

XV. Confirm Your Calling and Election

March 29/31/April 1, 2021

2 Peter 1:3-11

Aim: To confirm our calling and election, i.e., to be sure of our assurance of salvation, through the pursuit of godliness that increasingly grows in fruitfulness and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Gardner: What follows in verses 3-11 is rather like a complete summary of the apostle's teaching. It is almost as if Peter gives us the main headings of a sermon, as if he were saying, 'I am coming to the end of my life and I want you to remember the gospel. Remember what I have taught about God's wonderful grace that brings us knowledge of Him, what I said about how to live for Him, and of course about the eternal kingdom that awaits for us all.

Moo: Most New Testament letters, following their secular models, feature a thanksgiving immediately after the opening. Peter takes a different tack here. He wastes no time with preliminaries, but instead gets to the heart of what he wants to communicate to his readers. We have seen how in 1:2 Peter highlights the idea of 'knowledge.' That same idea is central to 1:3-11, which forms, in fact, a 'mini-sermon.' Its theme is the need for Christians to grown in their knowledge of Jesus Christ (see vv. 3 and 6).

A. Provision of Godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Moo: Spiritual maturity begins with God's provision (vv. 3-4).

Helm: In verses 3, 4 we are told that God has already given us everything we need to finish well..... Two great truths stand at the forefront of all that we have been given to finish well in life and godliness. The first is mentioned in verse 3, *the knowledge of God*. The second is hidden in verse 4, *the promises of God*. These are the fountain head gifts that all followers of Jesus have in their possession—the knowledge and promises of God. Therefore, if you want to grow in godliness and gain eternal life, you need to grasp hold of what God has for us in Christ. You will need to cultivate your experiential knowledge of God and a willingness to hold on to His promises in this world that tempts you to grasp other things.

1. His Power (1:3)

³*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence...*

Gardner: Peter now develops the need for continuing grace in the life of the believer.

a) Divine Power (1:3a)

³*His divine power has granted to us...*

Gardner: Here Peter refers to what Jesus has done for us. *His divine power* might refer to *God's* power, but in verse 16 Peter reminds his audience of the power of Christ that he witnessed at the Transfiguration. It thus makes sense to assume that Peter is talking of *Christ's* power, specially since Jesus was identified with God in verse 1. That verse also helps us know who the 'we' is to whom Peter refers. It could of course be the apostles, but after his insistence that his readers have received the same faith as the apostles, Peter is surely including them in what he is saying.

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Moo: It is *His divine power* that has given us Christians all that we need both for new spiritual life and for *godliness*. Normally, we would think that the *His* in *His divine power* refers to God the Father. But Peter has already called Jesus God in verse 1. And Peter uses the word *power* (*dynamis*) later on in this same chapter to describe the appearance of Christ at His transfiguration. While a decision is not easy—and perhaps not ultimately important—I tend to think that Peter is referring to Christ’s divine power. This power is not so much Christ’s intrinsic power, which He has by virtue of His Godhead; more likely it refers to His power to reclaim lost sinners, unleashed through His death and resurrection.

MacArthur: Whatever spiritual sufficiency believers have is not because of any power they possess in themselves but derives from *His divine power*.... The *power* that operates in believers is of the same divine nature as that which resurrected Christ. That power enables saints to do works that please and glorify God (cp. 1 Cor. 3:6-8; Eph. 3:7) and accomplish spiritual things they cannot even imagine (see Eph. 3:20). *His* refers back to the Lord Jesus. If the personal pronoun modified God, Peter probably would not have used the descriptive word *divine* since deity is inherent in God’s name. His use of *divine* pointing to the Son underscores that Jesus is truly God (cp. Jn. 10:29; 12:45; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:16, 2:9; Heb. 1:3).... From the moment they experienced faith in Jesus Christ, God *has granted* His power to them. *Has granted* (*dedōrēmenēs*) is a perfect, passive participle meaning that in the past, with continuing results in the present, God permanently bestowed His power on believers.

Sproul: The most frequent Greek word in the New Testament for *power* is *dunamis*, from which we get the English word *dynamite*. The power that God works in our soul to bring us to faith is dynamite. It is an overwhelming power. It is no human potentiality realized by the flesh but, as Peter tells us, a divine and supernatural work of God in the soul. Regeneration is a result of the immediate, supernatural work of God in our soul, a work that only God can bring to pass. If you are a believer in Christ, if you have an inclination toward the things of God, at some point in your life you encountered the touch of the divine in your soul. That inclination did not arise from your bosom. It came from the Spirit of God—divine power through the knowledge of the One who called us—and He called us by His glory, by His majestic power. By His righteous activity He has made us alive.

b) Divine Provision (1:3b)

...all things that pertain to life and godliness...

Gardner: Christ’s *divine power* not only called us to Himself, but continues to supply *everything* that is necessary for us to be the Christians we should be. Christ supplies the wherewithal *for life and godliness*, in other words, for the godly life all Christians should lead. This gracious supply of God is vital even for forgiven sinners. They must rely continually upon the source of life for continuing in that life. How good is the Lord whose great and godly power is used to His people’s advantage to enable them to live for Him!

Moo: *Godliness* is prominent in this opening sermon of 2 Peter. It translates a Greek word that means, literally, ‘good worship’ (*eusebeia*). This is a relatively rare word in the New Testament, occurring once in Acts (3:12, interestingly, in a speech of Peter’s), ten times in the Pastoral Letters (1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11); 2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:1), and three other times in 2 Peter (1:6, 7, 11). This word is Hellenistic in its flavor and is often translated ‘piety.’ It is a general word, and the biblical authors use it to summarize the behavior expected of Christians

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who have come to know the God of Scripture. Thus, Peter reminds us, God has made available to us all that we require to lead lives pleasing to him.

MacArthur: Christians have received *everything* in the form of divine power necessary to equip them for sanctification—they have no lack at all. In view of that reality, the Lord holds all believers responsible to obey all the commands of Scripture. Christians cannot claim that their sins and failures are the results of God’s limited provision.... To stress the extent of the divine power given each believer, Peter makes the amazing statement that saints have received from God *everything pertaining to life and godliness*. Syntactically, the term *everything* is in the emphatic position because the Holy Spirit through Peter is stressing the extent of the believers’ self-sufficiency.... *Life and godliness* define the realm of sanctification, the living of the Christian life on earth and to the glory of God—between initial salvation and final glorification.... The word translated *godliness* (*Eusebia*) encompasses both true reverence in worship and its companion—active obedience. Saints should never question God’s sufficiency, because His grace that is so powerful to save is equally powerful to sustain them and empower them to righteous conduct (Rom. 8:29-30; Phil. 1:6).

c) *Divine Procurement (1:3c)*

...through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence...

(1) Knowledge

Gardner: This develops his reference to *knowledge* in verse 2. Coming to *know* Jesus is what happened at conversion, but that knowledge continues to develop as we ‘grow up’ in Christ.

Moo: But God has made this power available in a specific way: *through our knowledge of Him who called us*. As in verse 2, *knowledge* refers to an intimate and informed relationship that is the product of conversion to the gospel.

MacArthur: In light of the divine power and provision available to Christians, the question then arises, ‘How does one experience those to the fullest?’ The apostle indicates that it is *through the true knowledge of Him*. *Knowledge* (*epignōsis*) refers to a knowledge that is deep and genuine. The word is sometimes used interchangeably with the more basic term *gnosis*, which means simply knowledge. But Peter is referring to more than a superficial knowledge of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

Helm: The Apostle Peter is not merely interested in what you and I might know about God. The supreme issue is this: are we in relationship with God? Are we being conformed into the likeness of His Son by the power of His Spirit? Or have we strayed from Him? Have we turned from Him and gone our own way? If we need restoration with God, that will require one thing—giving more and more of our life over to the gracious rule of Jesus.

(2) Called

Gardner: Although it is usually God who ‘calls’ in the New Testament, there is no reason why Peter should not mean Christ here, for it is His glory to which Peter refers in verse 17 and He is the one who is ‘known’ both in 1:2 and 3:18. So in coming to Christ and continuing to look to our relationship with Him (knowing Him), we find that we have been given everything we need for a godly life.... *Him who called us* reminds us of the Savior’s initiating work in coming to faith. In the Old Testament it was Israel whom God ‘called’ into being by His grace (Dt. 7:6-9). The word does not refer simply to an outward call in the same way as I might call out to my son

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and hope that he would come, but with no guarantee that he will! ... Here the word is used with its full electing force. This is the sort of ‘call’ from the Savior which is *effective*. It is the call which actually brings His covenant community into being. Peter picks up on this understanding of calling in v. 10 and refers to ‘calling and election.’

Moo: Based on biblical teaching elsewhere, we would expect *Him who called us* to refer to God, since it is God the Father who is usually pictured as the one who ‘calls’ people into relationship with Himself (cp. Rom. 8:28-29; 9:12; Eph. 1:18). But we have already seen (2 Peter 1:1-2) how much emphasis Peter puts on the role of Jesus Christ in this letter; and elsewhere in the letter he usually makes Christ, rather than God the Father, the object of knowledge (see 1:8; 2:20; 3:18; in 1:2, it is both ‘God’ and ‘Jesus our Lord’). Probably, then, *Him who called* is Jesus.... Though unusual in the New Testament, Peter here links Christ with the Father in calling Christians to salvation. This calling is not, as some might want to take it, a general invitation—as if Peter is saying no more than that Christ invites people to accept the gospel and be saved. This calling is, rather, an effective summons—an act by which God (or Christ) brings people into relationship with Himself. Note how Peter in his first letter uses the language of calling as a simple way of describing Christians (1 Pe. 1:15; 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10). Calling, in fact, is another way of speaking of God’s election, since the relevant Greek words are closely linked (*kaleo* and *ekloge*, which come from the same root).

MacArthur: Personal saving knowledge of the Lord is the obvious beginning point for believers, and as with everything in the Christian life, it comes from *Him who called* them. Theologically, God’s call comprises two aspects: the general call and the effectual call.... As in all appearances of this call in the epistles, Peter’s use of *called* here clearly refers to the effectual and irresistible call to salvation.

(3) Glory

Gardner: *By His glory* concerns the nature of Jesus Himself. *Glory* is a word that describes Jesus’ divine character, a character of *goodness* and love which was most clearly demonstrated in the incarnation (see Jn. 1:14)....

Moo: Peter adds that Christ calls us *by His own glory and goodness*. In his first letter, Peter notes that God ‘gave [Christ] glory’ (NIV ‘glorified Him,’ 1 Pe. 1:21), and, again, in 2 Peter 1:17, referring to the Transfiguration, Peter says that Christ ‘received honor and glory from God the Father.’ The Greek word for *glory* (*doxa*) originally meant ‘reputation’ or ‘fame.’ But the New Testament use of the word is decisively influenced by the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), which used this Greek word to render the Hebrew *kabod*. This term refers to the majestic presence of God. It is this glory of God that Isaiah sees in the temple and that forces him to his knees in terror and worship (Is. 6). Christ, as God Himself, partakes of that same glory (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 1:12; Phil. 3:21; Heb. 1:3; 2:7; 1 Pe. 1:21).

MacArthur: God effects His saving call through the revealed majesty of His own Son. Sinners are drawn by the *glory and excellence* of Jesus Christ. In Scripture *glory* always belongs to God alone. Thus when sinners see the glory of Christ, they are witnessing His deity.

(4) Excellence

Gardner: But Christ’s glory and goodness have also been seen in His gracious calling of people to Himself as He carried out the will of the Father to save a people for Himself (Jn. 17:3-5).

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Moo: Christ's glory is often associated with His resurrection (see 1 Pe. 1:21), and Peter may be implying that connection here as well. But it is not just through the strength of divine power that Christ calls us. For sinners to be put into right relationship with a holy God required an act of redemption, an act that could be accomplished only by the one who was Himself morally perfect. Hence Peter notes that Christ called us also *by His own...goodness*. Some scholars think the Greek word used here (*aretē*) means 'power,' but Peter's other uses of the term in this context (v. 5) points to the meaning of 'virtue,' 'excellence of character.' Christ lived a sinless life and went to the cross in obedience to the Father. It was through this 'active' and 'passive' obedience (as theologians put it) that He was qualified to offer Himself as a sacrifice on our behalf.

MacArthur: When God draws sinners to Himself, they see not only Christ's glory as God, but also His *excellence* as man. That refers to His morally virtuous life and His perfect humanity.

2. His Promises (1:4)

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

a) Divine Promises (1:4a)

by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises...

Gardner: Peter now says that *through these*, in other words, through Christ's *own glory and goodness*, He has given us *very great and precious promises*. What promises are these that we are so graciously given? Peter is clearly telling us that they are of great importance. In 3:13 Peter uses this rather rare word for *promise* again, and there it is a promise of 'a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.' In chapter 3, verses 4 and 9, he has used a similar word. Again, in both cases Peter has in mind the future, specifically the return of Christ and all that will happen at that return. This is surely what Peter means in these opening verses as well. Once we belong to Christ and 'know' Him, we not only have all that we need to live this life in godliness, but we have set before us by Christ the most *precious* and *very great* promises for our future. Peter's sermonette here will end on a similar note in verse 11 by reminding us of the rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ which awaits His people. However, we may be limiting Peter's intention here too much if we say he is only referring to the future. In a very real sense, Christians have already received the promises of Christ. We are already part of His holy people, sons and daughters of God, saved from the corruption of sin. In the next few verses Peter will go on to challenge his readers therefore to grow in God-like qualities which are already theirs. Perhaps the best way to look at these *precious promises* is to remind ourselves that the fullness of Christ's glory and goodness is yet to be experienced, but we have already seen and received a measure of it.

Moo: What is the antecedent of *these*? 'God and Jesus our Lord' (v. 2)? Or 'everything we need for life and godliness'? Or 'His own glory and goodness'? Probably the last, for it is closest and makes good sense. Christ's attributes of divine majesty and moral goodness have been instrumental in giving believers not only what is needed for a godly life (v. 3), but also those *very great and precious promises* that enable us to participate in the *divine nature* as well.... He really means that through these attributes, Christ has provided for the *fulfillment* of these promises.... The promises Peter has in mind are not qualified here in any other way. He is probably thinking of those many promises in the Old Testament about a new era of salvation and

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blessing that God would bring into being through His Messiah. Christians now experience the fulfillment of those promises and thus have the remarkable privilege of enjoying intimacy with the God of this universe—or, as Peter puts it, *that you may participate in the divine nature*.

MacArthur: Christ's glory as God and His excellence as the perfect Man attract people to a saving relationship with Him. *By these* attributes of glory and excellence, He has accomplished all that is necessary for believer's salvation, so that He also *granted* to them *His precious and magnificent promises*. The term rendered *has granted* is from the same verb (*dōreomai*) that occurs in verse 3, again in the perfect tense, describing past action with continuing results. Peter describes all the salvation promises in Christ as *precious (timios) and magnificent (megistos)*, meaning 'valuable' and 'greatest,' respectively. These words include all the divine *promises* for God's own children contained in the Old and New Testaments.

Helm: True knowledge of God is always attended by a fixed belief in God's promises. So often today people want to claim relationship with God while at the same time they abandon the words of the Bible. It is as if we want a God in our own making—one who exists under the authority of our word. This verse challenges such a notion.... Those who finish well in faith do so by holding fast to God's promises. According to Peter's gospel, there is simply nothing else strong enough to pull us home.

b) *Divine Partakers (1:4b)*

...so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature...

Gardner: At first sight, this seems to be an extraordinary statement. In an age like ours where many are involved in Eastern religious ideas and New Age philosophies abound, we are rightly cautious about anything that might suggest we become 'god' ourselves. The Bible always carefully maintains a proper distinction between the Creator and His creation. It is worth saying that Peter probably deliberately chose this rare expression *divine nature* because it would have been recognized by his readers who had grown up in a pagan and pantheistic environment. What he is doing is re-defining, for those who have grown up among such pagans, the way in which they might have understood their relationship to God. They do not merge with or become God. That is not Peter's point. However, in a real sense Christians do share in some of God's attributes, not through effort or hard work, but through His grace. The next part of the sentence helps us see just what Peter has in mind (1:4c)... Christians are called to be 'holy' as God is holy, a refrain repeated in Peter's first epistle (1 Pe. 1:15, 16; 2:5)... Christians do share in God's holiness and will one day be made perfect. Christians also share in God's immortality. They are not trapped in this world. Though 'perishable' now, Christians will be raised 'imperishable' (1 Cor. 15:42), and they will live forever. Christians will even share in God's glory! It was this that Jesus so desired for His people as He prayed in John 17.

Moo: Peter's language in this phrase is strong and controversial. *Divine nature* has a mystical or pantheistic ring—in Peter's day and in ours. What he seems to mean is that believers come to share in some essential qualities that are characteristic of God Himself. Just what those qualities are Peter does not say here, and it is necessary to search the New Testament carefully to determine what they might be (and, just as importantly, what they might *not* be!). At this point, however, we can simply say that Peter must have in mind those divine qualities that enable believers *to escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires*.... In 2 Peter, Peter uses many terms that were popular in Hellenistic religion and philosophy.... Probably the most striking Hellenistic expression we find anywhere in 2 Peter comes in verse 4, where Peter says

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that Christians participate in *the divine nature*. The Greek translated *divine* (*theios*) was common in the Greek world but relatively rare in the Bible. In fact, it occurs only one other place in the New Testament outside this passage—significantly, in Paul’s speech to the well-educated Greek Athenians (Acts 17:29). This Greek word is almost as broad as our English word ‘divine.’ It could be applied to virtually any kind of ‘god’ that ancient people imagined.

Moo: But even more startling is Peter’s use of the language about Christians ‘*participating*’ in *the divine nature* and so escaping *the corruption that is in the world*. For these ideas were characteristic of certain mystical traditions in the Greek world which preached the need for human beings to become ‘divine’ in order to avoid the contagion of the material world (note the similarity to the teachings of some contemporary Eastern religions)... What are we to make of such language? ... A good communicator knows his audience and puts the message in a way that fits that audience. This is exactly what Peter is doing. We can surmise that his readers were in the habit of using such terms or that the false teachers were using this language to make their points. So Peter accommodates himself to his audience, adopting their way of speaking so that he can communicate to them more effectively... We suspect that the frequency of the word ‘knowledge’ in 2 Peter owes something to the fact that Peter knew it was being used a lot by his readers. So he picks up their term—but fills it with Christian content. Similarly, *participating in the divine nature* will not mean the merging of one’s personality into the person of the Godhead. Put in its Christian context and worldview, it is a vivid way of reminding believers that they have the Holy Spirit residing in their hearts and that they can therefore begin to manifest some of those qualities that are characteristic of God Himself: holiness, love, compassion, godliness.

Moo: Peter does not say that we *have* a divine nature; he says that we *participate* in the divine nature. (The Greek here, in fact, uses a noun rather than a verb: we are ‘participants’ ‘sharers in’—*koinonoi*—the divine nature.) In other words, there is some sense in which Christians experience a quality or qualities that God has—but there are certainly many qualities of God that we do not share! Just what these shared qualities might be is not completely clear from the context. Some commentators think that Peter may have in mind God’s immortality, arguing that this is what Peter means when he goes on to say that Christians *escape the corruption in the world*. Christians, by virtue of their union with Christ, are assured that their bodies will be raised and that they will live forever in these incorruptible bodies. Other commentators think that participating in the divine nature means that Christians share in God’s own holy character. *Escaping the corruption of the world* will refer, then, to the need for Christians to separate themselves from the moral corruption that is so much a part of our fallen world. Context favors this second meaning: Peter is talking here about growth in holiness rather than about eschatological deliverance. But, whichever meaning Peter intends, he clearly does not say that we possess ‘the divine nature’ in its totality and are therefore sinless.

MacArthur: The Lord bestows all these *so that* believers *may become* full *partakers of the divine nature*. First, *may become* is not intended to present merely a future possibility, but a present certainty. The verb builds on all Peter has written. He has said that in salvation saints are called effectually by God through the true knowledge of the glory and excellence of Christ, and thus they receive everything related to life and godliness, as well as priceless spiritual promises. It is because of all that that believers *may become*, here and now, possessors of God’s own eternal life. *Partakers* (*koinōnos*) is often translated ‘fellowship,’ and means ‘sharer’ or ‘partner.’ Believers are in this life partners in the very life that belongs to God... It is noteworthy that Peter borrows from the terminology of mystical, pantheistic religion that called for its adherents

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to recognize the divine nature within them and lose themselves in the essence of the gods. Ancient false teachers (the Gnostics) and more recent ones (Eastern mystics and New Age gurus of all sorts) have often emphasized the importance of personally attaining transcendent knowledge. The apostle Peter, however, stressed to his readers the need to recognize that only by being spiritual born anew (Jn. 3:3; James 1:18; 1 Pe. 1:23) can anyone attain true divine knowledge, live righteously as God's children (Rom. 8:11-15; Gal. 2:20), and thereby share in God's nature (cp. 2 Cor. 5:17). The false prophets of Peter's day believed that transcendent knowledge elevated people above any need for morality. But Peter countered that notion by asserting that genuine knowledge of God through Christ gives believers all they need to live godly lives (cp. 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Sproul: Second Peter 1:4 was greatly misunderstood in the Patristic period of church history. Many of the early theologians believed that Peter was teaching that what happens to us in our salvation ultimately is deification, that salvation makes us like God, and that the temptation by the Serpent in Eden is fulfilled in our redemption. However, we are creatures now, and we will always be creatures. We will never be gods, because even God cannot make another god. Any god that God could make would, by definition, have a beginning and would therefore be finite, dependent upon the one eternal God for its very existence. God cannot transfer deity to a creature.... When Peter says that we are partakers of the divine nature, he is saying that if we are in Christ, then God the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us. Insofar as we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we participate or partake. We do not become divine, but we partake of the presence of God in our very souls.

c) *Divine Passions (1:4c)*

...having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

[DSB Note: the name of this outline level—'Divine Passions'—is a contrast to what we have escaped from through the grace of God.]

Gardner: It is worth saying here that Greeks would have seen escape from evil and corruption in terms of escaping from the material world into some spiritual realm. Peter makes it clear that corruption in this world is caused by man's sinful desires. Christ has made it possible to escape evil and still live in and be part of this world.

Moo: The Bible makes clear that our ultimate separation from *corruption (phthora)* will only come with the resurrection of the body. Peter uses the word in this eschatological sense in 2:10; and this may be what he means by the phrase *escape the corruption in the word*. But the reference to *evil desires* at the end of the verse, along with Peter's focus on godliness in this passage, suggests rather that escaping corruption has to do with the renouncing of sin in this life. Note that the Peter also uses *phthora* with this moral sense (2:20). I think, then, that Peter sees our participation in the divine nature as consisting especially in the new ability to resist sin through our union with Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit.

MacArthur: From what they do partake in, Peter turns to what believers do not partake in, *the corruption that is in the world by lust*. Those who share the eternal life of God and Christ have completely *escaped* the effects of sin. *Corruption (phthora)* denotes an organism decomposing or rotting, and its accompanying stench. The world's oral decomposition is driven by sinful *lust (epithumia)*, 'evil desire' (1 In. 2:16; cp. Eph. 2:3; 4:22). *Having escaped* depicts a successful flight from danger, in this case the effects of one's fallen nature, the sinfulness of the decaying world, and its final destruction. At glorification, believers will be redeemed completely so that

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they possess eternal life in perfect holiness in a new heaven and new earth where no sin or corruption will ever exist.

Helm: Indeed, according to verse 4 it is by [God's promises] that we escape the tug of *the corruption that is in the world*. One can almost envision men, women, and children being pulled loose from the muck of this world and ascending to Heaven's skies solely by holding fast to the strong cord of God's Word. If we need rescuing from this world, that will require holding ever more tightly to the *very great promises* of God.

3. Summary

Gardner: These introductory verses have not been easy to follow. Peter uses a vocabulary that is both based in the Old Testament and yet adapted for his Greek audience, but the wonderful and thoroughly optimistic message rings through loudly into our age. Christ is so very gracious that He has not just saved us and let us get on with life on our own. In His divine power he had given us all that we need to live a life worthy of Him. He has done this for us as we have come to faith, and to a knowledge of Him. He has called us by His own glory and goodness and is even allowing us to participate in the divine nature as He shares various attributes with us including His glory, immortality, and holiness.

Gardner: As we are tempted sometimes to despair of the evil around us, of our human frailty and ability to sin all too easily, let us remember that our salvation and knowledge of the Lord are entirely of grace. We do not have to strive by our own effort to remain within the love of God, for He has supplied all that we need to live the life He wants of us. When we worry about our future or about what is in store for us, let us remember that Christ's divine power is carrying us forward to the time when we shall escape this world of sin and when the foretaste of the glory and goodness of Christ that we have now will be experienced in all its fullness.

B. Pursuit of Godliness (2 Peter 1:5-9)

Helm: If making a commitment to faith in Christ is what establishes our relationship to God, Peter moves on in verses 5-9 to remind us that continuing in faith, or growing in faith, is what provides 'entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ' (v. 11).

1. The Responsibility (1:5-7)

⁵For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

a) Pursuit (1:5a)

⁵For this very reason, make every effort to supplement...

(1) Reason

Gardner: It is *for this very reason* that we are not expected to lead effective and productive lives. There is always an appropriate response to someone when given a precious gift.... God and Jesus, our Savior, have done so much for us that we long to be able to respond appropriately. But how? What could we ever bring to God that He would ever need? Nothing, of course. Yet in His love and grace God has actually told us how He wants us to respond to His grace and love.

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It is summed up in the two great summary commands that Jesus gave us (Mk. 12:30-31)... Peter is saying that, given Christ's extraordinary love for us in calling us to Himself and allowing us to share in the divine nature, given His wonderful promises, it is *for this very reason* that we should develop personal qualities that will reflect the response that Jesus desires. Clearly it is significant that the list ends with the word 'love' in verse 7. That is the climax and summary of all the other qualities mentioned.

Moo: In verse 3-4, Peter has laid the groundwork for his main sermon point by reminding his readers that God has provided Christians with the power to live godly lives. In verses 5-9 he gives us that key point itself: *Christian need to live godly lives*. And, just in case we might miss the connection between these two sections, Peter spells it out for us: it is *for this reason*—that is—God's provision of all that we need—that we are to seek spiritual maturity.

MacArthur: Because of all the 'precious and magnificent promises' (v. 4), God has given believers and because they have received 'everything pertaining to life and godliness' (v. 3), *for this very reason* they must respond with maximum effort toward living for Christ.

(2) Effort

Gardner: Perhaps after Peter's rehearsing of God's gracious activity in our lives it is strange to hear him say *make every effort*. But this is indeed what he says. Christians are to lead, first, and effective and productive life and, secondly, they are to do this with effort and eagerness. We need to understand, here, that Peter is not going back on his emphasis on grace, but rather he has moved to talking of our response to Christ's grace. What Christians should now do as they seek to love God and their neighbor is to lead effective and productive lives (v. 8), and this is a matter of growth in our spiritual lives. It is interesting how important this concept is for Peter in this epistle. He uses the verb form of the same Greek word for 'effort' in 1:10 and 1:15, and summarizes his epistle in 3:14 by saying: 'So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with Him.' It is only through growing spiritually and responding to Christ more and more as we should that we will be able to stand against false teachers and the temptations of sin.

Moo: Peter uses strong language to emphasize just how strenuously we need to pursue this goal. *Make every effort*, he says. The word *effort* can also be translated 'eagerness,' 'haste,' 'zeal.' Peter is found of this word, using it again in 1:10, 15, and 3:14. The last verse is especially interesting, for it repeats the basic exhortation that we have here and thus serves to 'round off' the letter.... Peter's point is clear: spiritual growth is not a matter that Christians can treat lightly; it is a goal to which we need to give ourselves body and soul, every day of our lives.

God, through Christ, granted believers perfect and complete salvation; yet, paradoxically, He requires that the work it out by *applying all diligence* (Phil. 2:12-13; cp. Col. 1:28-29). *Applying* (*pareispherō*) means 'to bring in,' or 'to supply besides' and implies making a strong effort to provide something necessary.... Believers must carry out that effort with *all diligence* (*spoudē*, 'zeal and eagerness'), accompanied by a sense of urgency (cp. 2 Cor. 8:7).

Sproul: Because of what God has done for us, we ought to be *giving all diligence*. Before important decisions are made or property is exchanged in the business world, it is incumbent upon those in positions of authority to do what is commonly called 'due diligence.' To give due diligence is to pay close attention to the matter at hand. Peter uses that word to call us to a posture of diligence as we look into the things of God. Our approach to learning of God is not to

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be done in a frivolous, capricious, or cavalier manner. With earnest application, careful study, and inquiry, we are to apply ourselves diligently in every word that has proceeded from God's mouth.

b) Of Godliness (1:5b-7)

to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

Gardner: We must become, with God's help, the people we *are*. We are God's people and so we must behave as God's people. As Peter puts in in 1 Peter 2:9: 'You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.' That much is fact. It is not dependent upon our behavior but upon God's grace and the salvation of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, our response is to seek to be the people we now are, hence Peter also says in 1 Peter 1:15: 'Just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.' There is not an immediately obvious progression here in the qualities Peter lists and perhaps we should not look for one. However, it is probably significant that he starts with *faith* and of course summarizes it all with the final word *love*.

Moo: Rather than summarizing this goal in a single word, Peter choose to describe it as a series of ascending steps. Verses 5b-7 describe, like the steps in a staircase, eight Christian virtues that must be added, one to the other, so we move upward in our pursuit of spiritual maturity. Some commentators and especially popular writers and speakers, make much of the sequence of the steps here—as if we must make sure to add these virtues exactly in the order that Peter sets them forth. But this reading of the passage, while superficially convincing, fails to take account of the literary form that Peter is using.... New Testament authors similarly adapt various genres and forms from their culture as they communicate the good news of Jesus Christ in their day and age. One of the forms they use is called the *sorites*. This form links virtues or vices together in a series. A good example comes from Romans 5:3-4.... What is important for us to understand about the *sorites* is that the ancient writer did not always intend the order in which he put the vices or virtues to be the actual order in which they must always occur.... Once we recognize, then, this 'form' in verses 5-7, we will be reluctant to insist that the order of virtues in Peter's list must correspond to the order in which we are to produce them. Peter knows that all of them are important and that entrance into God's kingdom requires that we be exhibiting these qualities 'in increasing measure.' ... Having said this, however, it is significant that Peter begins where he does (with *faith*) and ends where he does (with *love*).

MacArthur: The word rendered *supply* (*epichorēgeō*) derives from the term meaning 'choirmaster.' In ancient choral groups, the choirmaster was responsible for supplying everything needed for his group, and thus the term for choirmaster came to refer to a supplier.

Sproul: Expanding on this diligence, Peter gives us a long list of things that we are to seek diligently. As we look at the list, we cannot help but notice the similarity to lists set forth by the Apostle Paul, most notably the list we call the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal. 5:22-23). The virtues that follow upon faith are to be manifest in the Christian life. They define for us the very essence of righteousness and true spirituality.

Helm: [Verses 5-7] are commonly referred to as a list of virtues. In reality they are much more, for when things are merely placed in a list, each item stands independently, each has an identity on its own. Here, however, each characteristic is connected to what follows. In fact, the

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repetition of each word demonstrates that Peter intends us to view them as inseparably linked to one another. In light of this, even the sequence in which they appear matters. To put an image on it, we could liken verse 5-8 to a golden chain or to stairs that lead one to the stars. Each stair or characteristic is built upon the strength of the previous one. Put differently, they form a ladder that leads us from our earthly faith in Christ to everlasting life.

(1) Faith (1:5b)

Gardner: *Faith* here is the gift from God mentioned in verse 1 that allows us to trust in Christ and be committed to Him.

Moo: *Faith*, of course, is the foundational Christian virtue (or, better, gift; see v. 1); with it we respond to God's call and come to know Him and His Son, the Lord Jesus (v. 3). But true Christian faith, as James especially reminds us (James 2:14-26) always leads further.

MacArthur: Saving *faith* is the ground in which the fruit of Christian sanctification. But that faith battles the flesh and will not produce a firm sense of assurance unless saints pursue sanctification.

Helm: It's a mistake to think that salvation by *faith* alone means that one's faith never needs work. True faith sweats. It grows.... The kind of faith that takes fallen men and women home to Heaven is one that operates by way of addition,

(2) Virtue (1:5c)

Gardner: We have already seen that *goodness* is one of the attributes of Jesus (v. 3), and this whole process of growth is to become more and more Christ-like, to become what we are: sharers in the divine nature. We should live lives that are morally upright. How often Christians are rightly criticized by those around them for being no better than anyone else. Our goodness should make us stand out from the crowd!

Moo: Consequently, Peter calls on us to add *goodness* to our basic response to God's work. *Goodness* (*aretē*) is the same word Peter used at the end of verse 3 to describe God's quality of moral excellence. Peter here borrows again from the wide Greek world, where the word meant, broadly, 'virtue,' (the word occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in Phil. 4:8 and 1 Pe. 2:9).

MacArthur: The first virtue, *moral excellence* (*aretē*), uses the distinctive word in classical Greek for virtue. It was such a lofty term that it was used for moral heroism, viewed as the divinely endowed ability to excel in heroic, courageous deeds. It came to encompass the most outstanding quality in someone's life, or the proper and excellent fulfillment of a task or duty (cp. Phil. 4:8). *Aretē* never meant cloistered virtue, but that which is demonstrated in the normal course of living.

Helm: To our faith we add *virtue*. The Greek word translated 'virtue' has a rich and storied history. Plato and Aristotle both made use of it.... Assuming that Peter is using the word in the classical sense, living a virtuous life means living a life that is worthy of praise. In essence, virtue is closely linked to that which is honorable. It means doing the right thing regardless of the outcome. The virtuous person is brave and generous and acts appropriately to all.

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(3) Knowledge (1:5d)

Gardner: This *knowledge* is not the same as that spoken of in verses 2 and 3. Here it has to do with the Christian's development of an understanding and discerning mind: one that will see what is good and God-honoring and one which can discern evil and sin and so avoid it.

Moo: The third term in Peter's list is likewise a general one. *Knowledge* can apply to almost any area of life. Here, obviously, it has a religious application. Since it comes in the middle of this list rather than at its beginning, it probably does not refer to that basic, intimate knowledge of God that defines who we are in Christ (cp. vv. 2 and 3). Here, it most likely refers specifically to the ability to discern God's will and orient one's life in accordance with that will. (It is worth noting that the Greek word for *knowledge* here is *gnōsis*, whereas Peter has used the compound form *epignōsis* in vv. 2 and 3. While not clearly the case everywhere in the New Testament, Peter probably sees a distinction between them.)

MacArthur: At the heart of moral excellence is *knowledge*. *Knowledge* refers to the divine truth that is the foundation of spiritual discernment and wisdom, the truth properly understood and applied. This virtue is related to illumination, which is having one's mind accurately enlightened about the truth of Scripture and involves diligent study and meditation on it, so as to acquire 'the mind of Christ' (1 Cor. 2:16).

Helm: To virtue we are to add *knowledge*. Interestingly, these two characteristics are often linked together.... 'Knowledge is virtue.' The premise beneath this kind of thinking is clear: if a man or woman *knows* the right thing, he or she will *do* the right thing. Of course, this might be true. But as our experience proves, it is not always the case. Knowledge does not always lead to virtue. Thus Peter's order is preferred. Knowledge must be added to virtue, and a fully orbited virtue rests on faith in Christ.... Peter couldn't make himself any clearer. If we are going to finish this life well, we must know God. To faith in Christ, let us add a praiseworthy life. To that let us add knowledge. We must get to work on knowing God. This is the pathway that leads us home.

(4) Self-Control (1:6a)

Gardner: To the modern ear it may seem strange just how much attention is paid to *self-control* in the New Testament.... Not to be self-controlled is to follow the path of sin and one that false teachers all too readily hold before us, yet to be self-controlled is to open up one's life to Christian growth and joy, a right use of time and a life that brings glory to God.

Moo: *Self-control* comes next in Peter's list of Christian virtues. Greek philosophers prized *self-control*, viewing it as the ability of the human being to act entirely of one's own free will without being subject to the whims and pressures of other people, competing philosophies, or one's own emotions. Peter and the other New Testament writers who use this term (see also Acts 24:25; Gal. 5:23) do not, of course, use the word in this philosophic sense. For them, *self-control*, an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23), enables believers to avoid falling prey to the temptations—especially sexual—that are so unavoidable in the world we live in.

MacArthur: Flowing from knowledge is a third virtue, *self-control* (*egkrateia*), which literally means 'holding oneself in' (cp. Gal. 5:23). It was used of athletes who sought self-discipline and self-restraint, even beating their bodies into submission (cp. 1 Cor. 9:27). They would also abstain from rich foods, wine, and sexual activity in order to focus all their strength and attention on their training regimen. False theology (such as that propounded by the heretics of Peter's day

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and discussed in chapters 2 and 3) inevitably divorces faith from conduct because it cannot deliver the soul from sin's harmful effects and forces its followers to battle for self-control on their own and indulge their lusts.

Helm: To knowledge Peter adds the term *self-control*.... Peter is saying to those learning to follow Christ, 'Begin to control yourself. Say no to ungodly passions. Grow up. Get on your feet; pick up your faith; do what is right; increase in your knowledge of God; for your own salvation's sake, begin to control yourself.'

(5) Steadfastness (1:6b)

Gardner: *Perseverance* has to do with remaining faithful in difficult times, withstanding temptation, and continuing on with the Lord. Again, we need to remember that we do not persevere on our own. The Lord who began a work in us will carry it on to completion until the Day of Christ (Phil, 1:6). Indeed, the doctrine of the *perseverance of the saints* is one of the most marvelous doctrines of grace and the clearest of evidences that salvation and even day to day life are a matter of God's grace. However, again we are to work at this wonderful truth as we put it into practice.... Perseverance therefore asks that we trust in God and rely entirely on Him at such times. It involves a total practical commitment to the sovereignty of our Lord and Savior in our lives even when we are suffering. We are to carry on in our faith to the very end, recognizing that 'the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials' (2:9).

Moo: But just as constant as the enticement of sinful pleasures is the sorrow of afflictions of all kinds. And if *self-control* helps the believer battle the former, so *endurance*, the next virtue in Peter's list, help us to handle the latter. *Endurance* is the ability to 'bear up under' (the Greek word, *hypomone*, comes from two Greek words, 'under' and 'remain'). The New Testament frequently uses this word to describe the Christian's ability to remain steadfast in his or her faith in times of trial (see Rom. 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 1:6; 6:4; 2 Th. 1:4; James 1:3-4; 5:11; 1 Pe. 1:6).

MacArthur: A fourth essential virtue to pursue is *perseverance*, which connotes patience and endurance in doing what is right—resisting temptations and enduring in the midst of trials and difficulties. *Perseverance* (*hupomonē*) is a difficult term to express with one English word. Uncommon in classical Greek, the New Testament uses the word frequently to refer to remaining strong in unwelcome toil and hardship (cp. Rom. 5:3-4; 12:2; 2 Cor. 1:6; 2 Th. 1:4; James 1:12; 1 Pe. 2:20; Rev. 2:2-3), the kind that can make life extremely difficult, painful, grievous, and shocking—even to the point of death.... *Hupomonē* does not simply accept and endure; there is always a forward look to it. It is said of Jesus...that for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the Cross, despising the shame (Heb. 12:2). That is *hupomonē*, Christian steadfastness. It is the courageous acceptance of everything that life can do to us and the transmuting of even the worst event into another step on the upward way.

Helm: To self-control we must add *steadfastness*. The word is almost synonymous with strength and longevity. It means that as we begin to control our passions, we need the next step by walking in that way for a long time.

(6) Godliness (1:6c)

Gardner: In many ways, [*godliness*] is another all-embracing virtue. Godliness involves faith and self-control, knowledge and goodness, and so on.

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Moo: *Godliness* was singled out by Peter in verse 3, along with ‘life,’ as that goal to which the believer’s knowledge of God should lead. We should not be surprised, then, to find the term reappearing here at the end of verse 6 as the sixth of those virtues that Christians are to be striving to exemplify. While God gives us the ability to become godly, it is our responsibility to use the power He has made available to us and actually work at becoming people who please God in every phase of life.

MacArthur: At the heart of spiritual pursuit is a fifth virtue, *godliness*, from a term (*eusebeia*) meaning reverence for God... It could also be translated ‘true religion’ or ‘true worship’ and conveys the idea that one who has it properly honors and adores God. In Greek thought *eusebeia* encompassed all the rituals related to worship and loyalty given to the pagan gods—respect toward all that is divine. The early Christians sanctified the Greek definitions of the word and directed them at the one true God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To steadfastness we must add *godliness*... For Peter, the term *godliness* was explicitly defined in his first letter. There he wrote, ‘Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation’ (2:12). Following this, he went on to describe what this looks like using three words. *Godliness* was *submission* to authority (2:13, 18; 3:1), a willingness to embrace *suffering* (2:20; 3:14; 4:1, 19), and *service* (4:1-11). Therefore, when Peter joins *godliness* to steadfastness, he is calling us to the exalted plane of a Christlike life.

(7) Brotherly Affection (1:7a)

Gardner: As Peter nears the end of his list he talks of *brotherly kindness*. *Philadelphia* is the word used here, though I doubt the city of that name offers a particularly good example of what Peter means here! This sort of Christian love is specially aimed at the Christian community, our brothers and sisters in the Lord (cp. Rom. 12:10; 1 Th. 4:9-10; 1 Pe. 1:22; 3:8)... When people see this sort of brotherly love in action, it is most attractive. People are deeply drawn to a community where they see others truly caring for each other and loving each other. In an age of alienation, lack of love, and loneliness, this can be one of the most attractive virtues of the Christian community, but it starts with us as individuals.

Moo: The first word he uses [meaning ‘love’] is *philadelphia*, ‘love of the brother,’ or, as NIV renders it, *brotherly kindness*. In distinction from the second word, the familiar *agape*, *philadelphia* probably refers to love expressed among fellow Christians.

MacArthur: Flowing out of the vertical reverence for God in every area of life is the horizontal virtue of *brotherly kindness*. The companion of affection for God is affection for others.

Helm: To *godliness* we must add *brotherly affection*. Peter was the recipient of Jesus’ brotherly affection that morning on the beach after the resurrection... We are now called to do the same thing. When a brother or sister in Christ fails us, will we run in the opposite direction when they seek restoration? Will we determine to hold on to the hurt in case we need it later as leverage over them? Or will we exhibit the mark of brotherly affection?

(8) Love (1:7b)

Gardner: Peter ends his list with *love*. This word, which Christ chose to summarize the whole law, calls upon us, heart, mind, soul, and body, to set our affections on God the Father, Son, and

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Holy Spirit.... Love is part of the divine nature (1 Jn. 4:16). It is therefore the ultimate ‘mark’ of a Christian.

Moo: *Agapē*, then is a completely different *love*, but embraces ‘love of the brethren’ as one sphere of Christian love in its fullest scope—that Spirit-given act of the will by which we treat other people with active benevolence. Surely it is not by chance that love, the crown of Christian virtues (see 1 Cor. 13) comes at the climax of Peter’s staircase of Christian qualities.... Love is not only the last and greatest Christian virtue; it is also the ‘glue’ that holds all the rest of them together, the quality without which all the others would be less than they should be.

MacArthur: The saints’ pursuit of devotion to one another flows from the highest virtue of all—*love*. For believers, *love* for others (especially fellow believers) has always been inseparable from love for God. This is the familiar *agape*, the sacrificial, selfless love of the will.

Helm: It comes as no surprise to anyone that the golden chain finishes on the landing of *love*. Here we stand upon the threshold of Heaven. We have arrived at the gate. For God is love. In poetic form Peter has given us the golden chain. The way forward for fallen people—the ascending journey home for any who desire to finish well—has been written down.

2. The Result (1:8-9)

MacArthur: If Christians are to fully enjoy their assurance as God desires for them, they must consider the two options Peter presents in this passage and choose the positive one rather than the negative.

In these short verses [vv. 5-7], Peter has summarized his ideas on Christian discipleship. This is how to keep from falling. And this is how to remain effective for Christ in this world and the next.

a) Positive (1:8)

⁸*For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

(1) Increasing (1:8a)

⁸*For if these qualities are yours and are increasing...*

Gardner: God calls us to live for Him wherever we are and to bring Him glory as we live for Him day by day in faith, goodness, self-control, godliness, love, etc. In other words, we can bring glory to Him by loving Him in *every* area of our life. To learn increasingly how to live for the Lord and demonstrate the virtues appropriate to people who share the divine nature in any and every circumstance is, Peter says, what will *keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Moo: The way in which Peter begins his list of virtues might suggest that he thinks his readers at this point possess only faith and that they have to add all the others.... No, the issue is not of having them or not having them; the issue is one of growing in the degree to which the Christian exhibits them. We must not be content, Peter suggests, with a B- in *goodness* or *knowledge* or *self-control* or *godliness* or *brotherly kindness* or *love*. We should not be content until we have an A+ in each one. Now this is a goal that I don’t think anyone of us will achieve in this life. But Peter’s point is that we need to be constantly on the way toward this goal, getting closer to it

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all the time. For it is only as we move along in this way that we will be able to avoid being *ineffective and unproductive*.

MacArthur: Positively, Peter calls for pursuing *these qualities* (the preceding list of virtues) and sets forth the result of doing so. The phrase rendered *are yours and are increasing* is a strong expression drawn from two present participles (*huparchonta* and *pleonazonta*). The first denotes owning property in an abiding sense, and the second refers to possessing more than enough, even too much, of something. If the virtues are abundantly present in a believer's life and actually on the increase, that reality will *render* ('make', 'set in order') him as *neither* spiritually *useless nor unfruitful*.

(2) Effective and Productive (1:8b)

...they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Gardner: In other words, effectiveness and productivity in the Christian life are measured by the extent to which we are conformed more and more to the image of Christ Himself, that is, by the extent to which we show forth the truth of our position that we *participate in the divine nature*. For many people this is immensely tough as a challenge and yet wonderfully liberating as well. It allows us to be ourselves with our own personalities and gifts before God, and yet to know how we are to be and to live. *Knowledge*, here in verse 8, again reminds us that we shall never be satisfied as Christians, for we shall always want to have a deeper relationship with our Savior and to 'know' Him better.

Moo: *Ineffective* translates a Greek word used only three other times in the New Testament. Two of these come in Jesus' parable about the workers in the vineyard, where it refers to 'idle' workers (Mt. 20:3, 6)... *Unproductive* means, literally, to be 'without fruit.' One thinks here of Jesus' cursing of the fig tree (representing Israel) for its lack of fruit (Mk. 12:12-14; 20-26 and parallels). Too many Christians are content simply with being Christians, happy simply to know they won't go to hell. But the true Christian never rests content with such a minimal (albeit important!) level of Christian experience. True *knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ* should always spark the unquenchable desire to know Him better and better and to seek to use that knowledge in the service of others. Indeed, as Peter will suggest in this letter, one cannot be a true Christian without showing the effects of one's relationship with Christ in a renewed lifestyle.

MacArthur: *Useless* (*argos*), meaning 'inactive' or 'idle' when employed in the New Testament, always describes something inoperative or unserviceable (cp. Mt. 12:36; 20:3, 6; 1 Tim. 5:14; Titus 1:12; James 2:20). *Unfruitful* (*akarpos*) or 'barren' is sometimes used in connection with unbelief or apostasy. For example, Paul warned against the 'unfruitful deeds of darkness' (Eph. 5:11). Jude described apostates as 'autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted' (Jude 12). Matthew 13:22 and Mark 4:19 use it as they record Jesus' description of superficial believers in the parable of the soils. It can refer even to true believers who are for a time unproductive (Titus 3:14; cp. 1 Cor. 14:14). If Christians pursue the virtues Peter outlined, their lives will be increasingly productive spiritually. But if those qualities are not present, believers are likely to be indistinguishable from the superficial professors Jesus described in His parable. Use of the identifying expression *the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ* demonstrates that Peter is addressing genuine Christians. Real believers to whom God has granted *true saving knowledge* therefore possess the capacity to pursue and fruitfully apply the virtues mentioned. If those virtues are present in one's life, then he has and enjoys this *true knowledge*.

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b) Negative (1:9)

⁹For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

Gardner: Sadly, many Christians are not growing in this way and the contrast of verse 9 is telling indeed.... We all know Christians, and perhaps we are sometimes among that number, who show few or none of these virtues that Peter has listed.... If we show none of these virtues, Peter is quite right to suggest that we must have forgotten that grace. Such a person is *nearsighted and blind*. A *blind* person can readily lose his way and to be *nearsighted* here implies that the person is unable to see what lies at the end of the way. The *nearsighted* person, in the sense that Peter is using the word here, is no doubt one who has lost all sense of the wonderful promises of God that have been mentioned earlier. This person cannot see beyond today and forgets that Christians are moving toward a goal. Not only is he unable to see the way ahead, but he must also have *forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins*.

Moo: Spurious Christians, false teachers, were about. Surely Peter has these people—whom he will describe in great detail in chapter 2—in mind when he warns about the kind of Person who *does not have them* (i.e., the virtues of vv. 5-7). Peter goes on to describe these people as *nearsighted and blind*. This combination of words seems rather strange: if a person is *blind*, how can he or she be *nearsighted*? In the Greek the latter word is a participle (*myopazan*) and could be translated ‘because of shutting one’s eyes’ (cp. REV, ‘willfully blind’). This translation matches very well the final description of this example of a spurious Christian: he has *forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins*.... Many think that *cleansing from sin* refers specifically to baptism. This is possible, since the New Testament presents baptism as related to the forgiveness of sins and as a standard part of coming to Christ. But the Bible is fond of the metaphor of ‘washing’ or ‘cleansing’ as a way of depicting the forgiveness of sins. This is probably all that we have here. As is usual in the Bible, the idea of *forgetting* is not a mental process but a practical failure to take into account the true meaning and significance of something. As Peter will make even more clear in 2:20-22, these fake Christians are people who at least claim to have had their sins forgiven by Christ but who are not now living as if that makes any difference to them. Such is the danger that may await those of his readers who fail to grow in Christian virtues, for these is no standing still in the Christian life—one is either moving ahead or falling behind.

MacArthur: On the other hand, Peter presents a negative option for his readers to avoid. If one who professes faith in Christ fails to pursue virtues and fruitfulness, and thus *lacks these qualities*, he is *blind or short-sighted*, unable to discern his true spiritual condition (cp. Is. 59:10; Rev. 3:17). The believer who is not experiencing an increasing in the virtues will forfeit assurance, *having forgotten his purification from his former sins*. Literally the phrase here means ‘to receive (*lambanō*) forgetfulness (*lēthē*).’ *Purification* translates *katharismos*, from which the English *catharsis* (‘cleansing’) derives. Such a believer’s sin makes him unable to be confident that he was cleansed and rescued from his former life. He cannot be certain if he has been truly saved because he does not see an increase of virtue and usefulness in his life. Once blind before salvation, then made to see, these saints can experience a kind of spiritual blindness again. That kind of spiritual forgetfulness leads to the repeating of old sins, and it robs such Christians of their assurance.

Sproul: I once heard a profess say, ‘The problem with our culture today is that we have a penurious epistemology that tends to be myopic.’ A penurious epistemology is a poverty-

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stricken view of knowledge. It is bankrupt, and it tends to be myopic, which is a more technical term for ‘near-sighted.’ It is precisely the problem of myopia that Peter is addressing here. He who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness. The image of blindness is used repeatedly in the Word of God to describe the natural tendency of those who live in darkness and will not have God in their thoughts.... Many people with 20/20 vision are blind to the things of God. We know they are blind because their lives are barren of the fruit of the Spirit or of the virtues that Peter lists here. However, Peter directs this critique not to pagans but to Christians who can become shortsighted because they forget that they were cleansed from their sins.

C. Practice of Godliness (2 Peter 1:10-11)

1. Be Diligent (1:10a)

¹⁰*Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent...*

Gardner: As Peter nears the end of this sermonette and summary of his teaching, he does what every preacher does towards the end of a sermon, he makes the application explicit. *Therefore*, in other words because of what has been said, it is vital that these Christian *brothers* (men and women) to whom Peter is writing *be all the more eager*... Peter uses the verb form of a word he used back in verse 5. There it was translated ‘make every effort,’ and this again is the thrust of Peter’s message. The Christians in these churches must really work at their Christian faith.

Moo: In the last part of Peter’s mini-sermon, he does what a good preacher should always do: motivate the listener to take action based on the truth shared in the message. Peter therefore builds on the warning he has implicitly stated in verse 9, but now he takes a positive take. *Therefore* may related to the danger of spiritual blindness (v. 9), but more likely it refers back to all of verses 3-9. *Be all the more eager* picks up the basic exhortation in verse 5: *make every effort*. That effort is to be directed to make their *calling and election sure*.

MacArthur: Peter urges believers to select the positive option already stated in verse 8. Reiterating verse 5 (‘applying all diligence’), the apostle commands believers to *be all the more diligent* spiritually, so as to know and enjoy the reality of their eternal salvation. *Be...diligent* (*spoudasate*) is the verb form of the noun *spoudē* (‘diligence’) used in verse 5 and again conveys urgency and eagerness.

Sproul: Peter has called believers to be diligent, industrious, and careful to add virtue to faith, along with perseverance, kindness, and brotherly love, so that they will not be barren or fruitless. Yet he wants believers to be even more diligent about something else. There is an even greater priority, and that is the doctrine of election—not in the abstract but with respect to your own person. The most important question you need answered in your lifetime is this: am I numbered among the elect?

2. Confirm (1:10b-11)

...to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

¹¹*For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

a) Responsibility (1:10b)

...to confirm your calling and election...

2 Peter – Lesson 15

Gardner: Peter is adamant that there can be no ‘arm-chair’ Christians. Rather, we must be *eager to make [our] calling and election sure*. The two words, *calling* and *election*, are closely related and both refer entirely to the gracious work of our sovereign Savior in drawing Christians to Himself. Initially this verse seems almost a contradiction in terms. We noticed this problem back in verse 5 as well. How does our work make certain something that is already certain because of God’s gracious activity on our behalf? ... Peter is not...seeking to undermine a confidence in God’s gracious work in a Christian’s life, much the reverse. True Christians will...be seeking to respond appropriately and from the heart to the grace and love of God. The law is now written on our hearts. Peter is reminding us in very start terms that if we are recipients of God’s grace then we shall be seeking to live the lives expected of the elect.

Moo: *Calling* and *election*, words closely related in the Greek (*klesis* and *ekloge*, respectively), probably work together to emphasize the single concept Peter has in mind: God’s, or Christ’s, effective drawing of the sinner to Himself for salvation (see v. 3). The Christian must earnestly seek to grow in Christian virtue in order to ‘validate’ this calling of God. Some theologians have difficulty with the idea that Christians must work in order to validate their election and to ensure that they will not fall away.... But we must not evaporate Peter’s language of its seriousness and strength. Striving for spiritual maturity is not an option in the Christian life.

MacArthur: To emphasize the right believers have to enjoy assurance, the apostle speaks not of their faith, but God’s sovereign choice. Believers are able *to make certain*—in Hebrews 9:17 the word for *certain* (*bebaios*) is used in the sense of a legal validity or confirmation—God’s *calling and choosing* of them. *To make* (*poiseisthai*) is reflexive, indicating believers are to assure themselves. *Calling and choosing* are inseparable realities indicating God’s effectual call of believers to salvation based on His sovereign election of them in eternity past. Peter’s concern is that believers have confidence and assurance that they are included in the elect. God knows His elect, and His elect should enjoy the knowledge that they are His.

Sproul: If it is true that God is unwilling that any should perish (2 Pe. 3:9), then who needs to worry about election? We do, because Peter is saying that we need to be all the more diligent to make our calling and election sure. Peter’s first epistle was addressed to the elect. In fact, the doctrine of election permeates both of Peter’s epistles. Therefore, we cannot dismiss the doctrine.... What does Peter mean when he says we are to be all the more diligent to make our calling and election sure? Many commentators interpret this text to mean that although God has elected to save certain people, their election is not certain until they respond to the call of God; in other words, unless or until people make such a response, their election is uncertain. We can do nothing to make an eternal decree of God sure. When God chooses to save someone, his or her election is absolutely certain. God does not choose to save people and then let them decide. There would be no election if that were the case.... If God choose to elect someone, that election must come to pass. Nothing in heaven or on earth can frustrate the sovereign will of God.... Obviously, therefore, making our calling and election sure is not making what God has decreed a sure thing. It is sure already. Our diligence can never change something decreed by God. The question is, for whom is calling and election to be made sure? In this world we can never know for sure that we are not elect, because even though we are not in faith at the present moment, we do not know what tomorrow will bring. We do not know that maybe on our deathbed God will bring us to faith and our election will be realized. We cannot know for sure that we are not elect, but we can know for sure that we are elect. So, Peter is talking about assurance of salvation or the assurance of election.

2 Peter – Lesson 15

Reward (1:10c-11)

(1) Present Assurance (1:10c)

...for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Gardner: Ultimately, of course, if a Christian has no desire to follow the life of obedience or to develop his or her life, the moral virtues of which Peter has been speaking, then he or she will *fall*. There is a response required of all who truly know and love the Lord Jesus, and if that response is not seen then ultimate judgment awaits. Of course, theologically, and based upon an understanding of God's grace in the life of a believer, we would be right to say that no one who is truly *called* and *elect* will ever *fall* in this final way. But that is not what Peter is concerned with here. His concern is to ensure that all Christians examine themselves.... Peter is not implying here that Christians can ever be perfect this side of eternity. He is not saying that they will never fail, or that they will always be fully self-controlled or always full of brotherly love, but he is saying that sure and certain Christian life will be working hard at these virtues, continually making use of the divine power given by Christ. Christians cannot do it on their own, but the Spirit within them will be driving all true believers toward the goal of a holy life.

Moo: Peter mentions two reasons why it is important for Christians to *make their calling and election sure*, 'one negative and one positive. Negatively, Christians are to respond in this way so that they *will never fall*. James uses the word translated *fall* here to mean 'sin' (James 2:19; 3:2; NIV translates 'stumble'). But it is unlikely that Peter is suggesting believers may attain the position of never sinning; James himself insists that 'we all stumble in many ways' (3:2). What Peter may mean is that the fruitful Christian will be spared a disastrous coming to grief—that no serious interruptions on the path to glory will occur. This meaning of the term is certainly plausible, since Paul contrasts 'stumbling' with 'falling beyond recovery' in Romans 11:11. But most commentators think that the 'stumbling' here is of a final nature, denoting a fall that prevents one from getting to heaven. They are probably correct. The 'stumbling' here is the opposite of *receiving a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (v. 11) and seems to be the equivalent to the 'falling' that Jude contrasts with being presented faultless before the Lord in the last day (Jude 24).

MacArthur: *As long as* Christians *practice these things*—increasingly pursue the moral virtues essential to holy living—they give evidence to themselves and enjoy assurance that God has granted them eternal life. *Practice* refers to the pattern of daily conduct. If it is in keeping with the moral virtues Peter described, believers *will never stumble* into doubt, despair, or fear, which allows them to confidently enjoy an abundant and productive spiritual life.

Sproul: If you do these things, Peter says—that is, if you are diligent to make your call and election sure—you will never stumble.... Regeneration is *monergistic*, which means that it is not a joint effort between you and God. You cannot cause yourself to be born again. You cannot do anything to help yourself to be born again. Your rebirth is totally dependent upon the sole working of the Holy Spirit, who, in His sovereign and immediate power, raises you from spiritual death. You are utterly, completely passive in that action. However, from that moment until you die, the progress of your Christian life is *synergistic*, which means that it involves a cooperation between you and God (cp. Phil. 2:12-13).... Everything after our rebirth is a cooperative activity.

2 Peter – Lesson 15

(2) Future Entrance (1:11)

¹¹For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Gardner: The kingdom of God in Scripture refers to His rule and dominion. It is both present and future. Christ obviously has dominion and rule even over those who do not belong to Him, for He is their judge and they will stand before Him at the Last Day. He is sovereign even in their affairs. However, the *eternal kingdom*, as Peter refers to it here, has in mind specially that dominion and rule of the Savior which is part of the believer's most marvelous future inheritance. It is a wonderfully *rich* inheritance that will last through eternity for all the children of God.... Peter does not delay on the nature of the inheritance of God's people at this point. He speaks only enough to remind us of where we are going, the joy that awaits us in the future, and therefore, just how important it is that we are the people we should be right now, this side of the eternal kingdom that we await.

Moo: This leads us, then, to the positive reason why Christians are to *make [their] calling and election sure*: to bring a *rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. Jesus proclaimed the presence of the kingdom, a kingdom that, the New Testament makes clear, came into existence through Christ's death and resurrection. Christians now experience the kingdom, or better reign, of God (see Col. 1:13; 2 Th. 1:5). But the New Testament also makes clear that this kingdom has a future aspect to it; we pray, 'Your kingdom come,' because we are dissatisfied with things as they are and long for the day when our sins and trials will be no more (see also 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal 5:21). It is our effusive welcome into this eternal kingdom that should motivate us to move forward in the Christian life.

MacArthur: *In this way*, again referring to the constant pursuit of holiness, the blessings of assurance and perseverance come to believers. As a result, *the entrance into the eternal kingdom of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied* to them. Assurance of one's having entered into *the eternal kingdom* is the experience of the Christian who practices what Peter has listed. That was great encouragement to the apostle's weary readers. No believer needs to live with doubt regarding salvation, but he may have assurance *abundantly supplied* in the present. A rich heavenly reward in the future may also be implied. The Lord will reward His children based on their faithful pursuit of righteousness. Assurance in this life and riches in heaven are the benefits of spiritual diligence and fruitfulness.

Sproul: Peter is saying that if you want to have a fruitful Christian life, if you want to grow in grace, if you want to move forward in your sanctification, then make sure of your election early in your Christian walk. Those who are sure with the sound reasons of assurance are unlike those who are tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. Assurance keeps us from being double-minded people who are up one day and down the next. Those with assurance know that their destiny has been settled from the foundation of the world. Those who argue against election and predestination miss out on the sweetness of these doctrines. To know that your final destination is in God's hands is of great value in the Christian life. The irony is that the more sure you are, the more likely you are to bear fruit in abundance.

3. Summary

Gardner: Peter, regarding his own death as imminent, has given his readers a truly fascinating summary of the gospel he has taught. It gives us a challenging insight into some of what the

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apostles themselves saw as vital to the heart of Christian faith. Peter spends time emphasizing salvation by grace. But he moves on to speak of how the ‘saved’ life is to be lived, and that too is by grace, for Jesus has provided everything needed to live the godly life to which the believer is called. Nevertheless, Christians are not machines. They have specific responsibilities to live out the lives to which they have been called and for which they have been empowered by the divine power, by Jesus and His Holy Spirit.

Gardner: The dangers for all Christian are several and Peter is keen that we do not fall into any of the possible traps. We must never presume upon the grace of God. A virtuous and godly life is essential if we are to be the Christians we claim to be. The danger is that to miss out on such a life and to ignore the growth we ought to see as Christians, may lead to our falling and our condemnation at the last day. But our work here is always in the context of response to God who has so loved us. As we eagerly work for Christ in this context, so we shall be making clear to ourselves, to the world, and before God that our calling and election is sure. We really are the people we think we are!

Gardner: The thrill of what lies ahead of us outweigh any thought of hard work or difficulty in life. How much we should anticipate that wonderful rich welcome that awaits us, a welcome into *the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

For next time: Read 2 Peter 1:12-21.

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Lesson Summary

XV. Confirm Your Calling and Election (2 Peter 1:3-11)

Aim: To confirm our calling and election, i.e., to be sure of our assurance of salvation, through the pursuit of godliness that increasingly grows in fruitfulness and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A. Provision of Godliness (1:3-4)

Peter immediately jumps into a mini-sermon on the theme of growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Through His power, He has provided everything necessary for the Christian to pursue a life of godliness, including the knowledge and promises of God.

1. His Power (1:3)

- Christ's *divine power (dynamis)* has been given to us
- This divine provision concerns *all things pertain to life and godliness (eusebeia, 'true worship,' 'piety')*; this is the realm of sanctification
- Divine procurement makes this power for living possible through true *knowledge (epignōsis) of Him*; *knowledge* refers to an intimate and informed relationship
- He has *called us* – refers to God's effective call unto conversion
- *To His own glory (doxa) and excellence (aretē, 'virtue,' 'moral excellence')*; Christ's active and passive obedience made our salvation possible

2. His Promises (1:4)

- Through Christ's glory and excellence, *He has granted to us His precious and very great promises*; promises include all those of the OT (e.g., salvation) & glory to come
- We become *partakers (koinōnos) of the divine (theios) nature*; language from Greek philosophy; we do not become divine, we share in His communicable attributes and have the ability to pursue godliness (see vv. 5-7)
- We have *escaped from the corruption (phthora) that is in the world because of sinful desire (epithumia)*

B. Pursuit of Godliness (1:5-9)

Because God has provided everything we need to live godly lives (His sovereignty), we are to eagerly pursue godliness (human responsibility). Peter gives us a list of eight Christian virtues to pursue; if we are increasing in them, it is an effective sign of growth in Christian maturity and provides us assurance that we will never fall or become blind to our spiritual need.

1. The Responsibility (1:5-7)

- Faith: the starting point; saving faith is a gift of God; our belief can grow
- Virtue: 'goodness,' 'moral excellence' (*aretē*); same word in v. 3
- Knowledge: *gnosis*; ability to discern God's will; discerning mind
- Self-Control: *egkrateia*; ability to avoid falling prey to temptation
- Steadfastness: 'perseverance, 'endurance' (*hupomonē*); especially during suffering
- Godliness: *eusebeia*, cp. v. 3; refers to living a Christlike life
- Brotherly Affection: *philadelphia*; love within the Christian community
- Love: *agape*; the sacrificial, selfless love of the will

2. The Result (1:8-9)

- Positive: demonstrating an *increasing* growth in these virtues means that you will be effective and productive (fruitful) in *in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*

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- We will not be *ineffective* (*argos*), meaning ‘inactive’ or ‘idle’ or *Unfruitful* (*akarpōs*), i.e., ‘unproductive’ or ‘barren’
- Negative: if we lack these qualities, we are *nearsighted* and *blind* (*myopazōn*), we have forgotten (*lēthē*) our cleansing (*katharismos*) from sin

C. Practice of Godliness (1:10-11)

We are not only to be diligent in pursuing these Christian virtues and increasing in them, but we are to be diligent in confirming our calling and election, i.e., to ensure our assurance of salvation. Growth in Christian virtue is a sure sign that we will not fall short of glory but be warmly received into our heavenly inheritance in the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ.

1. Be Diligent (1:10a)

- *Be all the more diligent*; we are to be even more eager to work on our assurance

2. Confirm (1:10b-11)

- *Confirm your calling* (*klesis*) *and election* (*eklogē*); God has assured our election we cannot make it any more sure; but we are not doing this to assist God, but to assure ourselves that we are elect; the doctrine of election gives us assurance (cp. Phil. 2:12-13)
- If we pursue the qualities of godliness and are increasing in them, that is a sure sign of our calling and election; *you will never fall* (cp. Jude 24)
- Practicing and growing in godliness will ensure *there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*

Immediately after his introductory greeting, Peter launches into a three-part mini-sermon describing the Christian life informed by the knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:3-11). Peter’s first point (vv. 3-4) is that through His power, God has provided everything necessary for the Christian to pursue a life of godliness, including the knowledge and promises of God. He has called us to conversion, revealed to us a true and intimate knowledge of Him, and given us great and precious promises, that enable us to escape the corruption of our former sinful and lustful lives and begin participants/partakers in the divine attributes of Christ.

Peter’s second point (vv. 5-9) is that having been enabled by God’s power to live godly lives, we are to therefore make every effort to in fact pursue godliness. Peter gives a list of eight Christian virtues, a staircase of Christian living that metaphorically extends up to and grants us access to heaven. To faith, we are to add virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. If we demonstrate growth and maturity in these areas, we will be effective and productive in the Christian life. Failure to practice these virtues is shortsighted and leads to blindness, effectively forgetting our cleansing from sin.

Peter closes his exhortation to practice godliness by being even more eager and diligent to confirm our calling and election. This does not mean that God needs help to complete His electing grace; indeed, His eternal decrees are absolute and inviolable. Rather, this is a call to add human responsibility to divine sovereignty (cp. Phil. 2:12-13). God does not need our confirmation, but *we* do. We need assurance of His mighty salvation; and therefore we must not only pursue godliness, we must practice it. If we do so we will have the assurance that we will never fall (cp. Jude 24); rather, we will be warmly welcomed into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.