:32 to set the course of the remainder of Peter’s ministry. “In this little letter, the term is leveraged afresh, along with the word *fall*, to capture Peter’s intention in writing” (Helm, *1 & 2 Peter*, 186).

What is that intention? Peter obviously wanted to make sure his readers—and all of us who have followed them—would stand fast and be fixed firmly in the faith. So the one who fell, who—by the grace of Christ—was then strengthened to get back up, who was charged to then do the same for others, we now find obediently carrying out his assignment.

## The Blessing

### 2 PETER 1:2

Similar to his first letter, Peter blesses his current readers in verse 2 by wishing “grace and peace” to them. Grace is the resource God gives to undeserving sinners for both conversion and sanctification. Peace is that blissful joy and contentment we have as a result of being made right with him. Together they describe the blessed condition of being right with God and growing into Christ’s image (see also Rom 5:1-5). This blessed condition, however, doesn’t exist in a vacuum. Peter will close his letter with the same ideas, emphasizing the proactive and dynamic nature of these conditions as they are lived out in the Christian life. So his desire here is for grace and peace to be multiplied in the lives of his readers “through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (1:2). Grace and peace are increased by knowing God through Jesus Christ, a knowledge about which believers constantly need to be reminded.

### *The Blessing of Knowing Jesus*

Peter implies that this blessed condition of grace and peace is brought about and fleshed out in its fullness only in the gospel. Specifically, he says it’s found “through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord,” a construction that indicates that the object of this “knowledge” is both God and Jesus. And this knowledge is no mere intellectual exercise but instead is a genuine personal experience with the Lord Jesus, who is the only way for anyone to truly know God. “In a true sense it is Jesus alone who is the object of the knowledge of the Christian” (Vaughn and Lea, *1, 2 Peter*, 144). In short, grace and peace can only be found and

experienced when one knows God, and one can only know God in relationship with Jesus Christ. This, beloved, is at the heart of the gospel!

It's incredibly important for us to consider the huge role *knowledge* plays in Peter's letter. Peter uses two different words in Greek that are both translated by our English word *knowledge*. The word used here in 1:2 as well as in 1:3; 1:8; and 2:20 is *epignōsis*, which is a reference to full knowledge, the most intimate kind of knowledge possible. But Peter also uses *gnōsis* in 1:5-6 and 3:18, which indicates good sense, understanding, and practical wisdom. It is often used to communicate the idea of knowing by experience.

Peter bookends his letter with this emphasis, opening here in 1:2 with a prayer for his readers to know God in Christ intimately and closing in 3:18 with an exhortation for them to know Christ experientially. In between he tells his readers that both the full knowledge of God and the experiential knowledge of God are necessary for them to stand fast and be fixed firmly in the faith as they wait for Jesus's return. Such a decisively anchored faith will be especially crucial if they are to be unwavering against the assault of heretical teachers whose doctrine is contrary to gospel truth (e.g., 1:16; 2:1; 3:3).

The importance of this charge can't be overestimated for the contemporary pilgrimage of believers in Christ. In the midst of a culture that champions truth as being relative, Christians need a strong foundation of objective reality to navigate their journey home. When I open the GPS app on my phone and plug in my destination, I expect the lady's voice coming out of the speaker to give me clear and accurate directions that are based on someone's real knowledge. And while there may be several alternate routes, they all are based on objective realities. The only chance I have to reach my destination is to get real knowledge that is based on what is true and right.

If this is true for something as trivial as getting me from my house to the closest Starbucks for a cup of coffee, how much weightier is having accurate knowledge about matters of life and death, eternity and entrance into God's kingdom! Certainly we need clear directions that are rooted in real knowledge for these things (Helm, *1 & 2 Peter*, 177). That's why Peter will say, "For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you" (2 Pet 1:11). He wants his readers to make it, and the only chance we have is to have real knowledge that only comes through knowing Jesus!

### *The Blessing of Being Reminded*

There's an implicit relationship between knowledge and the need to be reminded that I mentioned earlier. We can know something and yet from time to time push it into the shadows of our forgetfulness. And if that knowledge is crucial for our well-being, then we welcome someone who will remind us of it. That's what Peter does for his readers. Second Peter 1:12-15 serves as somewhat of a hinge paragraph for the letter. Three times in four verses Peter emphasizes his intention to remind his readers of needed spiritual truth. He says, "I will always remind you" (v. 12). He says, "I think it is right . . . to wake you up with a reminder" (v. 13). And he says, "I will also make every effort so that you are able to recall these things at any time after my departure" (v. 15). His words here appear to point backward to the truths he unfolds in 1:3-11, as well as forward to those he proposes in 1:16–3:18. And in the middle of that latter section, he will again emphasize his desire to remind his readers of things they can't afford to forget (3:1-2).

There's nothing new under the sun, and that includes in the realm of spiritual truth. People today don't need new truth but only to gain a clearer understanding of the eternal truth God has already revealed in his Word (Isa 40:8; 1 Pet 1:23-25; cf. Matt 5:18). Peter's opening line in the body of this letter asserts that we have been granted "everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him" (1:3). Peter—along with every preacher and teacher of the Word who has followed him—sees himself as responsible for reminding people of what God has said in his Word so that his truth will stick (MacArthur, *2 Peter*, 49).

Such repetition obviously is part of God's economy. In his inspired Word, Deuteronomy 5:1-22 is a restatement of the giving of the law at Sinai (Exod 20). The people were being reminded of what God said as part of their preparation to enter the promised land. Chronicles reviews much of the same material that we find in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. The psalms echo the attributes and works of God. The Old Testament prophets were in sync with their common themes of law, judgment, and forgiveness.

The practice of repetition continues in the New Testament. All four Gospels recount many of the same aspects of Jesus's life, ministry, and teaching. And the Synoptics actually tell the same story from three different perspectives. Jesus often repeated his sermons, parables, and object lessons, which solidified their truth in the minds of his followers.

And the epistles largely are an explanation and application of the same gospel truth as it relates to the church and the Christian life.

So Peter's approach is consistent with the Bible's emphasis on the need for us to be reminded about truth by hearing it over and over again. The apostle Paul, like Peter, was a big fan of repeating truth for his followers: "To write to you again about this is no trouble for me and is a safeguard for you" (Phil 3:1). To the Romans he said, "I have written to remind you more boldly on some points" (Rom 15:15). To the Thessalonians he asked, "Don't you remember that when I was still with you I used to tell you about this?" (2 Thess 2:5). Jude took the same approach: "Now I want to remind you, although you came to know all these things once and for all" (Jude 5). These are just a few examples that illustrate the principle of divine repetition in Scripture.

## The Big Idea

### 2 PETER 1:3-4

I love working with my hands—construction, remodeling, and even putting things together. Like many people, I order items off Amazon that sometimes require assembly. When I open the instructions, they usually tell me what I need to put the item together. Some instructions even show pictures of a drill, a tape measure, a level, and other items under a heading that says something like, "Items Needed for Assembly." At other times, however, the instructions pleasantly surprise me and say something like, "All items necessary for assembly are included." And underneath will be a picture of an Allen wrench, a template, or some other small item that's included in the box. How convenient! I don't even have to make the trip out to my shop and haul in a bunch of tools.

That's the kind of package God delivers when he saves someone: "All items necessary for assembly are included." The knowledge of God in Christ referenced in verse 2 lays the foundation for the big idea of Peter's letter in verses 3-4. Basically, these verses contain his proposition for everything else he'll say. In these verses Peter tells his readers that God has provided everything we need to grow in Christlikeness as we wait for his return, even in the face of false teaching. How? "Through the knowledge of him" (v. 3), a knowledge that includes his "very great and precious promises" (v. 4). Not the least of these promises is the assurance that he will come back for his people and bring to completion our journey toward sharing in "the divine nature" (v. 4), which

arguably is the pressing issue in 2 Peter (1:11,16-21; 3:1-18). In verses 3-4 we find the assurance of Christ's *power* to be like Jesus, the *process* he's ordained to get us there, and the *promise* that we'll arrive safely and securely in his likeness.

### *The Power to Be like Christ (1:3)*

What God ultimately desires for his children is that they look like his Son, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul says that before time began God delighted in and marked out a group of people "to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Rom 8:29). Then when time did begin in Genesis 1, "God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female" (Gen 1:27). In Genesis 3 sin messed up that image. He said, "Since the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he must not reach out, take from the tree of life, eat, and live forever" (Gen 3:22). Mankind had been created in the image of God, but that image had been perverted. God can know good and evil, and he can always choose good. Human beings can't. So God banished Adam and Eve from the garden so they wouldn't eat from the tree of life and remain in that wretched condition forever. And from that point the rest of the Bible is the story of God's activity in Christ to recover his image and restore the purpose he intended for mankind.

That's why Peter says Christ has given us everything we need that pertains to "life and godliness" (v. 3). That's just another way of describing the image of God for which we were created. The "life" here is true life, the life of God believers were created to have. The word "godliness" is a reference to practical conduct more than it is to mere devotional service. Jesus has provided everything that's needed for Christians to "flesh out" his life in everyday living so as to reflect his image. He's made it possible for us to grow and mature in the life we were created to have—life that we lost because of sin but that was restored to us through his resurrection. And this God-life is supposed to be expressed in practical ways through our daily conduct. The progressive maturity and practical godliness intended for the Christian will be unpacked more in verses 5-11.

So Peter begins by describing the resource necessary for living out the Christian's calling to be like Jesus. He describes it as "his divine power," obviously reaching back to the antecedent "of God and of Jesus our Lord" at the end of verse 2. This is God's power in Christ that we're

talking about. The word for “power” is *dunamis*, from which we get our word *dynamite*. But this dynamite is different from our dynamite. The dynamite we know about has an initial loud explosion that wreaks havoc all around it, but then it’s over. The dust settles, and we pick up the pieces. But the dynamite Peter uses is different. It’s more like the gasoline you put in your car. It’s not flashy and has no big bang. In fact, you really don’t even see it. It’s just a dependable, ongoing source of power that gets you where you’re going.

Paul used *dunamis* in Ephesians 1:19-20 to describe this same resource that God—in Christ—has given to believers. Grasping for adequate descriptors, he said he wanted us to know “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength” (Eph 1:19). And if that were not enough, what he says next is absolutely astounding! Paul says that God “exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens” (Eph 1:20). In other words, the power that’s been given to believers to live out their calling faithfully is the same power that it took to raise Jesus from the dead and seat him at God’s right hand!

So when Peter said that “his divine power has given us” everything we need to look like Jesus, he could’ve just dropped the mic and walked off the stage! Enough said. All bets are off, and all excuses are rendered null and void. When the power of God through Christ is at play in the Christian life, the believer has absolutely everything he or she needs to be true to the calling of spiritual maturity and growth in Christlikeness. No exceptions and no excuses. God wants us to know that he didn’t save us and then say, “Now, knock yourself out!” or “Good luck out there!” He didn’t do the work of redeeming us and then leave us on our own as far as surviving and growing in our faith. “His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness.” There isn’t anything outside of *everything*! In Christ, God has provided everything we need to mature in our faith and be faithful to the calling that he’s exercised in our lives.

### *The Process of Becoming like Christ (1:3)*

But exactly how does this progressive transformation take place? To answer that question, Peter makes an early installment in one of the key themes of his letter—knowing God through Christ. He says that growth in godliness comes by way of “the knowledge of him” (v. 3). Peter uses *epignōsis* here, which is full and intimate knowledge. Distinguished from

*gnōsis*—good sense, understanding, and practical wisdom—this word expresses a more thorough participation in the learner’s acquisition of knowledge. In the New Testament it often refers to knowledge that influences spiritual life in a profound way.

So Peter basically says that the believer’s re-creation into the image of Christ comes about by way of active participation in the pursuit of knowing him more and more. Many believers limit their knowledge of God to their conversion. “I came to know Christ” or “I believed on Christ” are frequent confessions, as if knowing him was a one-time deal tied to conversion. But knowing God, Peter says, is a lifetime pursuit. And it’s the avenue through which God’s children access all the powerful resources he’s provided to make them look more like Jesus. And remember—to know God is to know Jesus. Knowing Jesus is the way to know God.

In knowing Jesus, believers are called “by his own glory and goodness” (v. 3), indicating the agency of Christ’s calling. In this context the word “glory” is a reference to Christ’s splendor and majesty as a divine being, not his renown. The word “goodness” refers to his moral excellence, an idea that Peter will begin to unpack in verse 5 as having practical implications for believers. When combined together, these two words describe the divine moral excellence of Christ, focusing especially on the beauty of his goodness (Starr, *Sharers*, 42–44). We can actually experience true life and godly living through knowing Christ. That’s why Paul says you “have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator” (Col 3:10). As we grow in this knowledge of Christ, we “are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18). As we journey through this world, God intends for us to be growing to look more and more like Jesus.

### *The Promise of Being like Christ (1:4)*

Finally, the end awaiting believers for such a journey is described in verse 4. While at conversion we begin to experience God’s glorious radiance and moral excellence, that’s not all he has in store for us. We are assured that we ultimately will look like him in the way God fully intended. Believers in Christ inherit “very great and precious promises” that have been given to God’s people through the gospel. Specifically, the promises Peter has in mind are those involved in sharing “in the divine nature,” which will happen fully when the Lord returns. This phrase has some similarities to Greek philosophical and religious thought but is couched in distinctively Christian terms.

Peter wasn't suggesting that Christians will actually *become* gods, be absorbed into deity, or even share in the divine nature in every way. He was simply saying they will be morally perfected by sharing in God's moral excellence. He's speaking of that real union with Christ Jesus that begins at conversion (cf. John 1:12; Rom 8:9; Gal 2:20) but won't ultimately be realized until he comes again. The apostle John articulated this "now but not yet" understanding well when he said, "Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Peter apparently is tipping his hat here to what he will address later concerning the Lord's coming (1:11,16-21; 3:1-18). There he will counter head-on the false teachers' denial of Christ's future coming when they mockingly ask, "Where is his 'coming' that he promised?" (3:4). Peter understood that to deny the return of the Lord was to undercut the gospel, which promises the believer's moral perfection when Christ comes back. "If there is no future coming of Christ, their salvation does not include the promise of likeness to God, and the gospel is a sham" (Schreiner, *1 and 2 Peter*, 294).

The final phrase in verse 4—"escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire"—describes the ultimate freedom Christians will experience as part of their reward when they finally participate in the divine nature. The aorist participle indicates a definitive act, one that will be realized when believers finally are released from the war with sinful flesh that characterizes their journey in this world. I can't wait for this glorious reward! Paul said, "We groan in this tent, desiring to put on our heavenly dwelling. . . . Indeed, we groan while we are in this tent, burdened as we are, because we do not want to be unclothed but clothed, so that mortality may be swallowed up by life" (2 Cor 5:2,4; cf. Rom 7:1-25). That's when our precious Lord "will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away" (Rev 21:4). O, come quickly, Lord Jesus!

## Conclusion

Most dads and granddads have had the same embarrassing experience at least once on Christmas morning. Here's how it looked at our house on more than one occasion. The kids wake up all excited, storm into our bedroom, and stir me and my wife out of bed. Then they hurry into

the living room to get ready to open presents. After stumbling to the kitchen and putting the coffee on, we make our way into the living room and collapse sleepily into our chairs. After we read the Christmas story from the Bible and pray together, my daughter begins to hand out the gifts. And then inevitably one of the kids opens a gift that has the words “Batteries not included” printed on the box. Immediately my wife looks at me with panic in her voice and says, “Did you get the batteries?” My wide-eyed silence incriminates me. In that moment my kid slumps in disappointment and the joyful air escapes from the room like someone letting the air out of a tire. Cool present, but no batteries.

That never happens with the heavenly Father and his children. When he adopts us into his family, he does it with batteries included. He provides everything that’s needed for us to experience true life, to live our lives in a way that reflects his character on the road of sanctification and to arrive safely at our glorification where we look fully like his Son, Jesus. None of us can ever say that we don’t have what it takes to live the Christian life and grow in God’s grace. He’s provided everything we need in our knowledge of him through Jesus Christ.

No doubt Peter’s readers had an intimate knowledge of God in Christ, and they had been given additional deposits of knowledge about him during their Christian journeys. That was knowledge they would need to remember. So Peter provides clear and right direction for them to remember, as well as for all who have come after Jesus’s apostles passed off the scene. He knew that after his death people would push back against the gospel, and some would even abandon it. Believers would need to remember the answers to great gospel questions about final judgment, Christ’s future coming, and life in light of these realities. And those answers would need to conform to real knowledge (Helm, *1 & 2 Peter*, 177). So they needed to be reminded—and we need to be reminded—about the differences between a true knowledge of God found only in Jesus Christ and the ideas being served up by false teachers today. This letter, then, is meant to remind us that the content of the gospel message as proclaimed by the apostles tells us what it really means to *know God*, and that knowledge fully equips us to live for him. That is truth we need to remember.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. Is it important to affirm the apostle Peter as the author of this letter? If so, why?

2. In verse 1, how else could “servant” be translated? Why is this significant? Are all believers servants, or is this title unique to Peter and the other apostles?
3. Do believers today have “a faith equal to” the apostles? On what basis?
4. Because of a commonly used Greek construction, we can be confident that Peter describes Jesus as “our God and Savior.” Why is affirming the deity of Jesus important?
5. What is significant about Peter’s word choice of *epignōsis* in reference to knowing God? What does it mean to grow in/have “the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord”?
6. Why is there continual repetition throughout the Scriptures? How should we apply that principle in our lives and ministries?
7. We have been given everything we need to live godly lives. What keeps us from doing that sometimes? What stumbling blocks to Christ living through us need to be identified and removed?
8. What dangers arise when salvation (knowing Christ) is understood merely as a one-time, past event?
9. What does it mean to “share in the divine nature”?
10. In what ways do the hope and promise of eternal perfection with Jesus spur you on to live a godly life?