A FREE STUDY RESOURCE

The Knowledge of Him

A Greek Word Study of the Second Letter of Peter

"His divine power has bestowed on us everything necessary for life and godliness through the rich knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence."

2 PETER 1:3

By Larry Herzog Jr. · Ordinary Means

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Greek citations. Footnotes cite the author's two companion volumes, *Just Enough Greek* and *Fifty More Greek Words for Confessional Lutherans*, by chapter and word. The Greek text underlying this study is that of the New Testament in its standard critical and Byzantine editions; significant variants are noted where they bear on meaning.

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A Word Before We Begin

Second Peter is a dying man's last letter. "I know that my tabernacle will soon be removed," Peter writes, "because our Lord Jesus Christ revealed this to me" (1:14). Everything in these three chapters is written under that shadow and in that light. A man who knows he is about to die does not waste words. He says the one thing that matters most. And the one thing Peter says, over and over, in a dozen ways, is: hold on to what you already know. Hold on to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

For a storm had come. False teachers had risen inside the churches — men who denied the Master who bought them, who promised freedom and delivered slavery, who scoffed at the promise of the Lord's return and lived as though no reckoning would ever come. Peter answers them not with a new revelation but with an old certainty. Against their cleverly concocted fables he sets two anchors that cannot be moved: the apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ's majesty, and the church possesses the prophetic word, the Scripture that came not from human impulse but from men "carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1:21). The answer to a counterfeit is not a better feeling. It is the Word.

And so this little letter is built, front to back, on a single thread: knowledge. Not knowledge as bare information, and not the secret "knowledge" the false teachers boasted of, but the true, deep, saving knowledge of God in Christ — the Greek word ἐπίγνωσις *(epignōsis)*. It opens the letter ("grace and peace be lavished on you as you grow in the rich knowledge of God," 1:2) and it closes the letter ("grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," 3:18). Everything in between is held inside that frame. A confessional Lutheran feels immediately at home here, because this is the gospel's own logic: faith comes by knowing Christ, and Christ is known through the Word He has given. The whole letter is a sustained argument that the cure for every counterfeit is to grow up into the One you already know.

This study works through all sixty-one verses in nine sessions, slowly, with one ear always tuned to the Greek. You do not need to read Greek to use it. Every word is transliterated and translated, and where a word also appears in one of the two companion volumes —

Just Enough Greek or *Fifty More Greek Words for Confessional Lutherans* — a footnote points you there for a fuller treatment. The aim is not scholarship for its own sake. The aim is to hear Peter the way his first readers heard him, and to grow, as he begged them to grow, in the knowledge of Him.

How to Use This Study

Each of the nine sessions follows the same rhythm, so that after the first one you will know your way around:

The Text — the verses themselves, to be read aloud if you are in a group.

Orientation — where we are in the letter and what is at stake.

The Greek — two to four words that carry the weight, opened up without jargon.

Verse by Verse — the unhurried walk through the passage.

What Confessional Lutherans Hear — where the passage lands in the Book of Concord and in the life of faith.

For Reflection — questions for the table or the journal.

Prayer — a short collect to close.

A session can be read alone in twenty minutes or stretched across an hour of group discussion. There is no homework and no test. Read slowly. Peter, at the end of his life, did not hurry; neither should we.

A Word on the Greek

Jude hangs his whole letter on one verb. Peter hangs his on one noun. If you want a single key to put in your pocket before you begin, take this word:

ἐπίγνωσις *(epignōsis)* **— knowledge — full, deep, personal recognition.** A strengthened form of γνῶσις (*gnōsis*, "knowledge"), with the prefix *epi-* intensifying it: not bare acquaintance but full, settled, personal knowing. The NET renders it "rich knowledge." It is Peter's favorite weapon against the false teachers, who traded in a "knowledge" of their own.

Watch where it falls. Grace and peace are multiplied "in the rich knowledge of God" (1:2). His divine power gives everything for life and godliness "through the rich knowledge of the one who called us" (1:3). The virtues keep you from being ineffective "in your pursuit of knowing our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:8). Even the apostates were people who had once "escaped the filthy things of the world through the rich knowledge of our Lord and Savior" (2:20). And the very last line of the letter is a command: "grow in the grace and *knowledge* of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (3:18). The word opens the letter and closes it. Everything urgent in between is bracketed by the knowledge of Christ.

Hold those together and Peter's strategy appears. He does not fight the counterfeit with a newer, hotter experience. He fights it by sending his readers deeper into what they already have — the true knowledge of the real Christ, given in the real Word. That is the difference between *epignōsis* and the false teachers' boasted insight, and it is the whole of the Christian life: not to move beyond Christ, but to grow up into Him.

Everywhere else, the method is simple: when a word does real work, we stop and look at it — its family, its range, the places you have met it before — and then we keep walking. No Greek is assumed. All of it is translated. None of it is wasted.

SESSION ONE

Like Precious Faith

2 Peter 1:1–2

THE TEXT

2 PETER 1:1–2 · NET

[1] From Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, have been granted a faith just as precious as ours.

[2] May grace and peace be lavished on you as you grow in the rich knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord!

ORIENTATION

Peter opens by leveling the ground. He is an apostle — one of the Twelve, an eyewitness of the Transfiguration, a man who watched the risen Christ eat fish on a beach. His readers are ordinary Christians scattered across Asia Minor, most of whom never saw Jesus in the flesh. And the very first thing Peter tells them is that the faith they hold is "just as precious" as his own. Not a lesser grade. Not a beginner's portion. The same faith, of equal value, equal standing, equal worth. Before he says anything else, the apostle flattens the distance between himself and the newest believer in the room.

Notice, too, how he signs his name. "Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle." Slave comes first. Like his brother in the Lord, Jude, who called himself a bondservant rather than trade on being the Lord's brother, Peter defines himself downward before he claims his office. And the gift he prays for them is the same gift that runs through the whole letter: that grace and peace would be "lavished" on them — not merely present, but heaped up, multiplied — as they grow in the knowledge of God.

THE GREEK

ἰσότιμον *(isotimon)* — **equally precious, of equal value or standing.** A compound of *isos* ("equal" — the root behind our *iso*-meter and *iso*sceles) and *timē* ("honor, value, price"). It was used of citizens who held equal civic rights and of things of equal worth. Applied to faith, it is startling: the faith "granted" to a Gentile convert in Pontus is of exactly equal value to the faith of Simon Peter, prince of the apostles. There are no first-class and second-class Christians. There is one faith, equally precious in every hand that holds it.

πίστις *(pistis)* — **faith, trust; the faith received.** Here faith is something "granted" — the verb is passive, the faith is received, not achieved. It is not a capacity these believers worked up but a

gift handed to them "through the righteousness of our God and Savior." Faith's whole character is to be the empty hand that receives.[1]

ἐπίγνωσις *(epignōsis)* **— rich, full, personal knowledge.** The letter's keyword, sounded for the first time. Grace and peace grow "in the rich knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." Knowledge here is not a stage you pass through on the way to something higher; it is the very atmosphere in which grace multiplies. The whole letter will unfold this one phrase.

εἰρήνη *(eirēnē)* **— peace — the Hebrew shalom, wholeness with God.** Not the absence of conflict but the presence of wholeness: the Hebrew *shalom*, right relationship with God spilling over into right relationship with one another. Peter prays it would be "lavished," multiplied, in a church about to be shaken by false teaching.[2]

VERSE BY VERSE

Verse 1. "From Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ." The Hebraic spelling "Simeon" (rather than the usual "Simon") appears only here and on the lips of James in Acts 15:14; it is a small, authentic touch, the kind of detail a forger would have smoothed away. The readers "have been granted a faith just as precious as ours" — and granted it "through the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Read the phrase carefully: Peter calls Jesus "our God and Savior" in a single breath. It is one of the New Testament's clearest confessions of the full deity of Christ, tucked into a greeting.

Verse 2. "May grace and peace be lavished on you as you grow in the rich knowledge of God." Grace (charis) and peace (eirēnē) are the standard apostolic greeting, but the engine Peter attaches to them is knowledge. The gifts multiply *in* the knowing of God. This is the whole letter in a sentence: you do not grow in grace by leaving Christ behind for something deeper; you grow in grace by going deeper into Christ.[3]

What Confessional Lutherans Hear—One Faith, Equally Precious. The single word *isotimon* — "equally precious" — carries a whole Lutheran doctrine. If the faith of the newest, weakest believer is of exactly the same value as the faith of an apostle, then the worth of faith does not lie in the strength, maturity, or pedigree of the one believing. It lies in its object. Faith is precious not because of how firmly you grip Christ but because of the Christ it grips. This is why a Lutheran can speak comfort to a trembling conscience: a weak faith in a strong Savior saves, because faith's value is borrowed entirely from Him. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession insists that justifying faith is not a heroic quality we produce but the trust that lays hold of Christ and His promise.[4] And it is why the same Confession can speak of the priesthood of all the baptized: there are no spiritual aristocrats in the church, because there is one faith, *isotimos*, in every hand.

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1. On pistis *as the receiving, gift-shaped trust worked by the gospel rather than a work the believer contributes, see Larry Herzog Jr., Just Enough Greek*, chap. 17 (*"Pistis,* πίστις").
2. On eirēnē *as shalom-wholeness rather than mere calm, see Larry Herzog Jr., Fifty More Greek Words for Confessional Lutherans*, chap. 32 (*"Eirēnē,* εἰρήνη").
3. On charis *as God's unmerited favor, the gift that grounds every other gift, see Larry Herzog Jr., Just Enough Greek*, chap. 16 (*"Charis,* χάρις").

Granted, Not Achieved. Notice the passive again: the faith was "granted," and granted "through the righteousness of our God and Savior." It is not your righteousness that secured your faith but His; not your achievement but His gift. Peter, like Jude, opens with what God has already done, before a single command is given. The whole letter will issue commands — make every effort, be diligent, grow — but every one of them stands on this opening indicative of grace. You are given a faith as precious as Peter's. Now grow up into it.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Peter tells ordinary believers their faith is "just as precious" as an apostle's. Where are you tempted to rank Christians — including yourself — by the strength or maturity of their faith?
2. If the value of faith lies in its object rather than its strength, what does that say to you on a day your own faith feels weak?
3. The faith was "granted" — received, not achieved. How does beginning with a gift change the way you hear the commands that follow in this letter?
4. Peter calls Jesus "our God and Savior" in his very first sentence. Why might it matter, for a letter about false teaching, to establish who Christ is at the outset?
5. Grace and peace grow "in the knowledge of God." Where, concretely, do you go to know God more — and is it the same place Peter would point you?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, our God and Savior, you have granted us a faith as precious as any apostle's, not because of our strength but because of your righteousness. Lavish your grace and peace upon us, and let us grow in the true knowledge of you. When our faith feels small, fix our eyes not on the weakness of our grip but on the strength of your hand. Through your own name we pray, Amen.

4. Apology of the Augsburg Confession IV ("Justification"): faith justifies not as a virtue or work of ours but because it apprehends Christ, in whom alone is the merit set against our sin. The value is in the object grasped, not the strength of the grasp.

SESSION TWO

Everything for Life and Godliness

2 Peter 1:3–4

THE TEXT

2 PETER 1:3–4 · NET

[3] I can pray this because his divine power has bestowed on us everything necessary for life and godliness through the rich knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence.

[4] Through these things he has bestowed on us his precious and most magnificent promises, so that by means of what was promised you may become partakers of the divine nature, after escaping the worldly corruption that is produced by evil desire.

ORIENTATION

If you wanted one sentence to silence every salesman of secret spiritual upgrades, it would be this: his divine power has already bestowed on us everything necessary for life and godliness. Everything. Not most of it. Not the starter kit, with the real power sold separately. The false teachers came offering more — deeper secrets, higher experiences, a fuller knowledge than the plain gospel could give. Peter answers them before he even names them: you already have everything you need, and you have it through the knowledge of Christ you already possess.

And how does this divine power reach us? Through promises. God has bestowed on us his precious and magnificent promises, and it is by means of those promises that we come to share in the divine nature itself. This is the engine of the Christian life running in plain sight: God speaks a promise, faith lays hold of it, and through it we are joined to God. Nothing here is earned. Everything here is given, and given in a word.

THE GREEK

εὐσέβεια *(eusebeia)* — **godliness, true reverence toward God.** More than morality and more than religiosity, *eusebeia* is the whole posture of a life oriented rightly toward God — reverence that shows itself in worship and in conduct. It was a favorite word of the false teachers' world, claimed by every philosopher and mystery cult. Peter takes it back: real godliness is not a technique you master but a gift that flows from the knowledge of the God who called you.

κοινωνοί *(koinōnoi)* — **partakers, sharers, those who hold something in common.** From κοινωνία (*koinōnia*, "fellowship, communion, common participation"). To be a *koinōnos* is to share in a thing, to have a stake in it together with others. Peter's claim is breathtaking: through the prom-

ises we become "partakers of the divine nature." Not absorbed into God, not made into gods, but brought to share, by grace, in the life of God himself.[5]

φθορά *(phthora)* **— corruption, decay, ruin.** The rot that is already at work in the world "produced by evil desire." It is what the promises rescue us *from*: not from the physical world as such, but from the moral decay that desire breeds and death completes. To share the divine nature is to be pulled out of the orbit of decay and into the orbit of life.

VERSE BY VERSE

Verse 3. "His divine power has bestowed on us *everything* necessary for life and godliness." The verb is in a tense of completed action: it is done, given, settled. And it comes "through the rich knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence." There is the epign²sis thread again. The power for a godly life is not a separate substance you acquire after conversion; it comes through knowing the Christ who called you. Grow in him, and you are growing in the power.

Verse 4. "Partakers of the divine nature." This is the high-water mark of the New Testament's language about salvation, and it must be read with care. Peter does not say we become God, or pieces of God, or gods in our own right. He says that through the promises we come to *share* in God's own life — his holiness, his incorruption, his love — by being joined to Christ. And the frame around it guards it: we partake of the divine nature precisely as we are escaping "the worldly corruption produced by evil desire." The sharing is moral and relational, not a dissolving of the creature into the Creator.

What Confessional Lutherans Hear—Union with Christ, Not Deification. Eastern Christianity built a whole doctrine of *theosis* on this verse. A confessional Lutheran reads it through a careful lens and lands somewhere precise. We do partake of the divine nature — but by grace, through union with Christ, never by nature or by absorption. The creature remains a creature. What Scripture calls the mystical union (*unio mystica*) is real: by faith Christ himself dwells in the believer, and where Christ is, there the whole fullness of God is. The Formula of Concord confesses that after a person is justified, "God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwells in the believer," and stirs him to do good.[6] So the order matters. We are not declared righteous *because* the divine nature is in us; we are declared righteous for Christ's sake, and *then* the God who justifies takes up residence in us and begins to remake us in his likeness. Partaking of the divine nature is the fruit of being clothed in Christ's righteousness, never its cause.

Everything, Already Given. Notice what this does to the false teachers' sales pitch — and to ours. If God has already bestowed "everything necessary for life and godliness," then the Christian life

5. On koin²nia *as real participation and communion — our sharing in Christ and so in the life of God — rather than mere association, see Larry Herzog Jr., Just Enough Greek,* chap. 35 (*"Koinōnia,* κοινωνία").
6. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration III ("Righteousness of Faith"), distinguishes the indwelling of God in the believer from justification itself: the indwelling follows justification as its fruit, and is not the ground of our acceptance. We are first declared righteous for Christ's sake; then God dwells in us.

is not a ladder of acquisitions but the unfolding of a gift already complete. You do not need a secret. You need to grow up into what is already yours in Christ. That is the difference between the gospel and every counterfeit that has ever worn its clothes.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Peter says God has given "everything" needed for life and godliness. Where are you still living as though something essential were missing or sold separately?
2. The power for godliness comes "through the knowledge of him." How does that reframe what "growing spiritually" actually means?
3. Why does it matter to insist that we share in the divine nature by grace and union, not by becoming divine ourselves?
4. God works through "precious and magnificent promises." Which specific promise of God are you leaning on this week?

PRAYER

Almighty God, by your divine power you have already given us everything we need for life and godliness, and through your precious promises you have joined us to yourself. Keep us from chasing counterfeits and secrets, and let us grow up into the Christ we already know. Dwell in us by your Spirit, and conform us to your likeness, until the corruption of this world has no more claim on us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

SESSION THREE

Make Your Calling and Election Sure

2 Peter 1:5–11

THE TEXT

2 PETER 1:5–11 · NET

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith excellence, to excellence, knowledge;

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

7 to godliness, brotherly affection; to brotherly affection, unselfish love.

8 For if these things are really yours and are continually increasing, they will keep you from becoming ineffective and unproductive in your pursuit of knowing our Lord Jesus Christ more intimately.

9 But concerning the one who lacks such things — he is blind. That is to say, he is nearsighted, since he has forgotten about the cleansing of his past sins.

10 Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to be sure of your calling and election. For by doing this you will never stumble into sin.

11 For thus an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be richly provided for you.

ORIENTATION

Here is the passage most likely to be misread in the whole letter, and the place where a confessional ear earns its keep. Peter has just said God gave us everything. Now he says: "make every effort." Add to your faith a whole chain of virtues. Be diligent. Confirm your calling and election. Read carelessly, it sounds like the gift has quietly become a wage — as though salvation, handed over for free in verses 3–4, must now be secured by our striving.

But watch where the chain begins. It begins "with your faith." Faith is the root already in the ground; the virtues are the fruit that grows from it. And watch the word "sure." Peter does not say make your election happen, or make it real. He says make it sure — make it certain to yourselves. The diligence does not create the calling; it confirms it, the way fruit confirms a living tree. The whole chain hangs from a gift, and bears witness to a gift.

THE GREEK

ἀρετή *(aretē)* — **excellence, virtue, moral goodness.** The great word of Greek ethics — the "excellence" that makes a thing supremely what it is. A knife's *aretē* is sharpness; a horse's is speed.

Peter borrows the pagans' favorite virtue-word and plants it in the middle of a chain that begins with faith and ends with love, so that excellence is no longer self-cultivation but the outflow of a gift.

ὑπομονή *(hypomonē)* **— perseverance, patient endurance, steadfastness.** Literally a "remaining under" — the strength to stay put under pressure without being moved. Not grim teeth-gritting but the settled endurance of one who knows the outcome is secure. In a letter written to a church about to be shaken by scoffers, it is exactly the virtue needed: to remain under, to hold the line, to stay.[7]

κλῆσις / ἐκλογή *(klēsis / eklogē)* **— calling / election.** Two of the great words of grace, set side by side. *Klēsis* is God's effective summons through the gospel; *eklogē* is his eternal choosing, his electing love. Peter tells his readers to make these "sure" — not to accomplish them, which only God can do, but to grow ever more certain of them as the fruit of faith appears in their lives.[8]

βασιλεία *(basileia)* **— kingdom, reign, royal rule.** The "eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ," into which an entrance "will be richly provided." The word names first the *reign* of God — his kingly rule breaking in through Christ — and then the realm where that rule is everything. The entrance is "richly provided," supplied as a gift, the same verb that bestowed the virtues in the first place.[9]

VERSE BY VERSE

Verses 5–7. The famous chain: faith → excellence → knowledge → self-control → perseverance → godliness → brotherly affection → love. It is not a staircase you climb to reach God; it is a description of what a living faith looks like as it grows. Faith is named first and love is named last, and the whole sequence is bracketed by the two things the false teachers lacked utterly: true knowledge and true love. Each virtue is "added" to faith, never substituted for it.

Verses 8–9. These qualities "keep you from becoming ineffective and unproductive in your pursuit of knowing our Lord." There is the spine once more: the virtues serve the epign^{2}sis. And the one who lacks them is "blind, nearsighted" — he has "forgotten the cleansing of his past sins." Note the diagnosis: the failure to grow is, at root, a failure to remember the gospel. The barren Christian is not one who has tried too little but one who has forgotten what he was given.

Verses 10–11. "Make every effort to be sure of your calling and election." The effort is real, and Peter means it. But its object is assurance, not achievement. By the fruit of faith you come to know, with growing certainty, that the calling and election were truly yours. "You will never

7. On hypomonē *as the steadfast "remaining under" that endures because its hope is sure, see Larry Herzog Jr., Fifty More Greek Words for Confessional Lutherans,* chap. 31 (*"Hypomonē,* ὑπομονή*"*).
8. On klēsis *as God's effective summons rather than a vocation we hunt for, see Larry Herzog Jr., Just Enough Greek,* chap. 40 (*"Klēsis,* κλῆσις*"*); on God's electing choice of his people in Christ, see *Fifty More Greek Words,* chap. 37 (*"Eklektos,* ἐκλεκτός*"*).
9. On basileia *as God's dynamic reign breaking in through Christ, not merely a place, see Larry Herzog Jr., Fifty More Greek Words for Confessional Lutherans,* chap. 48 (*"Basileia,* βασιλεία*"*).

stumble," and "an entrance into the eternal kingdom will be richly provided" — provided, supplied, given. Even the entrance is a gift.

What Confessional Lutherans Hear—Good Works as the Fruit of Election, Not Its Cause. This is the passage where a Lutheran must hold two truths at once without letting go of either. First: election and calling are God's work alone, in Christ, by grace. The Formula of Concord treats election not as a prize we secure but as the deepest comfort of the gospel — to be considered always "in Christ," never in our own worthiness.[10] Second: good works really do follow, necessarily, from true faith — not to earn salvation, but as its certain fruit, and as the way our calling becomes *sure to us*. The Confessions are emphatic that good works must follow faith, yet equally emphatic that they contribute nothing to justification. So when Peter says "make your calling and election sure," he is not telling anxious Christians to secure heaven by effort. He is telling them where to look for assurance: not by prying into the hidden counsel of God, but at the fruit the Spirit is growing in them, which points back to the gift that planted it.

Against Both Sloth and Pride. The passage cuts two ways at once. To the presumptuous — those who treat grace as a reason to stop growing — it says: a faith that bears no fruit has forgotten its own cleansing. To the anxious — those who fear they have not done enough — it says: look, the Spirit is bearing this fruit in you; your calling is sure. Law to the lazy, gospel to the frightened. That is the Lutheran way of reading an imperative.

FOR REFLECTION

1. The chain of virtues begins with faith and ends with love. Why does it matter which comes first — and that none of them replaces faith?
2. Peter says the barren Christian has "forgotten the cleansing of his past sins." How is forgetting the gospel the root of a fruitless life?
3. What is the difference between making your election happen and making it sure? Why does the distinction protect you from both pride and despair?
4. Where do you look for assurance that you belong to God — and is it where Peter would point you?

PRAYER

Lord God, you have called us and chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, not because of anything in us but because of your mercy. Grow in us the fruit of faith — excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, affection, and love — not that we might earn what is already ours, but that we might be sure of it, and useful in your kingdom. Keep us from both sloth and pride, and bring us at last to the entrance you have richly provided. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

10. Formula of Concord XI ("Election"): God's eternal election is a cause of our salvation and of the gifts that belong to it; it is to be considered in Christ and received as consolation, not as a ground for speculation or anxiety. Our works neither establish nor secure it.

SESSION FOUR

We Were Eyewitnesses

2 Peter 1:12–21

THE TEXT

2 PETER 1:12–21 · NET

12 Therefore, I intend to remind you constantly of these things even though you know them and are well established in the truth that you now have.

13 Indeed, as long as I am in this tabernacle, I consider it right to stir you up by way of a reminder,

14 since I know that my tabernacle will soon be removed, because our Lord Jesus Christ revealed this to me.

15 Indeed, I will also make every effort that, after my departure, you have a testimony of these things.

16 For we did not follow cleverly concocted fables when we made known to you the power and return of our Lord Jesus Christ; no, we were eyewitnesses of his grandeur.

17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father, when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory: "This is my dear Son, in whom I am delighted."

18 When this voice was conveyed from heaven, we ourselves heard it, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

19 Moreover, we possess the prophetic word as an altogether reliable thing. You do well if you pay attention to this as you would to a light shining in a murky place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

20 Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination,

21 for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

ORIENTATION

Peter knows he is dying. "My tabernacle will soon be removed." So he does what a faithful pastor does with his last breath: he points away from himself to something that will outlast him. He gives his readers two anchors that will hold long after he is gone. The first is the apostolic eyewitness — "we were eyewitnesses of his grandeur" on the mountain of Transfiguration, where the Father's own voice declared Jesus to be his Son. The second is the prophetic word, the Scripture itself, which Peter says is even more secure than his own mountaintop experience.

That second move is the stunning one. A man who has heard the audible voice of God says, in effect: do not build your faith on experiences like mine, however real. Build it on the written Word, which is "altogether reliable." Against the false teachers' "cleverly concocted fables" and private revelations, Peter sets the most external, most public, most testable thing the church possesses: the Scripture that came not from the will of man but from God himself.

THE GREEK

ἐπόπται *(epoptai)* **— eyewitnesses, those who have seen with their own eyes.** A weighty word — in the mystery religions it named those initiated into the highest vision. Peter seizes it precisely there: you want a true initiation, a real seeing? We did not invent clever myths. We *saw* — the glory, the voice, the holy mountain. The Christian faith rests not on speculation but on testimony to events that happened.

γραφή *(graphē)* **— Scripture, a writing, that which is written.** The ordinary Greek word for "a writing," which the church filled with extraordinary weight: *the* Writing, the sacred text. When Peter calls the prophetic word "altogether reliable" and warns that "no prophecy of *graphē* comes from the prophet's own imagination," he is making a claim about the nature of the Bible itself: it is writing, but not merely human writing.[11]

φερόμενοι *(pheromenoi)* **— being carried along, borne, driven.** A present passive participle of φέρω (*pherō*, "to carry, bear") — the same word used in Acts 27 of a ship *carried along* by the wind, unable to steer itself, driven where the gale takes it. This is Peter's picture of inspiration: the prophets "spoke from God" as men "carried along by the Holy Spirit." They were not the source; they were borne by One who was.[12]

VERSE BY VERSE

Verses 12–15. Three times in four verses Peter speaks of "reminding." He is not bringing news; he is re-anchoring people in what they already know and "are well established in." This is the pastoral office in miniature, and the whole theory of this study: the cure for drift is not novelty but reminder. Peter even arranges that after his "departure" — his *exodos*, a beautiful word for a believer's death — his readers will still "have a testimony of these things." He is, in effect, leaving them a book.

Verses 16–18. The Transfiguration. Peter was there (Matthew 17); he heard the Father say, "This is my dear Son." Against the charge that the apostles peddled "cleverly concocted fables," he stakes everything on having been an eyewitness of Christ's majesty — a preview of the "power and return" of the Lord that the scoffers will deny in chapter 3. The empty tomb and the holy mountain are not myths. They are testimony.

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11. On graphē *as Scripture — the written Word that is God-breathed and authoritative over the church — see Larry Herzog Jr., Fifty More Greek Words for Confessional Lutherans,* chap. 21 (*"Graphē,* γραφή*"*).
12. On pneuma *as the Holy Spirit who gives and bears the Word, see Larry Herzog Jr., Just Enough Greek,* chap. 36 (*"Pneuma,* πνεῦμα*"*).

Verses 19–21. And yet — here is the hinge — Peter points past even his own experience to "the prophetic word," which he calls *more* reliable still, a lamp shining in the dark until Christ the morning star dawns. Why is the written Word more certain than a voice from heaven? Because it is fixed, public, and given by God to the whole church, where a private experience can be doubted, misremembered, or counterfeited. And its origin is divine: "no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

What Confessional Lutherans Hear—The God-Breathed Word Above Every Experience. This passage, with 2 Timothy 3:16, is one of the twin pillars of the church's confession of Scripture. Peter says two things a Lutheran cannot say loudly enough. First, on the *origin* of Scripture: it did not come from human will or imagination but from God, through men "carried along by the Holy Spirit." The human authors were truly authors — Peter writes like Peter, Paul like Paul — and yet what they wrote, God wrote. That is why the church receives Scripture as the only rule and norm of its teaching, the *norma normans* that judges every other voice and is judged by none.[13] Second, on the *authority* of Scripture over experience: Peter, who heard God's audible voice, directs us not to chase such voices but to the lamp of the written Word. This is the deathblow to every enthusiasm — the conviction that the Spirit speaks to us apart from the external Word. The Spirit who carried the prophets along is the same Spirit who now speaks through what they wrote. To want the Spirit without the Word is to want the wind without the breath that carries it.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Peter spends his last energy "reminding" rather than revealing. Why is reminder, not novelty, the cure for spiritual drift?
2. A man who heard God's voice on the mountain calls the written Word more reliable than his own experience. What does that say about how to test the many voices claiming to speak for God today?
3. "Men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." How does this protect both the full humanity and the full authority of the Bible?
4. Where are you tempted to anchor your faith in an experience rather than in the Word — and what difference would it make to reverse that?

PRAYER

Almighty God, you did not leave your church to clever myths or private voices, but gave us your sure prophetic Word, written by men carried along by your Spirit. Make that Word a lamp to our feet in every dark place, until the day dawns and Christ the morning star rises in our hearts. Guard us from every counterfeit, and keep us anchored in what is written, until faith gives way to sight. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

13. Formula of Concord, Epitome, "Of the Comprehensive Summary, Rule, and Norm": the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only judge, rule, and norm by which all doctrine is to be evaluated. Every other authority — fathers, councils, experiences — is subordinate to the written Word.

SESSION FIVE

The Master Who Bought Them

2 Peter 2:1–10a

THE TEXT

2 PETER 2:1–10A · NET

[1] But false prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. These false teachers will infiltrate your midst with destructive heresies, even to the point of denying the Master who bought them. As a result, they will bring swift destruction on themselves.

[2] And many will follow their debauched lifestyles. Because of these false teachers, the way of truth will be slandered.

[3] And in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words. Their condemnation pronounced long ago is not sitting idly by; their destruction is not asleep.

[4] For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but threw them into hell and locked them up in chains in utter darkness, to be kept until the judgment,

[5] and if he did not spare the ancient world, but did protect Noah, a herald of righteousness, along with seven others, when God brought a flood on an ungodly world,

[6] and if he turned to ashes the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah when he condemned them to destruction, having appointed them to serve as an example to future generations of the ungodly,

[7] and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man in anguish over the debauched lifestyle of lawless men,

[8] (for while he lived among them day after day, that righteous man was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)

[9] — if so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from their trials, and to reserve the unrighteous for punishment at the day of judgment,

[10] especially those who indulge their fleshly desires and who despise authority.

ORIENTATION

Now the storm is named. False teachers will rise from within — “among you” — just as false prophets once rose among Israel. They will not announce themselves; they will “infiltrate,” smuggling in destructive teachings under cover of the gospel’s own language. And the heart of their error Peter states in a single, staggering phrase: they deny “the Master who bought them.” They were bought. The Lord purchased even these men — and they turn and deny the One whose blood was their price.

Then Peter does what Jude does: he reaches into the Old Testament for proof that God both judges and rescues. The angels who sinned: judged. The ancient world: drowned — but Noah rescued. Sodom and Gomorrah: ashes — but Lot rescued. The pattern is fixed and double-edged. "The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from their trials, and to reserve the unrighteous for punishment." The same God does both, and he is good at both.

THE GREEK

ἀγοράσαντα *(agorasanta)* **— having bought, purchased (from agorazō).** From ἀγοράζω (*agorazō*, "to buy in the marketplace," the *agora*). It is the language of redemption: Christ paid a price — his own blood — to purchase sinners out of bondage. The shock of verse 1 is that the false teachers are among the bought. The Master purchased them too, and they deny him.[14]

δεσπότης *(despotēs)* **— master, sovereign owner, despot.** Not the usual κύριος (*kyrios*) but *despotēs*, the word for the absolute master of a household and its slaves. It names ownership. The false teachers are not merely rejecting a teacher; they are slaves repudiating the Owner who bought them at the price of his life. The ingratitude is total.

κρίσις *(krisis)* **— judgment, the act of judging, the verdict.** The decisive verdict of God — the angels are kept "until the judgment," the unrighteous reserved "for punishment at the day of judgment." Peter's point is not that judgment *might* come but that it is fixed, scheduled, certain. The condemnation "is not sitting idly by."[15]

VERSE BY VERSE

Verses 1–3. False teaching is an inside job. It rises "among you," wears the gospel's clothes, and works by stealth and greed. Two casualties follow: souls ("many will follow their debauched lifestyles") and reputation ("the way of truth will be slandered"). When professing Christians live like the world, the world concludes that the gospel is a fraud. But the verdict is already written: "their destruction is not asleep."

Verses 4–8. Three judgments, two rescues, woven into one long sentence. The fallen angels, the flood, Sodom — God did not spare them. But inside the flood stands Noah, "a herald of righteousness," and inside Sodom stands Lot, "a righteous man in anguish." Judgment never sweeps the godly away with the wicked. The God who drowns a world knows the address of the one righteous household in it.

Verses 9–10a. The summary, and the comfort: "The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from their trials, and to reserve the unrighteous for punishment." Both verbs describe expertise. God is not improvising. He knows how to rescue, and he knows how to reserve. The same omniscient

14. On agoraz² *as the marketplace word for redemption — Christ buying sinners at the price of his blood — see Larry Herzog Jr., Fifty More Greek Words for Confessional Lutherans,* chap. 16 (*"Agorazō,* ἀγοράζω*"*).
15. On krisis *as God's certain and decisive judgment, the verdict that separates, see Larry Herzog Jr., Fifty More Greek Words for Confessional Lutherans,* chap. 45 (*"Krisis,* κρίσις*"*).

care that locks the door on the impenitent unlocks it for the trembling believer in the next house over.

What Confessional Lutherans Hear—Christ Died Even for These. Stand still at verse 1: the false teachers deny "the Master who *bought* them." Christ purchased these very men — men now hurtling toward destruction. A confessional Lutheran hears here the clear note of universal, objective atonement: Christ died for *all*, even for those who finally perish. This is the gospel's breadth, and it is why a Lutheran cannot teach a limited atonement in which Christ died only for the elect. The price was paid for the whole world — "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of *the world*" — and the only way to be lost is to refuse, by unbelief, a redemption already purchased for you.[16] This is no abstraction. It means the gospel can be preached to every person without exception — "Christ bought *you*" — and it means the tragedy of the apostate is not that grace was withheld but that grace was spurned. The Master bought them; they denied the Master. The blood was sufficient; the unbelief was fatal.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Peter says the false teachers "infiltrate" and wear the gospel's language. Why is error that sounds Christian more dangerous than error that announces itself?
2. "The Master who bought them" — what does it mean for the gospel that Christ purchased even those who finally deny him?
3. In every judgment Peter lists, God also rescues someone. How does that steady you when the church or the world seems overrun by error?
4. "The way of truth will be slandered" when Christians live like the world. Where does your own life either commend or slander the gospel to those watching?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Master who bought us with your own blood, keep us from ever denying the price you paid. Guard your church from teachers who smuggle in destruction under the cover of your name. And when judgment and trial press in around us, remember us as you remembered Noah and Lot; you know how to rescue the godly. Hold us fast, that we may never spurn the redemption you have won for the whole world. Amen.

16. The Lutheran Confessions teach that Christ's atonement is universal: he died for all people, and God earnestly wills the salvation of all (1 Tim 2:4; John 1:29). See Formula of Concord XI, which rejects the notion that Christ died only for some, while locating the cause of anyone's damnation in their own contempt for the Word, never in a divine refusal to redeem them.

SESSION SIX

Waterless Springs

2 Peter 2:10b–22

THE TEXT

2 PETER 2:10B–22 · NET

10 b Brazen and insolent, they are not afraid to insult the glorious ones,

11 yet even angels, who are much more powerful, do not bring a slanderous judgment against them before the Lord.

12 But these men, like irrational animals — creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed — do not understand whom they are insulting, and consequently in their destruction they will be destroyed,

13 suffering harm as the wages for their harmful ways. By considering it a pleasure to carouse in broad daylight, they are stains and blemishes, indulging in their deceitful pleasures when they feast together with you.

14 Their eyes, full of adultery, never stop sinning; they entice unstable people. They have trained their hearts for greed, these cursed children!

15 By forsaking the right path they have gone astray, because they followed the way of Balaam son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,

16 yet was rebuked for his own transgression (a dumb donkey, speaking with a human voice, restrained the prophet's madness).

17 These men are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm, for whom the utter depths of darkness have been reserved.

18 For by speaking high-sounding but empty words they are able to entice, with fleshly desires and with debauchery, people who have just escaped from those who reside in error.

19 Although these false teachers promise such people freedom, they themselves are enslaved to immorality. For whatever a person succumbs to, to that he is enslaved.

20 For if after they have escaped the filthy things of the world through the rich knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they again get entangled in them and succumb to them, their last state has become worse for them than their first.

21 For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, having known it, to turn back from the holy commandment that had been delivered to them.

22 They are illustrations of this true proverb: "A dog returns to its own vomit," and "A sow, after washing herself, wallows in the mire."

ORIENTATION

Peter's prose turns to fire. He has named the false teachers; now he paints them, and the images are merciless: irrational animals, stains and blemishes at the love-feast, waterless springs, mists driven by a storm. The deepest charge is the one that runs through the whole portrait: they promise freedom and deliver slavery. They tell people just escaping the world's corruption that the gospel's constraints can be cast off — and they hand them back into the very bondage they fled.

And then the gravest words in the letter. These were people who had "escaped the filthy things of the world through the rich knowledge of our Lord and Savior" — there is the spine word, *epignōsis* again - and who then turned back. "Their last state has become worse than their first." The dog returns to its vomit; the washed sow returns to the mud. Peter will not pretend this cannot happen. It can. And it is worse, he says, than never having known the way at all.

THE GREEK

ἐλευθερία *(eleutheria)* **— freedom, liberty.** The very banner the false teachers march under: they "promise freedom." But Peter exposes the counterfeit in the same breath — "they themselves are enslaved to immorality. For whatever a person succumbs to, to that he is enslaved." The "freedom" they sell is the oldest lie: that liberty means throwing off the Master. It ends in the deepest slavery there is.[17]

πλανάω *(planaō)* **— to wander, go astray, lead astray, deceive.** The root behind our word "planet" — the "wandering star." The false teachers "have gone astray," following "the way of Balaam," and they lead others to wander with them. To be *planao*-ed is to lose the path; and a guide who has lost the path is the most dangerous companion of all.[18]

ὁδός *(hodos)* **— way, road, path; manner of life.** The quiet keyword of the chapter. There is "the way of truth" (v. 2), "the right path" and "the way of Balaam" (v. 15), "the way of righteousness" (v. 21). Christianity was first called simply "The Way" (Acts 9:2). Every life is on a road, going somewhere. The tragedy of the apostate is to have known the right way and deliberately turned off it.

VERSE BY VERSE

Verses 10b–16. The portrait: arrogant, animal, appetite-driven, trained for greed. Peter anchors it in Balaam — the prophet who would sell his gift for money and had to be rebuked by his own donkey. The detail is deliberately humiliating: a beast saw what the "prophet" was too blind to see. Greed makes men stupider than their livestock.

Verses 17–19. "Waterless springs." A spring exists to give water; one that gives none is a cruel joke to a thirsty traveler. So with teachers who promise life and deliver nothing. Their lure is "high-

17. On eleutheria *as true gospel freedom — liberation from sin's bondage for glad service to God, not license — see Larry Herzog Jr., Fifty More Greek Words for Confessional Lutherans,* chap. 17 (*"Eleutheria,* ἐλευθερία").

sounding but empty words," and their bait is "freedom" — aimed precisely at "people who have just escaped," new believers still unsteady on their feet. But the freedom is a fraud: the sellers are themselves slaves.

Verses 20–22. The hardest verses. People who had genuinely "escaped the filthy things of the world through the rich knowledge of our Lord and Savior" turn back, and their "last state has become worse than their first." Peter does not soften it: better never to have known the way than to know it and turn from it. The two proverbs land like hammer-blows. The dog and the washed sow return to what they are — because the washing was external; the nature was never changed.

What Confessional Lutherans Hear–False Freedom and the Bondage of the Will. The false teachers' lie is precisely a lie about freedom, and a Lutheran has heard this before. Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* exposed the great confusion at the root of it: the natural man imagines that freedom means autonomy, the power to choose God or not, to throw off every master and steer his own life. But Scripture says the will apart from grace is not free at all; it is in bondage - "whatever a person succumbs to, to that he is enslaved." True freedom is not the absence of a master but the right Master. The gospel does not leave us masterless; it frees us *from* sin *for* glad bondage to Christ, whose service is perfect liberty.[19] So when the false teachers "promise freedom," they are peddling the serpent's original offer - be your own master - which has always ended in chains. And the somber warning of verses 20-22 stands as it stands in Jude's doxology: the possibility of falling away is real, the warnings are addressed to the church, and the only safety is to keep clinging to the Christ who first set us free.

FOR REFLECTION

1. The false teachers "promise freedom" but are themselves enslaved. Where does our culture sell the same counterfeit — freedom that turns out to be bondage?
2. Peter says true freedom is not having no master but having the right one. How is that different from how the word "freedom" is usually used?
3. Verses 20–22 warn that one can know the way and turn from it. How do you hold that warning seriously without falling into fear about your own standing?
4. A "waterless spring" promises what it cannot give. Where have you been tempted to drink from one?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you alone are the spring of living water, and your service alone is perfect freedom. Guard us from teachers who promise liberty and deliver chains, and from the lie that freedom means casting off

18. On plana² *as wandering from the truth and leading others astray, see Larry Herzog Jr., Fifty More Greek Words for Confessional Lutherans,* chap. 13 (*"Planaō,* πλανάω").
19. On the bondage of the natural will and its liberation only by grace, see the Formula of Concord II ("Free Will"), which confesses that in spiritual matters the unregenerate will is captive and can do nothing toward its own conversion; the Holy Spirit alone, through the Word, sets it free. Compare Luther, *The Bondage of the Will.*

your gentle yoke. We cannot free ourselves; you must do it. Hold us on the way of righteousness, and when we are tempted to turn back to the mire, wash us again and keep us yours. Amen.

SESSION SEVEN

Where Is the Promise of His Coming?

2 Peter 3:1–7

THE TEXT

2 PETER 3:1–7 · NET

[1] Dear friends, this is already the second letter I have written you, in which I am trying to stir up your pure mind by way of reminder:

[2] I want you to recall both the predictions foretold by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

[3] Above all, understand this: In the last days blatant scoffers will come, being propelled by their own evil urges

[4] and saying, "Where is his promised return? For ever since our ancestors died, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation."

[5] For they deliberately suppress this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water.

[6] Through these things the world existing at that time was destroyed when it was deluged with water.

[7] But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, by being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

ORIENTATION

Now Peter reaches the false teachers' deepest denial: they scoff at the return of Christ. "Where is his promised return? Everything just keeps going as it always has." It is the oldest argument of unbelief dressed as common sense: the world looks stable, the centuries roll on, the Lord has not come — so he never will. The scoffers mistake God's patience for God's absence, and the regularity of nature for proof that nothing will ever break in.

Peter's answer is devastatingly simple: you have forgotten the Flood. The world did *not* simply continue as it always had. By the word of God the heavens and earth were made, and by the same word the ancient world was once destroyed by water. The same Word that created and the same Word that flooded now holds the present order in reserve — not for water this time, but for fire. The scoffers' "everything continues" is not science. It is a willful forgetting.

THE GREEK

παρουσία *(parousia)* **— coming, arrival, presence; the royal advent.** The great word for Christ's return, which the scoffers deny ("Where is the promise of his *parousia*?"). In the ancient world *parousia* named the official arrival of a king or emperor to a city — the day the sovereign came in person, in power, to set things right. The Christian hope is not a vague "someday" but a royal advent: the King is coming, in person, to judge and to save.[20]

ἐμπαῖκται *(empaiktai)* **— scoffers, mockers, those who play games.** From a root meaning "to play, to mock" — children at their games, then by extension those who treat sacred things as a joke. The *empaiktai* do not argue so much as sneer. And Peter notes the engine under the sneer: they are "propelled by their own evil urges." The denial of judgment is rarely a cool conclusion; it is usually a desire wearing the mask of an argument.

λόγος *(logos)* **— word; the spoken, creative, powerful word of God.** Three times in three verses the *word* of God does the heavy lifting: by God's word the heavens existed, by God's word the world was deluged, and "by the same word" the present order is reserved for fire. The God who speaks worlds into being and out of being is not a distant deity who has lost interest. His Word made the world; his Word will judge it.[21]

VERSE BY VERSE

Verses 1–2. Peter calls this his "second letter" and again names his purpose: "to stir up your pure mind by way of reminder." The cure for the scoffers is the same as the cure for every drift — recall the prophets, recall the apostles, recall what you were taught. Faithfulness is largely a matter of remembering on purpose.

Verses 3–4. "In the last days blatant scoffers will come." Note: their arrival is itself a fulfillment of prophecy, so the very mockery that says "nothing is happening" is a sign that something is. Their argument — "all things continue as from the beginning" — is uniformitarianism as a creed: the present is the only key to the past and future, and nothing will ever interrupt the closed system. It is unbelief's most respectable disguise.

Verses 5–7. Peter dismantles it with one word: Flood. "They deliberately suppress this fact" — the forgetting is a choice. The world was created by God's word, destroyed once by water through that same word, and is now "reserved for fire" by the same word, "kept for the day of judgment." The system is not closed. It never was. The God who spoke it into being can speak it into judgment.

What Confessional Lutherans Hear—He Will Come Again to Judge. Every Sunday the church confesses what the scoffers deny: "he will come again to judge the living and the dead." The return of

20. On parousia *as the royal arrival of Christ in glory — the church's sure hope, not a timetable to decode — see Larry Herzog Jr., Just Enough Greek*, chap. 50 (*"Parousia,* παρουσία").
21. On logos *as the powerful, creative Word of God — and supremely the Word made flesh — see Larry Herzog Jr., Just Enough Greek*, chap. 1 (*"Logos,* λόγος").

Christ is not a fringe doctrine or a code for prophecy enthusiasts to crack; it is an article of the Creed. The Augsburg Confession states it plainly: at the end Christ will appear to judge, will raise the dead, give eternal life to the faithful, and condemn the ungodly.[22] Notice what the confessional hope is *not*. It is not a chart of stages, not a secret timetable, not a worldly kingdom to be set up before the resurrection. It is the simple, sure expectation that the King will come in person, in glory, to judge and to save. To the scoffer who says "where is the promise of his coming?" the church answers with neither speculation nor panic, but with the Creed: he *will* come; we wait; and his patience in the meantime is not absence but mercy — which is exactly where Peter turns next.

FOR REFLECTION

1. The scoffers reason that because the world looks stable, nothing will ever break in. Where do you hear that same logic today?
2. Peter says they "deliberately suppress" the truth. How is unbelief often a matter of the will — a choice to forget — rather than just the intellect?
3. The same Word created, flooded, and will judge the world. How does that change the way you think about the seeming "delay" of Christ's return?
4. The church confesses "he will come again to judge" every week. Does that confession function as living hope for you, or as a line you recite? What would make it the former?

PRAYER

Lord Christ, by your word all things were made, and by your word they are held until the day of judgment. When scoffers say you will never come, and when our own hearts grow dull with waiting, stir up our minds by your Spirit to remember your promise. You will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Make us ready, and keep us watching, neither speculating nor sleeping, until that day dawns. Amen.

22. Augsburg Confession XVII ("Christ's Return to Judgment"): Christ will openly return to judge the living and the dead, raise all the dead, give the godly eternal life, and condemn the ungodly. The same article rejects speculation that turns this hope into an earthly, this-worldly kingdom before the resurrection.

SESSION EIGHT

The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:8–13

THE TEXT

2 PETER 3:8–13 · NET

8 Now, dear friends, do not let this one thing escape your notice, that a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day.

9 The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some regard slowness, but is being patient toward you, because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; when it comes, the heavens will disappear with a horrific noise, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze, and the earth and every deed done on it will be laid bare.

11 Since all these things are to melt away in this manner, what sort of people must we be, conducting our lives in holiness and godliness,

12 while waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God? Because of this day, the heavens will be burned up and dissolve, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze!

13 But, according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness truly resides.

ORIENTATION

The scoffers count the delay as proof. Peter reads it as mercy. “The Lord is not slow concerning his promise … but is being patient toward you, because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” Every day the Lord tarries is a day held open for repentance — not evidence that he will not come, but evidence of how badly he wants none to be lost when he does. What looks like slowness is the long patience of a God who would rather wait than lose you.

And then the day itself: it “will come like a thief,” unannounced, and the present heavens and earth will dissolve in fire. But Peter does not leave us staring into the blaze. The fire is not the last word. “We are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness truly resides.” The old order is not annihilated into nothing; it is purged and remade. The Christian hope is not escape from the world but a world set right at last.

THE GREEK

μετάνοια *(metanoia)* **— repentance, a change of mind and heart.** A compound of "after" and "mind" — a turning, a transformation of the whole inner person, away from sin and toward God. God's patience has a purpose: "that all may come to *metanoia*." Repentance is not the despairing work of squeezing tears from a hard heart; it is the gift God's very patience is designed to give time for.[23]

ἡμέρα κυρίου *(hēmera kyriou)* **— the day of the Lord.** The great prophetic phrase, carried over from Joel and Amos: the day when the Lord acts in final judgment and final salvation. Peter says it "will come like a thief" — not announced, not scheduled, not crackable by any chart. The κύριος whose day it is, is now openly the Lord Jesus, whose *parousia* the scoffers denied.[24]

καινός *(kainos)* **— new — new in kind and quality, not merely new in time.** Greek has two words for "new." *Neos* is new in time, the latest of its kind. *Kainos* is new in *quality* — fresh, unprecedented, of a different order. Peter promises not *neos* heavens and earth, a mere replacement, but *kainos* — a creation made new in kind, the old order purged and transfigured, "in which righteousness truly resides."[25]

VERSE BY VERSE

Verses 8–9. "One day is like a thousand years." God does not keep time the way an impatient creature does; he is not subject to our clocks. And the "delay" has a name: patience. "He does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." This is the heart of God laid bare. The waiting is not indifference. It is the held breath of mercy.

Verses 10–12. "The day of the Lord will come like a thief" — suddenly, unmistakably, on a world that thought it was safe. The dissolution is total: heavens, elements, every hidden deed "laid bare." And Peter's response to the coming fire is not speculation but ethics: "what sort of people must we be?" The certainty of the end is meant to make us holy now, not to make us calculate dates.

Verse 13. "New heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness truly resides." Here is the destination. Not a disembodied escape to the clouds, but a renewed creation — the home of righteousness, where everything wrong has been put right and everything right is finally at home. The fire is not the end of the story. The new world is.

What Confessional Lutherans Hear—God Wills All to Be Saved, and the Hope of the New Creation. Verse 9 is one of the clearest windows in all of Scripture into the heart of God: he "does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." A confessional Lutheran clings to this against

23. On metanoia *as the Spirit-worked turning of the whole person — contrition and faith — rather than mere regret, see Larry Herzog Jr., Just Enough Greek*, chap. 13 (*"Metanoia,* μετάνοια*"*).
24. On kyrios *as "Lord" — the title that names Jesus with the very name of God — see Larry Herzog Jr., Just Enough Greek*, chap. 3 (*"Kyrios,* κύριος*"*).
25. On the kainē ktisis *— the "new creation" God brings, new in kind and not merely in sequence — see Larry Herzog Jr., Fifty More Greek Words for Confessional Lutherans*, chap. 49 (*"Kainē Ktisis,* καινὴ κτίσις*"*).

every attempt to make God's saving will narrow or secret. God earnestly desires the salvation of all; the gospel is a universal offer of grace, meant for every sinner without exception. The Formula of Concord is emphatic that we are to seek the will of God toward us not in hidden speculation but exactly here — in the revealed Christ and the universal promise of the gospel.[26] So the "delay" of the end is not slackness but the patience of a God who wills none to perish. And the end itself, when it comes, is gospel: not annihilation but renewal. The same hope the church confesses — "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting" — Peter paints as "new heavens and a new earth." The Christian does not flee the world; the Christian waits for it to be healed. Righteousness will not merely visit the new creation; it will *reside* there, at home at last.

FOR REFLECTION

1. The scoffers read delay as absence; Peter reads it as patience. How does it change your view of "unanswered" time to see it as mercy holding the door open?
2. God "does not wish for any to perish." How does this anchor the way you pray for, and speak to, people who are far from God?
3. Peter draws an ethical conclusion from the end of the world: "what sort of people must we be?" Why does the coming of the day make holiness urgent rather than dates interesting?
4. The hope is a renewed earth where "righteousness resides," not an escape from creation. How does that shape how you live in this world now?

PRAYER

Patient Lord, you do not count time as we do, and your slowness is mercy: you do not wish for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. Thank you for every day you have held open for us. Make us holy as we wait, and use us while the door still stands open, that others might turn and live. And bring us at last to the new heavens and new earth, where righteousness is at home. Amen.

26. Formula of Concord XI ("Election"): God's will that all be saved is revealed in the universal call of the gospel; we are to look for God's gracious disposition toward us in Christ and the means of grace, not in the hidden counsel of his majesty. The cause of anyone's perishing is unbelief and contempt for the Word, never a lack of love in God.

SESSION NINE

Grow in Grace

2 Peter 3:14–18

THE TEXT

2 PETER 3:14–18 · NET

14 Therefore, dear friends, since you are waiting for these things, strive to be found at peace, without spot or blemish, when you come into his presence.

15 And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as also our dear brother Paul wrote to you, according to the wisdom given to him,

16 speaking of these things in all his letters. Some things in these letters are hard to understand, things the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they also do to the rest of the scriptures.

17 Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard that you do not get led astray by the error of these unprincipled men and fall from your firm grasp on the truth.

18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the honor both now and on that eternal day.

ORIENTATION

Peter ends where he began. The letter opened with grace and peace multiplied "in the rich knowledge" of God; it closes with the command to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The whole letter has been held inside that one frame, and now the frame closes. The answer to false teaching, the answer to scoffing, the answer to the long wait, the answer to everything, is the same: grow up into the Christ you already know.

Along the way Peter drops an astonishing aside. He sets "our dear brother Paul" and his letters alongside "the rest of the scriptures." Paul's epistles, still wet with ink in Peter's lifetime, are already being read as Scripture by the apostolic church. And Peter warns that "the ignorant and unstable twist" these writings "to their own destruction." The Bible can be wrested. The cure is not to stop reading it but to grow stable in grace, so that you read it from inside the gift rather than against it.

THE GREEK

γραφή *(graphē)* — **Scripture — here, including Paul's letters.** Peter speaks of people who twist Paul's letters "as they also do to the rest of the *graphas*" — the rest of the Scriptures. The phrase is

quiet and momentous: the apostle classes Paul's epistles *with* the Old Testament as sacred writing. Here, inside the New Testament itself, the church's recognition of its own canon is already underway.

χάρις *(charis)* **— grace, unmerited favor.** The first thing Peter prayed for his readers (1:2) and the first thing he commands them to grow in at the end. The Christian life begins in grace, continues in grace, and matures in grace. You do not graduate from grace into something more advanced; growing up *is* sinking deeper into it.[27]

γνῶσις *(gnōsis)* **— knowledge.** And the last word of the letter's last command. The keyword that opened the letter as ἐπίγνωσις (*epignōsis*) closes it as γνῶσις (*gnōsis*): "grow in the grace and *knowledge* of our Lord." The false teachers boasted a knowledge that puffed up and led astray. Peter ends by commanding the only knowledge that saves — the knowing of a Person, deepening without end. The inclusio is complete: the whole letter is bracketed by the knowledge of Christ.

VERSE BY VERSE

Verses 14–15a. "Strive to be found at peace, without spot or blemish." The same words Peter used of the false teachers — "stains and blemishes" (2:13) — he now negates for his readers: be the opposite of them. And "regard the patience of our Lord as salvation": the very delay the scoffers mocked is to be received as God's saving mercy. The waiting is grace.

Verses 15b–16. Paul is "our dear brother," his letters are "scripture," and some of what he wrote is "hard to understand." Peter does not hide the difficulty; he names it. But the danger is not in the hard texts; it is in the "ignorant and unstable" who "twist" them. Scripture wrested by an ungrounded heart becomes a weapon against its own reader. The safeguard is stability in grace.

Verses 17–18. The final "therefore." "Be on your guard … but grow." Defense and growth in one breath: guard against being "led astray," and grow in "grace and knowledge." You cannot merely play defense against error; the only real protection is to keep growing into Christ. And so the letter ends in a doxology — "to him be the honor both now and on that eternal day" — the dying apostle's last word lifting, at the end, into praise.

What Confessional Lutherans Hear—Scripture, and Growth That Is Always Deeper into Grace. Two confessional notes ring out from these closing verses. First, the canon: Peter places Paul's letters among "the scriptures." The New Testament bears witness, from within, to its own authority — the apostolic writings are received as the Word of God alongside the Old Testament. This is the seed of the principle the Reformation would confess as *sola scriptura*: Scripture, the prophetic and apostolic Word, is the church's only rule and norm, and it interprets itself — which is precisely why the "unstable" who tear texts from that whole "twist them to their own destruction." Second, and finally, the shape of the whole Christian life: "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord." Notice that Peter does not command us to grow *beyond* grace into something higher,

27. On charis *as the unmerited favor of God that grounds the whole of salvation, see Larry Herzog Jr., Just Enough Greek*, chap. 16 (*"Charis,* χάρις").

the way the false teachers always promise. He commands us to grow *in* it — deeper, not past. This is the whole Lutheran instinct in a single line. There is no advanced Christianity that leaves the cross behind, no secret knowledge above the gospel. To mature is to know Christ more deeply, to lean on grace more completely, to need the Master who bought us more, not less. The letter that began "grace and peace in the knowledge of God" ends "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord" — and between those two phrases stands the whole of the Christian life.

FOR REFLECTION

1. The letter opens and closes with "grace and knowledge." Looking back over 2 Peter, how has that frame held everything in between?
2. Peter says some Scripture is "hard to understand" and is twisted by the "unstable." What makes a reader stable enough to handle the hard parts rightly?
3. Peter commands growth "in" grace, not beyond it. Where are you tempted to think of maturity as moving past the basics of the gospel rather than deeper into them?
4. The dying apostle's last word is praise. What would it look like for your own life, lived under the same sure hope, to end — and to continue — in doxology?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, our God and Savior, you have given us a faith as precious as any apostle's, joined us to yourself, and promised to come again and make all things new. Guard us from every error that would tear us from our firm grasp on the truth, and let us never imagine there is anything higher than to know you. Make us grow — not beyond your grace, but ever deeper into it — until that eternal day. To you be the honor, now and forever. Amen.

Excursus: Second Peter and Jude; and the Question of Authorship

Two questions hover over any careful study of 2 Peter, and it is better to meet them in the open than to leave them whispering. The first is literary: why does 2 Peter, especially its second chapter, run so closely parallel to the little letter of Jude? The second is historical: why was 2 Peter, alone among Peter's writings, questioned in the early church?

The relationship to Jude. Anyone who reads Jude and then 2 Peter 2 side by side notices it at once: the same false teachers, the same Old Testament examples of judgment, much of the same vivid imagery — the waterless springs, the wandering stars, the unreasoning animals, the way of Balaam. The overlap is too close to be accidental. Either one author drew on the other, or both drew on a common store of apostolic teaching about the false teachers the church had been warned to expect. Scholars debate the direction of dependence, and the debate need not trouble us. Inspiration does not forbid an apostle from using sources, any more than Luke's careful use of "many" earlier accounts (Luke 1:1–3) makes his Gospel less the Word of God. Whether Peter expands Jude, or Jude condenses Peter, or both echo a shared apostolic tradition, the Holy Spirit stands behind the result. Two inspired witnesses sound the same alarm, and the church is doubly warned.

The question of authorship. Of all the books that finally took their place in the New Testament, 2 Peter had the slowest road. Some in the early centuries hesitated over it; the historian Eusebius listed it among the "disputed" books — not rejected, but discussed — chiefly because its style differs from 1 Peter and because the church was rightly cautious about anything circulating under an apostle's name. It is worth being honest that this conversation happened. But it is just as worth noting how it ended: the church, over time and with care, received 2 Peter as the genuine, canonical Word of God, and there it has stood ever since. The letter itself claims Peter as its author (1:1), recalls the Transfiguration as an eyewitness (1:16–18), and speaks of Paul as a contemporary "dear brother" (3:15). A confessional Lutheran receives 2 Peter the way the church catholic finally received it: as Holy Scripture, apostolic and authoritative.

This is, in fact, a deeply Lutheran posture toward the canon. Luther himself was candid that a few books had been more contested in the church's history than others, and he was willing to say so out loud. But candor about history is not the same as doubt about authority. The church did not vote 2 Peter into power; it *recognized* in it the voice of the Good Shepherd, the same gospel the prophets and the other apostles proclaim, and received what God had given. The letter's own message is its best credential: a dying apostle pointing away from himself to the sure prophetic Word, begging the church to grow in the knowledge of Christ until he comes. That is not the voice of a counterfeit. It is the voice of a shepherd laying down his staff.

A Greek Word Index to 2 Peter

The principal Greek words treated in this study, beginning with the letter's central keyword.

ἐπίγνωσις *epignōsis* - rich, full, personal knowledge (1:2, 3, 8; 2:20)

πίστις *pistis* - faith; the faith received (1:1, 5)

ἰσότιμος *isotimos* - equally precious, of equal standing (1:1)

χάρις *charis* - grace, unmerited favor (1:2; 3:18)

εἰρήνη *eirēnē* - peace, the wholeness of shalom (1:2; 3:14)

εὐσέβεια *eusebeia* - godliness, true reverence (1:3, 6, 7; 3:11)

κοινωνός *koinōnos* - partaker, sharer (1:4)

φθορά *phthora* - corruption, decay (1:4; 2:12, 19)

ἀρετή *aretē* - excellence, virtue (1:3, 5)

ὑπομονή *hypomonē* - perseverance, patient endurance (1:6)

κλῆσις *klēsis* - calling (1:10)

ἐκλογή *eklogē* - election (1:10)

βασιλεία *basileia* - kingdom, royal reign (1:11)

ἐπόπτης *epoptēs* - eyewitness (1:16)

γραφή *graphē* - Scripture, the written Word (1:20; 3:16)

φέρω *pherō* - to carry, bear along (1:21)

ἀγοράζω *agorazō* - to buy, redeem, purchase (2:1)

δεσπότης *despotēs* - master, sovereign owner (2:1)

κρίσις *krisis* - judgment, verdict (2:4, 9; 3:7)

ὁδός *hodos* - way, path, manner of life (2:2, 15, 21)

πλανάω *planaō* - to wander, lead astray (2:15)

ἐλευθερία *eleutheria* - freedom, liberty (2:19)

παρουσία *parousia* - coming, royal advent (1:16; 3:4, 12)

ἐμπαίκτης *empaiktēs* - scoffer, mocker (3:3)

λόγος *logos* - word; the creative word of God (3:5, 7)

μετάνοια *metanoia* - repentance, change of mind (3:9)

κύριος *kyrios* - Lord; the day of the Lord (3:10)

καινός *kainos* - new in kind (new heavens and earth) (3:13)

γνῶσις *gnōsis* - knowledge (3:18)

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