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2 Peter and Jude

Session 1

As we probe the setting of 2 Peter, we raise more questions than we can decisively answer, which some may find to be a source of frustration when dealing with this text. There is substantial doubt concerning the authorship of the letter, and in what sense, if any, its contents are anchored in the words of the Apostle Peter himself. We are not at all clear concerning the location of the audience, even if the letter was written by Peter.

Only the occasion and the message of the letter in response to these presenting problems stand out as fairly clear, but these are indeed the more important foundations for interpreting the text and hearing its ongoing words of exhortation. 2 Peter is noteworthy for its adaptation of Jude's warning to a new situation, but 2 Peter is also a text of an extremely different kind. Where Jude is deeply steeped in Palestinian Jewish traditions, 2 Peter is one of the most Hellenized of New Testament texts.

Its beginning reads like a benefactor inscription from a Greek city. Its closing reads like a debate with preachers who have been too heavily influenced by the school of Epicurus, an influential Greek philosopher of the late 4th and early 3rd centuries BC. As it addresses the very particular challenges of its hearers, 2 Peter lays out for readers in every age the two principal compass points for our lives, our redemption by Christ from past sins and Christ's coming in judgment, and to usher in a kingdom where righteousness has a home.

And so it challenges us. What manner of people, then, ought we to be so as both to honor our costly redemption and to live in such a way that we, too, will find a home in God's new creation? 2 Peter was written in response to the activity of innovative teachers. The author gives an initial, clear indication of this in chapter 2, verse 1. But false prophets also arose among the people, as indeed false teachers will appear among you who sneakily introduce destructive factions, even denying the master who bought them, bringing down swift destruction upon themselves.

The remainder of chapter 2 is devoted to the subject of these intruders and to underscoring the shameful character and ungodly practices that they bring with them, thus also underscoring the goal of undermining their influence and the attractiveness of their message. A clearer picture of these teachers' slant emerges in chapter 3, verses 3 and 4. Know this up front. Scoffers will come in the last of the days with contempt, walking in line with their own desires and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since our fathers died, all things continue in the same way since the beginning of creation.

The author's representation of the skeptic's language is open to a variety of interpretations. One might hear this simply as a statement about the seeming endlessness of the stream of human history into which God cannot be remembered to have intervened in any earth-shattering way to bring unrighteousness to heel and righteousness to light. We could hear it, however, specifically as a repudiation of the early Christian belief that Jesus would return

soon, perhaps even within the lifetime of his disciples and associates, to usher in the kingdom of God in all of its fullness.

Jesus was indeed remembered to have said that some present with him during his earthly ministry would, quote, see that the kingdom of God has come with power. And yet, by AD 64, most of the generation of the apostles and first followers of Jesus had, in fact, passed away without seeing the kingdom come. Over the course of nearly 21 centuries of Christian history, the failure of the judgment and second coming to have materialized in any way that could remotely be described as soon or quickly has often been used to urge the abandonment of the apocalyptic hope in favor of reconfiguring Christian expectations and therefore actions toward the present world as, in fact, the world without end.

The teachers whom our author opposes may have been the first to make such a case. In their eyes, the passing of a whole generation casts grave doubt on the apostles' teaching and indeed on Jesus' reputed teaching about an end to the age, as well as casting doubt on the testimony of the Old Testament scriptures to some day of the Lord. Hence, our author's defense of both the apostolic and the scriptural testimony in 2 Peter 1, verses 16 to 21.

These rival teachers may seek to nurture what they would view as a more enlightened Christianity, one that was set free from Jewish apocalyptic notions, which may have seemed backward and provincial to them. Indeed, their skepticism has often been compared to that nurtured by Epicureanism, one of the three principal streams of philosophical thought in the Roman period alongside Stoicism and Middle Platonism. Epicurus identified the highest good as ataraxia, an untroubled existence.

The elimination of the emotions and other stimuli that brought disturbances, fear, anger, anxiety, and craving in their train became a principal goal of the Epicureans' self-monitoring and discipline. Epicurus taught that the gods, being gods, possessed the highest good themselves and thus were undisturbed by human affairs. As Diogenes Laertius would quote Epicurus, a blessed and eternal being has no trouble himself and brings no trouble upon any other being.

Hence, he is exempt from movements of anger or partiality. Epicurus explicitly drew the conclusion that gods do not concern themselves with punishing those who act wickedly or with favoring and rewarding those who act nobly. Those who followed Epicurus' way of thinking pointed to the fact that so many wicked people went unpunished for so long, sometimes for the whole of their lives, as evidence that the belief in divine providence and judgment is mere superstition.

Epicurus' goal was to free people from religion's tyranny of fear and thus eliminate one major source of anxiety, of disturbance, from human experience. An unfortunate and somewhat frequent side effect of his teaching was a propensity to shake off conventional morality in favor of seizing the day, as it were, and taking one's fill of pleasure. Granted, Epicurus himself spoke of pleasure as the product of his philosophy, but he himself thought of pleasure strictly as undisturbedness, not shameless indulgence, which he himself would have held to bring disturbances upon a person's tranquility.

It is against this background that the majority of scholars now place the enlightened rival teachers opposed in 2 Peter. Their question, where is the promise of his coming, which, to

judge from our author's response, also involved a denial of divine judgment in general and future judgment in particular, brings an Epicurean critique to bear on the Christian gospel. Similarly, the author represents the teachers as promising freedom, an explicit Epicurean goal, while they themselves are slaves of corruption, a common consequence of Epicureanism lived poorly.

The remainder of 2 Peter chapter 3, then, is dedicated to confirming the scriptural and apostolic promise, both in terms of a day of accountability before God and in terms of the dissolution of the present cosmos in favor of a new creation. It is also dedicated to answering the rival teacher's objections to the conviction that would come to be enshrined in the Nicene Creed. He will come again to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

It would appear that the denial, like the affirmation of a day of judgment upon which an eternity in a renewed cosmos would depend, had serious consequences for ethical practice. This emerges both in the author's castigation of the ethical laxity of the rival teachers throughout chapter 2 and his urging of the pursuit of righteousness and holiness among his audiences in chapter 3. As we look back to the opening chapter, we see that the author has already been preparing to address these concerns. The second half of chapter 1 focuses on the event of the transfiguration of Jesus, taken here to be a prophetic foreshadowing of the glory that Jesus will bear at his second coming.

Indeed, the event of the transfiguration itself is offered as evidence for that second coming against the doubts raised by the rival teachers. The opening paragraph of chapter 1, then, focuses on the ethical imperative of the Christian life. Our cleansing from past sins must impel us forward in a journey toward holiness and righteousness for which we have been amply equipped by God himself against the ethical trajectory both lived and taught by the rival teachers.

As with the letter of Jude, the most debated words in 2 Peter are the opening ones, Simeon Peter. Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ. The letter presents itself explicitly as a text written by the apostle Peter.

The use of the double name makes this all the clearer, shortly before his martyrdom during the last few years of the reign of Nero, somewhere between 64 and 68. Like Paul, James, Jude, and John the seer, Peter here, though not in 1 Peter, identifies himself both as a slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ.

The first implies a claim to act wholly on behalf of Jesus rather than on one's own behalf. And while slavery was in general regarded as a degraded status, in connection with the divine being, it also implied a claim to honor as a representative and part of the household of the divinity. The term apostle also implies both acting as a designated envoy of Jesus Christ and as such a person invested with the authority of the one he or she represents.

A number of characteristics of this letter, however, give readers pause concerning the claim that the letter comes from the mind or mouth of Simeon Peter. First and foremost, the dense, even otiose Greek style of the letter seems a far reach for someone who was once a fisherman in Galilee, no matter how much ministry in Greek-speaking territories he had

undertaken in the second half of his life. The style is also significantly different from that of 1 Peter, which was already quite a reach for said Galilean fisherman.

Second, some of the thoughts are particularly Greek and quite un-Jewish. For example, salvation is conceived here as participating in the divine nature and escaping the decay present in the world caused by desire, two very Greek notions. The place of punishment is called Tartarus, a more specific term than the generic Hades or Sheol, and a particularly Greek term at that, referring to the realms of punishment in Greek mythology.

Third, there is very little verbiage from the Jewish scriptures woven into the language of 2 Peter, which is particularly unusual in light of the abundance of such verbiage in 1 Peter. Raising questions about the letter's attribution is not a modern phenomenon, as Eusebius, writing in the early fourth century, bears witness. Peter, on whom the Church of Christ is built, has left one acknowledged epistle, and it may be a second also, for it is doubted.

Recognition of stylistic and conceptual issues with ascribing the letter to Peter was noticed by Jerome in the fifth century. Two epistles also, which are extant as of Peter, are discrepant among themselves in style and character and structure of the words, from which we understand that he used different interpreters as necessary. Jerome's proposed solution remains an important consideration in any theory of authorship that seeks to preserve a direct connection between the letter and the apostle.

An interpreter, or however we conceive of the secretarial assistance, gave the letter its specific wording. The essence may indeed be Petrine. The actual expression certainly is not.

John Calvin also confronted the issue head-on in the introduction to his commentary on Second Peter. Since it has his name inscribed, it would have been a fiction unworthy of a minister of Christ to have impersonated another individual. So then, it must have proceeded from Peter, not that he himself wrote it, but that someone of his disciples set forth in writing by his command those things which the necessity of the times required, though I do not here recognize the language of Peter.

The unquestionable presupposition that Calvin brings to the matter is worth noting. Second Peter can't be pseudonymous because such a fiction would be unworthy of a minister of Christ. It is worth asking whether people in the late first century Mediterranean would have shared his point of view.

Nevertheless, Calvin's conclusion, which is essentially the same as Jerome's, is most important to note. Once again, if there is any connection between the letter and the apostle, it is quite robustly mediated by the unknown Christian wordsmith to whom Peter entrusted the task of giving written expression to Peter's thoughts. Like Jerome, Calvin also admits the extensiveness of this mediation alongside his general attribution of the letter to the apostle.

I do not recognize here the language of Peter, by which he might mean the speech attributed to Peter in Acts or the verbiage in First Peter. Some degree of mediation between author and text is not at all unusual in the ancient world, including within the pages of the New Testament. One need only consider the letters of Paul that were written with the help of a scribe or secretary of some sort.

We even have the name of the one involved in the writing of Romans, Tertius. The stylistic differences between First and Second Peter should alert us, as they did alert Jerome and Calvin, to the degree to which this often invisible writer participated in and contributed to the formation of the final product. The first scenario that we might imagine for the composition of Second Peter, as we have just explored, is Peter authorizing a letter to be written in his name, the style and expression of which, and to an unknown extent, the content of which, has been supplied by that trusted associate.

Many scholars, however, favor a second scenario, one in which a faithful Christian writes a letter in Peter's name to bring the apostle's authority, and quite likely his teaching, to bear on problems that have arisen after Peter's death, defending the apostolic tradition against rival teachers who endanger the heritage that Peter and his apostolic peers bequeathed to them. According to this scenario, Second Peter is a pseudonymous work, that is, one that bears a false attribution of authorship. One contextual factor to which such scholars routinely point is the existence of the genre of the Testament, a text that purports to contain the deathbed speech of a celebrated and important figure from the past, giving instructions to his offspring, often also containing personal reminiscences of episodes in the figure's life, as well as predictions concerning the future, since the approach of death was often thought to be a time of clairvoyance as well.

Many examples of this genre survive. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Testament of Abraham, the Testament of Moses, and the Testament of Job are some of the better-known. Scholars have observed several similarities between Second Peter and these Testaments.

First, Peter includes reminiscences of his experience, here specifically in regard to transfiguration in 116-18. Peter voices an awareness of his impending death, and therefore a desire to provide moral instruction in 112-15. Third, the content of that moral instruction itself, which is to be found throughout the letter.

And fourth, predictions of a present and a future crisis, and of the final intervention of God. Second Peter is, of course, couched as a letter. Arguably, the typical form of apostolic communication, the letter, would have been deemed more appropriate for an apostle's testament.

Other potential indications of pseudonymity include, first, the skeptic's observation. Where is the promise of his coming? Ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation. The specific skeptical words attributed to these mockers would have the greatest force after the deaths of all the apostles who were with Jesus, thus in the wake of the failure of such sayings as we find in Mark's gospel.

Just prior to Jesus' transfiguration, Jesus had said, Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power. Then again, in the midst of his apocalyptic discourse, Jesus asserts, Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Some have noted the fact that predictions are made concerning false teachers in the future tense in the first few verses of both chapters 2 and 3, but application is made in the present tense to individuals currently troubling the congregation or congregations addressed.

These scholars have suggested that this is the pseudonymous author's way of asserting, first, the genuine apostolic predictions and admonitions from decades ago that these were now being fulfilled as the false teachers carry on their work in the presence of both author and audience. The author's incorporation of material from the letter of Jude after heavy editing is also often thought to square more with a post-apostolic author than with Petrine authorship, leaving the material still apostolic, however, if not thoroughly Petrine. Those who support this second scenario, of course, also point to the style and vocabulary of the Greek as distinctly un-Petrine.

Before we dismiss the possibility out of hand, we should consider that in the ancient world, pseudonymous authorship could be understood in some instances to be an act of deception with bad motives, but in others to be understood as a sincere tribute motivated by a desire to carry on or preserve the teaching of a revered figure. We might take Pythagoras, a Greek philosopher and mathematician from the 6th century BC, as an example. He himself wrote nothing, but ancient catalogs of books attribute hundreds of titles to his name, some of which have come down to us as complete manuscripts.

His students collected and wrote down what they remembered of his teachings on various subjects and published them under the teacher's name rather than their own, as they believed it to be more proper to credit their teacher with the content as it originated with him, though it only came to written expression through their mediation of the contents. A theory of pseudonymous authorship, however, does face one major obstacle when it comes to 2 Peter. The leaders of the early church do not appear ever to have allowed for pseudonymity as an acceptable practice.

This is probably the result of the widespread use of pseudonymity throughout the 2nd and 3rd centuries to promote heretical beliefs, advancing them as the secret teachings of John, James, or Thomas. But even a largely unobjectionable work, if discovered to have been written pseudonymously, would be rejected. Attempts to secure a place in the canon for letters like Jude and 2 Peter, consequently, necessarily involved affirming their authenticity as apostolic writings.

So this is a bit of a two-edged sword. Placing a high value on a text's contents would lead to claiming its authenticity as an apostolic witness, whether or not it had actually been written by that particular apostle. The authorship of 2 Peter remains an elusive question, and it would betray the complexities of the evidence to simply brush away half of the evidence.

What we can say with confidence, however, is that the letter clearly represents apostolic content, the narrative of the transfiguration, the warnings concerning false teachers, the assurance of God's judgment of the ungodly, and deliverance of the faithful. It also reflects apostolic intent, namely the goal of keeping its readers aligned with, to borrow a clause from Jude, the faith delivered once for all to the saints. If we do decide to affirm Petrine authorship, we will need to do so in a way that honors the difficulties of assigning the style and some of the content to Peter as the sole author.

Jerome and Calvin point the way to a baseline affirmation of Petrine authorship. This text is, at the very least, highly mediated through a trusted associate of Peter's. The text of 2 Peter

opens with a typical letter salutation formula, sender to recipients, greetings, expanded as is typical for letters in early Christian circles.

Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of equal value to ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, may grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. This opening salutation provides very little, well, nothing really, by way of information about the audience. It reveals only that they themselves are Christian.

At the beginning of chapter 3, the author makes reference to an earlier letter from Peter. This is now, beloved, the second letter that I am writing to you. In them, I am trying to arouse your sincere intention by reminding you that you should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles.

It is tempting to identify that earlier letter as our first Peter, which would mean that second Peter is also written to Christians in one or more of the provinces in Western Asia Minor addressed by the earlier letter. The Roman provinces of Asia, Galatia, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Bithynia. But how much should we depend on that connection as we consider the audience of this epistle? It presumes that Peter wrote only these two letters, if indeed he wrote both, over the course of three or more decades of ministry.

We know that a major apostolic figure could write significant letters that were lost to posterity. In Paul's case, we could name just the previous letter to the Corinthians that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 5, 9 to 11, and the tearful letter that Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 2, verses 3 and 4, as well as the letter to the Laodiceans, which Paul mentions in Colossians 4, if this is not our Ephesians or incorporated into our Ephesians, as a few scholars have suggested. The author of Second Peter's reference to Paul's letters, teaching that the patience of God is meant to lead people to repentance, is also somewhat problematic for an audience in Western Turkey, for it is only in Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 2, verse 4, that we find Paul making precisely this claim.

Do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? I would therefore prefer not to hang too much on the identification of the audience of Second Peter with the audience of First Peter, as if we are dealing with a relationship along the lines of First and Second Thessalonians or First and Second Corinthians. The description of the audience in chapter 1, verse 2, however, merits some attention to those who have received a faith of equal value to us in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

The author thus expresses goodwill toward and esteem for his audience, which always contributes positively to their receptiveness to any word that follows. It also strategically underscores the value of the faith as the audience had received it from their founders, a faith that included the conviction that God will indeed judge the world and hold all accountable to God's righteous standards, as well as the conviction that the present material creation is not the ultimate and eternal arena for existence. This may put the audience on notice from the outset that the faith they had embraced at first possesses

significant sufficient value to defend against the innovations of skeptics such as have infiltrated the congregation or the congregations addressed.

The letter opening may also be an early assertion of the divinity of Jesus, speaking of our God and Savior Jesus Christ in a grammatical construction that strongly suggests that the author is referring to a single entity. The reading in Codex Sinaiticus, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, probably reveals a scribe's discomfort with the unusual, if ultimately orthodox, formulation, our God and Savior Jesus Christ. But this minority reading should probably be discounted as a scribal amendment, being the less difficult reading.

Instead of the simple word greetings, we find, as in most New Testament letters, a wish for grace and peace to abound for the addressees. The celebration of God's bounteous favor is, of course, central to all early Christian discourse, but it will provide this particular letter with its launching point, as we will see in chapter 1, verses 3 to 11. Second Peter seeks to provide a philosophically respectable, but still orthodox, faith.

In this author's hands, orthodox Christianity is not inferior to any popular philosophy of the day, and can withstand and answer criticisms, but it also will not sacrifice its principal tenets in order to achieve this respectability. One way in which the author moves forward in this regard is to present Christian discipleship as a process of unrelenting growth into a life of widely recognized virtues insofar as his divine power has given us all things with a view to life and piety through the acknowledgment of the one who called us by his own glory and virtue, through which he has given to us the precious and very great promises, in order that through these you might become participants in the divine nature fleeing from the corruption that is in the world through desire.

Bringing all diligence and deed to bear in respect of this very thing, supply in your faith virtue in addition, and in your virtue, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, endurance, and in your endurance, godliness, and in your godliness, love for the brothers and sisters, and in your love for the brothers and sisters, love without boundaries. For as these things belong to and abound among you, they will ensure that you are not unproductive or unfruitful in regard to your acknowledgment of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the people in whom these things are lacking are so short-sighted as to be blind, putting out of their minds the cleansing of their past sins.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, invest yourself fully in making your calling and selection certain. For by doing these things, you will certainly never trip up. For in this way, entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly supplied to you.

The author opens with language that would resonate with inscriptions declaring a city's resolutions to honor its benefactors, such as those that appear in public spaces throughout the cities in which the addressees live. The benefactions that this author celebrates, of course, are those granted by God, whose divine power has given us all things with a view to life and piety, who called us by his own glory and virtue, through which he has given to us the precious and very great promises, in order that through these you might become participants in the divine nature, fleeing from the corruption that is in the world through desire. The author conceptualizes salvation in very Greek terms here in chapter 1, verse 4.

Salvation means sharing in the divine nature, which would be understood to include immortality, moral perfection, and completeness.

Salvation means, at the same time, escaping from the corruption or the decay that is inherent in the material world, a decay that the author attributes to the effects of desire on the realm of human experience. The author may incorporate the language and thought of Greco-Roman ethical philosophy here at the outset as a means of offering his hearers assurance in direct counterpoint to the complaints of the skeptics about the apostolic faith, that the faith that they have received is indeed enlightened and entirely in keeping with the highest ideals celebrated in the Greco-Roman world. It is quite countercultural for me in my own American context to think about desire as something negative.

I encounter all kinds of encouragement to dream big in terms of enjoying the goods and the pleasures of this life, even in terms of achieving great things in this life, as my society-shaped peers define great things. I encounter all manner of enticements seeking to stimulate my desire, whether for a new appliance, a new car, a new medication, a new drink, a new snack, a new restaurant, a new beach resort, a new movie, a new computer, new kitchen cabinets, or a new vehicle. Wanting seems to be as normal, as necessary, as breathing in the world that I inhabit.

Our author speaks to us from a distant culture, one that knew just as well as we do what it was to desire, but that was also more critical, more suspicious when it came to desire and its effects on human life. A commonplace of ethics throughout the Greek and Roman periods was this. In order to arrive at a consistently virtuous life, reason had always and consistently to maintain the upper hand over one's desires.

To give free rein to one's impulses, desires, and feelings, however, was to abandon the pursuit of the virtues that made a life worth having lived. Early Christian ethics would be no less rigorous. Our author warns us that desire has contributed to the corruption of God's good world and God's good vision for life in this world in so many ways.

Greed leads to unsustainable ecological practices, to oppression of the weak so as to enjoy a larger share of coveted goods, to withholding other people's access to having enough so that I can have access to more. Sexual desire can lead to the warping of relationships, the breaking of relationships, and even to systematic and violent victimization of people who are transformed into objects of lust. But desire doesn't have to lead to such obvious evils to contribute to the corruption, the ruin that is in the world.

I suspect that for many of us the greatest threat comes from vanilla desires that simply distract us, occupy us, siphon off our time, attention, and energy from pressing on along the evacuation route that God has laid out for us and for which God has equipped us, with the result that we run the risk of being found still pattering around uselessly at ground zero when the catastrophe strikes. But there is also holy desire. God has given us precious and very great promises, and the author would only encourage us to desire these things, becoming reflections of God's own righteousness in this world by the working of his spirit within and among us, being granted lavish entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, a place in God's unfiltered presence forever, sharing in God's virtue and goodness rather than this world's corruption.

God's promises hold before us that which is indeed worth desiring. If we train our desires on what God has promised us, desire will work for us instead of against us. We will put aside being self-directed unto distraction at best and destruction at worst, and allow ourselves to be impelled in the direction of salvation.

In regard to both its positive and negative aspects, salvation does not involve instantaneous teleportation to the safe harbor of eternity. Rather, salvation has the nature of following the evacuation route that God has graciously laid out for us who are committed to escaping the corruption that is in the world through desire. Telling in this regard is the author's conclusion to this paragraph.

It is by following this evacuation route that we will be granted entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as we read in verse 11 of chapter 1. The author celebrates God's gracious provision. At the same time, he calls his hearers to make a graceful response to these provisions. The promises that God has set before them should evoke a zealous, diligent response, as the author affirms in verse 5. In regard to this very thing, namely God's provision for escape from the corruption that otherwise is the end of every human being's existence, bring forward all zeal to make the journey that leads to the enjoyment of God's great and precious promises, namely, entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Just as inscriptions honoring benefactors moved toward a statement of the actions that the recipients agreed to undertake to honor the benefactor, so our author lays out the actions that the audience must continue to take to honor the gifts and the promises God has supplied, as well as honoring the costly investment that their divine benefactor has made in them to make this possible. The author lays out a path, an escape plan, an evacuation route by which to keep putting the world that is subject to decay and ruin further behind us and to keep moving forward in the direction of entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ that shall mark our arrival in the safe, everlasting harbor. Bringing all diligence indeed to bear in respect of this very thing, supply in your faith virtue in addition, and in your virtue knowledge, and in your knowledge self-control, and in your self-control endurance, and in your endurance godliness, and in your godliness love for the brothers and sisters, and in your love for the brothers and sisters love without boundaries.

For as these things belong to and abound among you, they will ensure that you are not unproductive or unfruitful in regard to your acknowledgement of our Lord Jesus Christ. The author employs a rhetorical device here known as sorites or climax. The speaker offers a chain of concepts, each a link leading to the next in the series.

The device is particularly useful where a speaker wishes to lay out a path and its consequences. This can be used as a warning, as in James chapter 1, verses 14 to 16, where desire having conceived gives birth to sin, and sin growing to maturity gives birth to death. It can be used to encourage the pursuit of a path, as in the wisdom of Solomon, chapter 6, verses 17 and following, where concern for instruction constitutes love of wisdom, and love of wisdom means keeping her laws, and keeping her laws brings assurance of immortality, and immortality brings one near to God.

Thus, this device is appropriate here, as the author lays out the path that believers must take to arrive at God's promised goal for them. Coming to faith is just the beginning. The starting point for this evacuation plan.

In the midst of your faith, provide yourself also with virtue. The author uses the Greek word *arete*, a word meaning moral excellence or commitment to the highest ethical standards. Faith in Jesus and his promises must bear fruit in ethical transformation.

In the midst of growing in virtue, the author urges growth in knowledge. Not esoteric knowledge but ever fuller knowledge of the equally valuable faith into which the addressees have been initiated from the teachings of Jesus and the apostles to the experiential knowledge of living a life of moral excellence and the assurance this brings that its benefits outweigh any costs. The author has in mind the kind of knowledge that equips a person to exercise self-control.

A commitment of central importance where desire is the principal source of the corruption, the decay, the ruin from which we are escaping. On top of this, the author asserts the believer needs endurance so as to keep up the energy for this flight over the long haul, maintaining resistance in the face of every enticement and distraction, pushing back against the astounding cultural forces at work against our commitment to self-control. The forces daily preach self-gratification, self-indulgence, and self-centered investment.

Over and above endurance, the author urges the cultivation of godliness, piety, living a life that has God at its center, that places giving to God what is God's due as the highest priority. And of course, if a concern for living life with God at the center is firmly fixed, endurance and self-control will follow as a matter of course. In the midst of such God-centered living, the author urges the ongoing cultivation of a love for one's sisters and brothers in the household of God.

The Greek term here, *Philadelphia*, the love that ought to characterize sibling relationships, received a good deal of attention in Greco-Roman ethics. It was to manifest itself in a commitment to sharing ideals, sharing material resources, cooperating for one another's benefit rather than competing against one another for individual benefit, preserving harmony, and forgiving offenses. It was precisely this ethos that early Christian leaders sought to nurture among those whom God had made brothers and sisters in the family God had formed through adoption in his son Jesus Christ.

Beyond this and crowning the lot, the author commends cultivating *agape*, what I have rendered as love which knows no boundaries. The love that depends on nothing external, no kinship bond, whether natural or spiritual, but simply springs from a character that has at last arrived at the place where it shares in the divine nature of which the author was speaking. The divine nature of the God who is love, according to 1st John chapter 4. This sense was not inherent in the Greek word *agape*, but rather early Christians latched onto this less frequently used term for love in their world and used it as a focal point for developing their distinctive ethos of loving others as Christ had loved them.

The author assures his audience that as these things belong to and abound among you, they will ensure that you are not unproductive or unfruitful in regard to your acknowledgement of Lord Jesus Christ. And according to this author, cultivating these particular fruits and

indeed bringing them to a full and rich harvest is far from an optional add-on to faith. As he continues, for the people in whom these things are lacking are so short-sighted as to be blind, putting out of their minds the cleansing of their past sins.

The image of serious myopia, while perhaps not the kindest image to use, is indeed apt. One of the greatest threats to our ability to bring all diligence to bear on cultivating the life that Christ died to free us to live is the business of today, day after day. And if we were to be honest, the non-business of today, day after day, the hours that we often simply throw away on passive entertainments and ultimately meaningless distractions.

The author calls Christians to be far-sighted people, people who live with their eyes on the horizon of the dawning day of Christ's coming, arranging the whole of their lives now so as to be found blameless, even celebrated on that day. To hear the words known from another familiar parable, Well done, good and faithful servant. To keep investing the lion's share of our attention and efforts today on pursuits and distractions that will not matter on that day.

What better label could the author give this than the severest form of myopia? The author adds a further indictment, however. To fail to move forward along this evacuation route is to forget the costly investment that Jesus made in you to set you on this path in the first place, putting out of their minds the cleansing of their past sins. Forgetfulness of the benefits one had been given was considered a deplorable failure in the author's world.

Cicero, a Roman senator and statesman from the mid-first century BC, wrote, All people despise forgetfulness of benefactions, thinking it to be a personal injury against themselves since it discourages generosity. They regard the ingrate as an enemy to everyone who stands in need. Similarly, Seneca, writing a century later, said that the person who fails to make a return for a gift is ungrateful, but the person who has forgotten a gift once given is the most ungrateful of all.

Who is more ungrateful than the person who has so fully put out of his mind the gift that ought to have remained foremost on his mind that he has lost all knowledge of it? The fact of their cleansing from sin, which all hearers would associate with Jesus' death on their behalf and hence would know to be a costly benefit indeed while received on the basis of trust, also impels them forward to the one response to God's gifting that makes any sense, since that great gift demands living the life for which that cleansing was provided in the first place. So our author concludes this paragraph, therefore, brothers and sisters, invest yourself fully in making your calling and selection certain, for by doing these things you will certainly never trip up, for in this way entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly supplied to you. The author may challenge our notions of salvation and the answers we might carry around in our heads and preach from our pulpits to the question, What must I do to be saved? For the author of 2 Peter, salvation isn't just a matter of an isolated decision; it's a matter of following an evacuation route.

The decision is important, but it has to be a decision to follow the evacuation route because salvation and safety lie at the end of the evacuation route, not at its beginning. The route begins with faith, and faith sets us on a journey toward Christ's likeness, toward living for others, toward giving ourselves over more and more fully to allowing God to accomplish his purposes for who we would become and what fruit we will bear for him over the rest of the

course of our lives. John Wesley and the people called Methodists shared this author's view of salvation to a great extent.

Among early Methodists, the principal entrance requirements to the group were a, quote, desire to flee from the wrath to come, and the nature of that flight was a lifelong commitment to use all the help that God had provided, all of the means of grace to grow in holiness and righteousness. The movement's members sought and encouraged one another to exercise all diligence in discovering how to withdraw themselves from doing any harm and how to invest themselves in all the good they could, all the while seeking that second rest that was believed to be the Holy Spirit's goal for each and every Christian. Namely, arriving at that place where love for God and love for neighbor drove all of one's actions and interactions.

Following Christ entailed a long obedience in the same direction, not a long inertia in the same pew. Rather than ask the graceless question, How much or how little do I have to do to really be saved? The author urges his hearers to live out a graceful response. He tells them the way to make their calling and selection by God secure is not through formulating some lazy theological argument by which we might think to excuse ourselves from pursuing God's evacuation route.

Rather, he tells us to make our calling and selection sure by pursuing that lived response to God's calling and selection that makes us people who belong in the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, in that place where righteousness is at home. This we will do, the author claims, by giving ourselves over to pursuing the path along which all the provisions of God's divine power naturally and rightly impel us. Here, for the author, is the surest foundation for any doctrine of assurance.

By doing these things, you will surely not trip up on the way to that kingdom.