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1 Peter

2 Peter & Jude

THE MACARTHUR
NEW TESTAMENT
COMMENTARY

1 PETER

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The Elements of Election (1 Peter 1:1–2)

1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. (1:1–2)

Even though it is the starting point of redemptive history, it may seem startling to begin an epistle with reference to the doctrine of election, yet that is exactly what the apostle Peter does (cf. Eph. 1:1–5 and Titus 1:1–2, where Paul begins the same way). And he does so unhesitatingly, after the opening identifications, with the phrase **who are chosen** (v. 1). He thus opens his letter by writing of one of the most controversial and hated doctrines and doing so with no self-consciousness, no apology, no effort to palliate, and no explanation of or deferral to opposing arguments. He states this truth of sovereign election for what it is, a reality recognized and believed among the apostles and in the church. Still, today this unquestionably true doctrine is questioned by many and despised by many others. Arthur W. Pink, the British-born Bible teacher and prolific theological writer who died in 1952, wrote this about

people's views of God's sovereignty and, by implication, the subsidiary doctrine of divine election:

We are well aware that what we have written is in open opposition to much of the teaching that is current both in religious literature and in the representative pulpits of the land. We freely grant that the postulate of God's Sovereignty with all its corollaries is at direct variance with the opinions and thoughts of the natural man, but the truth is, the natural man is quite *unable* to think upon these matters: he is not competent to form a proper estimate of God's character and ways, and it is because of this that God has given us a revelation of *His* mind, and in that revelation He plainly declares, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55: 8, 9). In view of this scripture, it is only to be expected that much of the contents of the Bible *conflicts* with the sentiments of the carnal mind, which is *enmity* against God. Our appeal then is not to the popular beliefs of the day, nor to the creeds of the churches, but to the Law and Testimony of Jehovah. All that we ask for is an impartial and attentive examination of what we have written, and that, made prayerfully in the light of the Lamp of Truth. (*The Sovereignty of God*, rev. ed. [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961], 19; italics in original)

As Pink's still-relevant analysis reveals, it is imperative that Christians fully understand and appreciate this most vital and crucial teaching. Peter unfolds the theological and practical implications of divine election under seven headings: the condition of election, the nature of election, the source of election, the sphere of election, the effect of election, the security of election, and the advantages of election.

THE CONDITION OF ELECTION

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, (1:1a)

Peter, the inspired author, identifies himself as **an apostle of Jesus Christ**. Other New Testament verses also identify Peter as an apostle and furthermore, by placing his name at the head of each list of Jesus' apostles (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13), emphasize that he was the leader of the Twelve.

Peter's intention in this first part of his salutation was not only to

identify his readers as to their heavenly origin, as the elect of God, but also in relation to their condition as earthly residents. The apostle describes his readers in their earthly condition as **aliens**. *Parepidēmois* (**aliens**) can denote those who are temporary residents, or who are foreigners or refugees (cf. Gen. 23:4; Ex. 2:22; 22:21; Ps. 119:19; Acts 7:29; Heb. 11:13). The apostle further identifies them as people who were **scattered throughout** various locales. **Scattered** translates *diaspora*, from which root another English term, *dispersion*, derives. Commentaries, theological works, and works on Bible history often transliterate *diaspora* and use it interchangeably with dispersion. In its other two New Testament appearances, *diaspora* is a technical term referring to the dispersing of the Jews throughout the world by the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Both times the word has the definite article (John 7:35; James 1:1). However here Peter does not include the definite article; therefore it is best to interpret the term as a non-technical reference to believers widely distributed geographically.

Though God called Peter to be the **apostle** to the Jews (Gal. 2:7), the absence of the definite article with *diaspora* argues that Peter was not addressing Jews as such in his salutation. Another passage supports that interpretation. In 2:11 he identifies his readers, not racially or nationally, but spiritually: “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.” Thus the apostle addressed not only Jews who were dispersed from their native land, but Gentile believers, both of whom spiritually were **aliens** in the world.

The church is composed of strangers and pilgrims **scattered throughout** the earth, away from their true home in heaven (cf. Phil. 3:20; Heb. 11:13–16; 13:14). Specifically, he was addressing the church in **Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia**, all provinces in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) at the time. **Pontus** was in the far north, and Jewish pilgrims from there were in Jerusalem during the extraordinary events of Pentecost (Acts 2:9). The province was also the home of Aquila (Acts 18:2), the Jew who with his wife Priscilla became Christians in Rome and subsequently ministered with Paul (Acts 18:18). **Galatia** was in central Asia Minor and contained the towns of Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium where Paul ministered several times (Acts 14:1–13; 16:1–5; 18:23). **Cappadocia** was located in the east portion of Asia Minor, north of Cilicia, and is also mentioned in connection with the Acts 2:9 pilgrims. **Asia** included most of western Asia Minor and contained such subdivisions as Mysia, Lydia, Caria, and much of Phrygia. The province was the site of extensive ministry by Paul on his third journey: “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10) and is mentioned twelve other places in Acts. **Bithynia** was located in north-west Asia Minor near the Bosphorus, the strait separating the European

and Asian sections of modern Turkey. This province is mentioned only one other place in the New Testament, when the Holy Spirit, during Paul's second missionary journey, forbade him from entering it (Acts 16:7).

As the geographical areas Peter mentioned in his salutation indicate, this letter had a very wide circulation. No doubt, in each of those areas, churches received and read the letter. For example, there were at least seven churches in Asia Minor (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea) that thirty years later received special revelation from the risen Christ Himself (Rev. 1:11; chaps. 2–3). And there were other notable places in Asia Minor, such as Colossae, that Peter did not even mention. So he was writing to a large number of believers scattered as spiritual aliens throughout a hostile, pagan region.

Peter addressed such a wide audience because the Roman persecution of Christians had swept across the Empire. Believers in every place were going to suffer (cf. Luke 21:12; Phil. 1:29; James 1:1–3). The apostle wanted those believers to remember that, in the midst of potentially great suffering and hardship, they were still the chosen of God, and that as such they could face persecution in triumphant hope (cf. 4:13, 16, 19; Rom. 8:35–39; 2 Tim. 3:11; Heb. 10:34–36).

THE NATURE OF ELECTION

who are chosen (1:1b)

As spiritual aliens, the most important thing for Peter's readers was not their relationship to earth but their relationship to heaven. Describing Abraham's hope, the writer of Hebrews said, "He was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (11:10; cf. vv. 13–16; John 14:1–3; Phil. 3:20).

Understanding that truth, Peter identifies his audience as those **who are chosen** (*eklektos*). The apostle reiterates this concept in 2:9, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Peter's Old Testament allusions in that verse make it plain that he knew God had sovereignly chosen Israel: "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6; cf. 14:2; Pss. 105:43; 135:4).

God's sovereign love also prompted His choice of the church. The apostle Paul told the church at Ephesus, "We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all

things after the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11). He told the Thessalonians, “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13; cf. John 15:16; Rom. 8:29–30; 1 Cor. 1:27; Eph. 1:4–5; 2:10; Col. 3:12; 1 Thess. 1:4; Titus 1:1).

Jesus also did not hesitate to unambiguously and unapologetically teach the truth of election: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44); “I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen” (13:18; cf. Luke 10:20; 18:7; John 17:6, 9). The Lord assumed the truth of divine election in His Olivet Discourse, making indirect reference to it three times: “Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short” (Matt. 24:22; see also vv. 24, 31; Mark 13:20).

God has chosen people out of all the world (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; cf. John 10:16; Acts 15:14) to belong to Him, and the church is that people (cf. Rom. 8:29; Eph. 5:27). Throughout the New Testament this critical truth of election is clearly presented (2:8–9; Matt. 24:22, 24, 31; Luke 18:7; Col. 3:12; Titus 1:1–2; James 2:5). The apostle John repeatedly quotes Jesus saying that the Father gives whomever He chooses to the Son:

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.” They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven?’” Jesus answered and said to them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught of God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. (John 6:37–45)

I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. . . . While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. . . . Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me

where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (17:6, 12, 24)

The chosen are expressions of the Father's love for the Son. All whom the Father gives, the Son receives; and the Son keeps them and raises them to eternal life. In principle, Jesus revealed it to His disciples in the Upper Room: "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you" (John 15:16). John 5:21 says, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes." Luke chronicled God's sovereign election of the church in Pisidian Antioch during Paul's first missionary journey:

Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you [Jews] first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth.'" When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. (Acts 13:46–49)

Paul wrote clearly the truth that election is completely the result of God's sovereign purpose and grace: "who [the Lord] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" (2 Tim. 1:9). The great apostle further defines this truth in Romans 8:28–30,

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

John further emphasizes the eternality of election at the end of the New Testament when he notes that the Book of Life existed before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8; 17:8; cf. 3:5; 20:12, 15; 21:27). From eternity past, God has had a large body of believers in mind whom He chose to love (1 John 4:10; cf. Rom. 10:20), to save from their sin (Eph. 2:1–5; Col. 2:13), and conform to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 1:7–9; 2 Cor.

3:18; Jude 24–25). And each one of those names, from every nationality and every era of history, God specifically secured in eternal purpose before the world began.

THE SOURCE OF ELECTION

according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, (1:2a)

One popular explanation for election by those who cannot accept God's sovereign choice based on nothing but His own will stems from a faulty understanding of **foreknowledge**. According to that understanding, the term merely means foresight or supernatural knowledge of the future. Proponents say that God in His omniscience looked down the corridors of time and saw who would believe the gospel and who would not. He then chose for salvation all those He knew would choose to believe and guaranteed that they would reach heaven. But there are at least three reasons such an interpretation of **foreknowledge** is unscriptural. First of all, it makes man sovereign in salvation instead of God, though Jesus affirmed His and the Father's sovereignty when He told the disciples, "You did not choose Me but I chose you" (John 15:16; cf. Rom. 9:11–13, 16). Second, it gives man undue credit for his own salvation, allowing him to share the glory that belongs to God alone. The familiar salvation passage, Ephesians 2:8–9, shatters that notion: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the *gift* of God; not as a result of works, so that *no one may boast*" (italics added; cf. 1 Cor. 1:29, 31). Third, it assumes fallen man can seek after God. Romans 3:11, quoting from Psalms 14:1–3 and 53:1–3, clearly states, "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God" (cf. Eph. 2:1). The apostle John accurately defines God's saving initiative this way: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10; cf. Rom. 5:8).

Any sort of man-centered definition of foreknowledge is incompatible with God's absolute sovereignty over all things: "Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'" (Isa. 46:9–10; cf. 14:24, 27; Job 42:1–2; Pss. 115:3; 135:6; Jer. 32:17).

The usage of the Greek word rendered **foreknowledge** in verse 2 also proves it cannot mean simply knowledge of future events and attitudes. *Prognōsis* (**foreknowledge**) refers to God's eternal, predetermined,

loving, and saving intention. In 1:20, Peter used the related verb “was fore-known,” a form of *proginōskō*, in reference to God’s knowledge from eternity past that He would send His Son to redeem sinners. Usage of this verb cannot mean He looked into future history and saw that Jesus would choose to die, so He made Him the Savior. In the same way that God the Father foreknew His plan for Christ’s crucifixion from before the foundation of the world (Acts 2:23; cf. 1 Peter 2:6), He foreknew the elect. In neither case was it a matter of mere prior information about what would happen. Therefore **foreknowledge** involves God’s predetermining to have a relationship with some individuals, based on His eternal plan. It is the divine purpose that brings salvation for sinners to fulfillment, as accomplished by Jesus Christ’s death on the cross, not merely an advance knowledge that observes how people will respond to God’s offer of redemption.

In the Old Testament, “knowing” someone could indicate a sexual relationship (Num. 31:18, 35; Judg. 21:12; cf. Gen. 19:8). Long before Peter articulated the nature of God’s foreknowledge, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘I will do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name’” (Ex. 33:17). Regarding Christ the Servant, Isaiah 49:1–2 declares, “Listen to Me, O islands, and pay attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called Me from the womb; from the body of My mother He named Me. He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; and He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver.” God had a predetermined relationship with the prophet Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5). Amos wrote about God’s foreknowledge of Israel: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2, NKJV). With all of the foregoing references, the point is not simply God’s having information *about* someone, but His establishing an intimate relationship *with* someone. And **foreknowledge** was God establishing that by divine decree before time began.

In accord with the continuity of Scripture, the Old Testament’s understanding of foreknowledge appears again in the Gospels. Jesus, in making clear the true nature of salvation in His Sermon on the Mount, declared this about the pseudo-elect: “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Matt. 7:22–23). Certainly, Jesus knew who such people were, but He never “knew” them in the sense that He had predetermined a saving relationship with them. That sort of relationship is reserved for

His sheep: “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me” (John 10:14; cf. vv. 16, 26–28; 17:9–10, 20–21). Salvation **fore-knowledge**, then, involves God predetermining to know someone by having an intimate, saving relationship, so choosing them from eternity past to receive His redeeming love.

THE SPHERE OF ELECTION

by the sanctifying work of the Spirit (1:2b)

The outworking of God’s choice of the elect made in eternity past begins in time **by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. The sanctifying work** encompasses all that **the Spirit** produces in salvation: faith (Eph. 2:8), repentance (Acts 11:15–18), regeneration (Titus 3:5), and adoption (Rom. 8:16–17). Thus election, the plan of God, becomes a reality in the life of the believer through salvation, the work of God, which the Holy Spirit carries out.

Sanctifying work (*hagiasmō*) refers to separation, consecration, and holiness. First Peter 2:9–10 illustrates the principle: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” At salvation **the sanctifying work of the Spirit** sets believers apart from sin to God, separates them from darkness to light, sets them apart from unbelief to faith, and mercifully separates them from a love of sin and brings them to a love of righteousness (John 3:3–8; Rom. 8:2; 2 Cor. 5:17; cf. 1 Cor. 2:10–16; Eph. 2:1–5; 5:8; Col. 2:13).

Years earlier, at the Jerusalem Council, Peter expressed the same principle:

After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.” (Acts 15:7–9)

The Holy Spirit by faith cleansed the hearts of the Gentile converts. That underscores again that salvation is the Spirit’s work (John 3:3–8; cf. Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Thess. 1:4–6; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 3:5).

Once the Holy Spirit at salvation separates believers from sin, He continues to make them more and more holy (cf. Phil. 1:6) in the life-long, progressive separation process of sanctification (Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 5:23–24; Heb. 12:14; cf. Eph. 4:24, 30; 2 Tim. 4:18). Paul says that God chose believers “that [they] would be holy and blameless before Him” (Eph. 1:4). That begins at salvation and is completed at glorification. The sanctifying process is the working out of God’s elective purpose in the earthly lives of Christians (cf. Rom. 6:22; Gal. 4:6; Phil. 2:12–13; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 12:14).

THE EFFECT OF ELECTION

to obey Jesus Christ (1:2c)

Obedience to Jesus Christ is the effect or by-product of divine election. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” For one **to obey Jesus Christ**, then, is the equivalent of being saved. Paul called it “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5). Believers do not obey perfectly or completely (1 John 1:8–10; cf. Rom. 7:14–25), but nonetheless there is a pattern of obedience in their lives as they through Christ become servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:17–18; cf. Rom. 8:1–2; 2 Cor. 10:5*b*).

Paul was thankful for the believing Thessalonians because he saw in their lives many examples of obedience to Christ.

We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (1 Thess. 1:2–10)

All of those examples—their faith, love, and hope in Christ; their imitation of Paul and the Lord; their exemplary behavior before others; their proclamation of the Word; their turning from idols; their waiting for Christ—demonstrated their genuine regeneration. (John’s first epistle makes an even more extensive case for true salvation resulting in obedience to Christ [2:3–5; 3:6–10, 24; 5:2–3].)

In glorification comes the realization of the purpose of election and of the ultimate work of sanctification, when believers become completely conformed to Christ (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2). Until then, obedience is the effect of election.

THE SECURITY OF ELECTION

and be sprinkled with His blood: (1:2d)

Another profoundly important, practical component of election is security for the believer. That is affirmed in the passage quoted earlier (John 6:37–40), in which Jesus said He would not cast out or lose those who genuinely trust in Him, but raise them all on the final day. God indicates that security in that the elect are **sprinkled with His blood**. Peter’s metaphor here looks back to the time in the Old Testament when blood was sprinkled on the people of Israel. That event is significant enough that the letter to the Hebrews mentions it once specifically and once by allusion (9:19–20; 12:24). The following passage in Exodus describes the remarkable event:

Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!” Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!” So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (24:3–8)

Moses had just returned from Mount Sinai and orally reviewed to the people God’s law received there. As the text says, they responded

very dutifully by pledging to obey all God required. This began the covenant-making agreement between God and His people (cf. Ex. 19:3–20:17). Under the Spirit’s inspiration, Moses recorded all the words of the law just recited. When he finished the next morning, he built an altar at the foot of the mountain to symbolize the sealing of the covenant between God and the people. To represent the entire nation’s involvement, the altar consisted of twelve stacks of stones (pillars), one for each of the twelve tribes. To further provide the people an opportunity to express their determination to obey the Law, Moses offered burnt offerings and peace offerings of young bulls. Moses placed half the blood from the slain sacrificial animals in large basins, and the other half he splashed on God’s altar. Then Moses read for the people the words of the Law he had recorded the previous night and they again pledged their obedience. After that, Moses splattered the people with the remaining blood from the basins, thereby visually and ceremonially making the people’s obedience promise and pledge to God official. Shed blood was a tangible demonstration that two parties had made a binding commitment (cf. Gen. 15:9–18; Jer. 34:18–19). Israel made a promise of obedience to God, mediated through sacrifice. The blood splattered on the altar represented God’s agreement to reveal His law, and the blood sprinkled on the people signified their consent to obey.

The Holy Spirit compares that unique pledge to the inherent covenant in saving faith in Jesus Christ, which entails a similar promise to obey the Word of the Lord. When believers trust in Christ’s atoning sacrifice for them, they are not just accepting the benefit of His death on their behalf. They are also submitting to His sovereign lordship (cf. Matt. 7:24–27; 1 Thess. 1:9; 2:13; James 1:21–23). And Christ’s blood, shed at the cross, acts like a seal to that covenant. In fact, the night before He died, when He instituted the Lord’s Supper, Jesus echoed Moses’ words in Exodus 24:8, “And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins’” (Matt. 26:27–28). Inherent in the New Covenant was the promise that the Lord would come and redeem sinners and they would respond by keeping His Word.

Peter states that when believers were spiritually **sprinkled with Christ’s blood**, they entered into a covenant of obedience. Years earlier, Peter and the other apostles referred to the truth of obedience when they told the Jewish leaders, “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:31–32).

To recapitulate the Old Testament analogy: the blood sprinkled

on God's altar symbolized His commitment to forgiveness (fully realized in the sacrificial death of Christ), and the blood sprinkled on the people symbolized their intention to obey God's law (more fully realized when Christians walk in the Spirit and obey the Word). First John 2:3–6 is unambiguous about this submission:

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

As a coin has two sides, the new covenant has two sides: salvation and obedience. As a result of divine election, God's children are saved from sin and given the desire to obey Him, and He promises to forgive them when they do not do so. The same blood of Jesus Christ that sealed the new covenant keeps on spiritually cleansing the sins of Christians when they disobey (cf. Heb. 7:25; 9:11–15; 10:12–18; 1 John 1:7).

THE ADVANTAGES OF ELECTION

May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. (1:2e)

The salutations of many other New Testament epistles (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:3; Phil. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Rev. 1:4) repeat Peter's wish for his readers. That idea of wishing here derives from the optative mood of the verb *plēthuntheiē*, **may . . . be . . . in the fullest measure**. The apostle wished for his audience God's **grace** and its resultant **peace** (Rom. 5:1) in maximum allotment or quantity. He wished for them all the best that God can offer believers, and that it would repeatedly increase to their advantage.

Peter wanted the recipients of his letter to experience all the rich and varied blessings of being God's elect. Today, however, the tendency is usually to avoid election's profound implications. Christians often justify such an attitude by claiming the doctrine is too deep, too confusing, and too divisive. But believers ought to rejoice over the glorious advantages that an understanding of election provides, and this verse points toward a few of those.

First of all, the doctrine of election is the most humbling truth in all of Scripture. For believers it is most sobering to realize they had absolutely nothing to do with God's choice of them (John 1:12–13; Rom.

9:16). When properly understood, election crushes one's moral and religious pride, which is a blessing because God gives grace to the humble (5:5; Prov. 3:34).

Second, election is a God-exalting, worship-enhancing doctrine because it gives all the glory to Him. Election makes it clear that the sinner's faith, repentance, and ability to obey God come from Him (cf. Ps. 110:3, *KJV*; Eph. 2:8–9). Only God can grant forgiveness to His people when they sin (Prov. 20:9; Mic. 6:7; Eph. 1:7; 1 John 1:7; 3:5). The psalmist declares, "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory because of your lovingkindness, because of Your truth" (Ps. 115:1).

A third advantage of election is that it produces ultimate joy. Those whom God chooses rejoice because they know they would have no hope for salvation apart from His electing grace (John 6:44; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5–6). The elect would ultimately perish forever like all other sinners if God had not chosen them (cf. Rom. 9:29). Psalm 65:4 says in part, "How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near to You to dwell in Your courts." It is a supreme joy for the elect to consider that the Lord has loved them with an everlasting love (cf. Luke 10:20), from before the foundation of the world and on into eternity future.

Fourth, election is advantageous because it promises Christians an eternity of spiritual privileges. The apostle Paul's prayerful expression of praise and gratitude to God, which opens his letter to the Ephesians, is a fitting summary of many of those privileges.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. (Eph. 1:3–14; cf. 1 Peter 2:9–10)

Finally, the doctrine of election is a powerful incentive to holy living. Knowing God has set them apart because of His own special love for them is a most effective motivation for believers to live to the glory of God. That principle was undoubtedly on Paul's mind when he exhorted the Colossians, "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Col. 3:12–13). Their gratitude to God for His election of them should compel believers to a life of obedience and holiness.

If Christians ignore the doctrine of election, they fail to understand the glories of redemption, they fail to honor the sovereignty of God and Christ, and they fail to appreciate the immense spiritual privileges that are theirs. Present-day believers, just as those in Peter's time, need not be ignorant of election, because God wants them to know what His grace has provided, and because every scriptural teaching is cause to offer Him the praise He deserves (cf. Pss. 19:7–9; 119:7, 14–16).

Election is such a powerful truth that when Christians understand it, the practical ramifications of election will transform the way they live their daily lives. Knowing the condition of their election (they reside on earth as spiritual aliens to reach those around them), the nature of their election (it is completely the result of God's sovereign choice), the source of their election (God set His love on them from eternity past), the sphere of their election (it becomes a reality by the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work), the effect of their election (loving obedience to Jesus Christ), the security of their election (the covenant of obedience, which ensures divine forgiveness), and the advantages of their election (the many spiritual blessings and privileges available) produces power in believers' lives that they would otherwise never be able to fully appreciate.

THE MACARTHUR
NEW TESTAMENT
COMMENTARY
2 PETER & JUDE

John MacArthur Jr.

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The Believer's Precious Faith—Part 1: Its Source, Substance, and Sufficiency (2 Peter 1:1–4)

1

Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (1:1–4)

John Murray, one of the foremost Reformed theologians of the twentieth century, wrote the following about the profound and superlative significance of the atonement:

The Father did not spare his own Son. He spared nothing that the dictates of unrelenting rectitude demanded. And it is the undercurrent of the Son's acquiescence that we hear when he says, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). But why? It was in order that eternal and invincible love might find the full realization of its urge and purpose in redemption by price and by power. Of Calvary the spirit is

eternal love and the basis eternal justice. It is the same love manifested in the mystery of Gethsemane's agony and of Calvary's accursed tree that wraps eternal security around the people of God. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Rom. 8:35). "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38, 39). That is the security which a perfect atonement secures and it is the perfection of the atonement that secures it. (*Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955], 78)

Without question, God's redemption of sinners unto eternal life through the atoning work of His Son Jesus Christ is, for all those who believe, God's most precious gift. With salvation's certainty in view, Peter opens his second letter by enriching his readers concerning three great truths about it: its source, its substance, and its sufficiency.

SALVATION'S SOURCE

Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: (1:1)

According to the custom of his day, the apostle opened his epistle with a standard salutation, appropriately identifying himself as the author. **Simon**, the Greek form of the Hebrew "Simeon," the father of one of the twelve tribes of Israel, was a common Jewish name (cf. Matt. 13:55; 26:6; 27:32; Acts 1:13; 8:9; 9:43). **Peter** is from a Greek word that means "rock" (Cephas is its Aramaic equivalent; see John 1:42; 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Gal. 1:18; 2:9, 11, 14). The apostle used both names to ensure that the letter's recipients knew exactly whom it was from.

Identifying himself as a **bond-servant**, Peter humbly and gratefully placed himself in the position of submission, duty, and obedience. Some of the greatest leaders in the history of redemption bore the title *servant* (e.g., *Moses*, Deut. 34:5; Ps. 105:26; Mal. 4:4; *Joshua*, Josh. 24:29; *David*, 2 Sam. 3:18; Ps. 78:70; *all the prophets*, Jer. 44:4; Amos 3:7; *Paul*, Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1; *James*, James 1:1; *Jude*, Jude 1), and it eventually became a designation suitable for every believer (cf. 1 Cor. 7:22; Eph. 6:6; Col. 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:24). In Peter's day, to willingly call oneself a **bond-**

servant (*doulos*, “slave”) was to severely lower oneself in a culture where slaves were considered no better than animals. Whereas that practice may have been demeaning socially, it was honorable spiritually. It was to acknowledge that one was duty bound to obey his master, no matter what the cost. Of the sense in which this is true of Christians, William Barclay explains:

(i) To call the Christian the *doulos* of God means that he is inalienably possessed by God. In the ancient world a master possessed his slaves in the same sense as he possessed his tools. A servant can change his master; but a slave cannot. The Christian inalienably belongs to God.

(ii) To call the Christian the *doulos* of God means that he is unqualifiedly at the disposal of God. In the ancient world the master could do what he liked with his slave. He had the same power over his slave as he had over his inanimate possessions. He had the power of life and death over his slave. The Christian belongs to God, for God to send him where He will, and to do with him what He will. The Christian is the man who has no rights of his own, for all his rights are surrendered to God.

(iii) To call the Christian the *doulos* of God means that the Christian owes an unquestioning obedience to God. Ancient law was such that a master's command was a slave's only law. Even if a slave was told to do something which actually broke the law, he could not protest, for, as far as he was concerned, his master's command was the law. In any situation the Christian has but one question to ask: “Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do?” The command of God is his only law.

(iv) To call the Christian the *doulos* of God means that he must be constantly in the service of God. In the ancient world the slave had literally no time of his own, no holidays, no time off, no working-hours settled by agreement, no leisure. All his time belonged to the master. (*The Letters of James and Peter*, rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976], 345–46; emphasis in the original)

Although Peter viewed himself humbly as a bond-servant, he also represented himself nobly as an **apostle of Jesus Christ**, one officially sent forth by Christ Himself as a divinely commissioned witness of the resurrected Lord, with authority to proclaim His truth (Matt. 10:1; Mark 3:13; 16:20; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2–9, 22; 1 Cor. 9:1; 1 John 1:1; cf. Matt. 28:19–20; John 14:26; 16:13). Peter, in presenting himself in these terms, sets a pattern for all in spiritual leadership: the submissive, sacrificial anonymity of a slave, combined with the dignity, significance, and authority of an apostle.

The apostle sent this letter **to those** same believers who received his first one. They were part of God's elect scattered in the Gentile

regions of “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). Those believers were predominantly Gentiles, but certainly Jewish Christians were also among the recipients of the letter, which Peter most likely wrote in A.D. 67 or 68, about one year after writing his first epistle (for details, see the Introduction to this volume).

The manner in which Peter described his readers is theologically rich, albeit brief, and points to the divine source of salvation. **Have received** implies believers’ salvation is a gift. The verb (*lagchanō*) means “to gain by divine will” or “given by an allotment” (as in the biblical practice of casting lots to learn God’s will; cf. Lev. 16:8–10; Josh. 7:14; 1 Sam. 14:38–43; 1 Chron. 25:8–31; Prov. 16:33; 18:18; Jonah 1:7; Acts 1:16–26). Clearly it refers to something not obtained by human effort or based on personal worthiness but issued from God’s sovereign purpose. Peter’s readers received **faith** because God graciously willed to give it to them (cf. Acts 11:15–17; Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:13; Phil. 1:29).

A faith here could mean *the* objective faith, as in the doctrines of the Christian faith, or it could denote subjective belief. But it is best to understand it in this context without the definite article (in contrast to Jude 3) as subjective faith, the Christian’s power to believe the gospel for salvation. Even though belief in the gospel is commanded of all, so that all are responsible for their obedience or disobedience—and in that sense it is the human side of salvation—God still must supernaturally grant sinners the ability and power to believe unto salvation (Eph. 2:8–9; cf. 6:23; Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 2:5). Peter began his first epistle writing about divine choice and election in salvation, whereas here he refers to the human response of faith. God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility form the essential elements of salvation. Only when the Holy Spirit awakens someone’s dead soul in response to hearing or reading the gospel is saving faith initiated so the sinner can embrace redemption (cf. Acts 11:21; 16:14).

Further evidence that faith here is subjective comes from Peter’s description of his readers’ faith as **of the same kind as ours**. The word rendered **same kind** (*isotimon*) means “equally valuable,” or “of equal privilege.” It designated that which was equal in rank, position, honor, standing, price, or value. This would make no sense if referring to the body of gospel truth, since that truth has no equal. Each believer has received faith as a personal gift, a faith that is the same in nature, the precious gift of God, which brings equal spiritual privileges in salvation to all who receive it (cf. John 17:20; Acts 11:15–17; 13:39). Among the faithful, God sees no distinctions among Christians; as Paul wrote, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28; cf. v. 26; Rom. 10:12–13).

All the elect have received, as a gift, the faith that saves. Ephesians

2:8–9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” These verses have profound meaning and far-reaching application.

Our response in salvation is **faith**, but even that is **not of ourselves** [but is] **the gift of God**. **Faith** is nothing that we do in our own power or by our own resources. In the first place we do not have adequate power or resources. More than that, God would not want us to rely on them even if we had them. Otherwise salvation would be in part by our own **works**, and we would have some ground to **boast** in ourselves. Paul intends to emphasize that even faith is not from us apart from God’s giving it.

Some have objected to this interpretation, saying that **faith** (*pistis*) is feminine, while **that** (*touto*) is neuter. That poses no problem, however, as long as it is understood that **that** does not refer precisely to the noun **faith** but to the act of believing. Further, this interpretation makes the best sense of the text, since if **that** refers to **by grace you have been saved through faith** (that is, to the whole statement), the adding of **and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God** would be redundant, because grace is defined as an unearned act of God. If salvation is of grace, it has to be an undeserved gift of God. Faith is presented as a gift from God in 2 Peter 1:1, Philippians 1:29, and Acts 3:16. . . .

When we accept the finished work of Christ on our behalf, we act by the **faith** supplied by God’s **grace**. That is the supreme act of human faith, the act which, though it is ours, is primarily God’s—His **gift** to us out of His **grace**. When a person chokes or drowns and stops breathing, there is nothing he can do. If he ever breathes again it will be because someone else starts him breathing. A person who is spiritually dead cannot even make a decision of faith unless God first breathes into him the breath of spiritual life. **Faith** is simply breathing the breath that God’s **grace** supplies. Yet, the paradox is that we must exercise it and bear the responsibility if we do not (cf. John 5:40). (John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1986], 60–61)

Peter’s use of the pronoun **ours** most likely had in view the conflict between Jews and Gentiles in the church. The book of Acts records that he was heavily involved in that issue in the early days of the church. Peter explained to separatist Jewish brethren his encounter with the Gentile Cornelius’ household:

But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying, “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four

corners from the sky; and it came right down to me, and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But a voice from heaven answered a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.' This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky. And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea. The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house. And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" (Acts 11:4–17; cf. 10:1–48)

At the Jerusalem Council Peter reiterated the truth that God plays no favorites concerning the salvation and spiritual privileges of Jews and Gentiles:

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them [the Gentiles] and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are." (Acts 15:5–11)

Therefore it should not be surprising that Peter referred to that same truth here. Among His elect, God makes no favored distinctions based on ethnicity—He gives all Christians the same saving faith with all its privileges (cf. Eph. 2:11–18; 4:5).

Believers' saving faith is available because of **the righteousness**

of . . . Jesus Christ. Sinners are given eternal life because the Savior imputes His perfect **righteousness** to them (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:8–9; 1 Peter 2:24), covering their sins and rendering them acceptable to Him. Romans 4:4–8 says,

Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.” (cf. Acts 13:38–39)

This immensely important doctrine of imputed righteousness is at the very heart of the Christian gospel. Salvation is a gift from God at all points. Both the faith to believe and the righteousness to satisfy God’s holiness come from Him. On the cross Christ bore the full wrath of God against all the sins of those who would believe (2 Cor. 5:18–19). Those sins were imputed to Christ so that God could impute to believers all the righteousness that was His. His righteousness fully covers the redeemed, as the prophet Isaiah beautifully expresses it, “I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isa. 61:10).

It is noteworthy that Peter does not refer to God **our** Father here but to **our God and Savior, Jesus Christ**. Righteousness here does proceed from the Father, but it reaches every believer through the Son, Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 3:8–11; Phil. 3:8–9). The Greek construction places just one article before the phrase **God and Savior**, which makes both terms refer to the same person. Thus Peter identifies Jesus, not just as Savior, but as God (cf. 1:11; 2:20; 3:2, 18; Isa. 43:3, 11; 45:15, 21; 60:16; Rom. 9:5; Col. 2:9; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8), the author and agent of salvation. The apostle made the same relation clear in his Pentecost sermon, in which he took the Old Testament truth of God and applied it to Jesus (Acts 2:21–36; cf. Matt. 1:21; Acts 4:12; 5:31).

SALVATION’S SUBSTANCE

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; (1:2)

In Peter's version of this familiar salutation, he reminds readers that true saints live in the realm of **grace and peace**, as the apostle Paul taught the Roman Christians: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1–2). God wants the substance of salvation **grace and peace to be multiplied**, to come in unending, abundant streams to His children. Similar statements fill the epistles (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2). **Grace** (*charis*) is God's free, unmerited favor toward sinners, which grants those who believe the gospel complete forgiveness forever through the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Titus 3:7). **Peace** (*eirēnē*) with God and from Him in all life's circumstances is the effect of grace (Eph. 2:14–15; Col. 1:20), flowing out of the forgiveness God has given to all the elect (cf. Ps. 85:8; Isa. 26:12; 2 Thess. 3:16). "Grace upon grace" (John 1:16) is an expression that defines the boundless flow of divine favor, while peace comes with such fullness that it is divine and beyond human understanding (John 14:27; Phil. 4:7). Believers receive surpassing **grace** for every sin (Ps. 84:11; Acts 4:33; 2 Cor. 9:8; 12:9; Heb. 4:16) and abundant **peace** for every trial (John 14:27; 16:33).

All this grace and peace comes **in** (through) **the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord**. It is not available to those who do not know and wholeheartedly embrace the gospel. **Knowledge** (*epignōsis*; cf. 1:8; 2:20) is a strengthened form of the basic Greek word for "knowledge" (*gnōsis*; cf. 1:5, 6; 3:18). It conveys the idea of a full, rich, thorough knowledge, involving a degree of intimate understanding of a specific subject (cf. Rom. 3:20; 10:2; Eph. 1:17). The substance of one's salvation is this kind of rational, objective knowledge of God through His Word (cf. John 8:32; 14:6; 17:17; 2 John 2). This fundamental concept of knowing was first of all an Old Testament one (cf. Ex. 5:2; Judg. 2:10; 1 Sam. 2:12; Prov. 2:5; Hos. 2:20; 5:4). Paul often used the same word in relation to divine truth (Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9, 10; 2:2; 3:10; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1). The knowledge that brings salvation derives not from feelings, intuition, emotion, or personal experience, but only from the revealed truth, based on the gospel preached in and from the Word: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17; cf. v. 14).

Salvation requires a genuine knowledge of the person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10). It involves not merely knowing the truth *about* Him, but actually *knowing* Him through the truth of His Word (cf. John 20:30–31; 21:24; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; 1 John 5:11–13). Hence Peter closed this letter by exhorting his believing readers, who already possessed that saving **knowledge**, to "grow in the grace and knowledge

of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (3:18). Knowing the Lord in salvation is the starting point. The rest of the believer’s life is a pursuit of greater knowledge of the glory of the Lord and His grace. Paul said that was his passionate pursuit: “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10). He also made it clear that being consumed with the glory of His Lord was the means by which the Holy Spirit transformed him into Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18).

SALVATION’S SUFFICIENCY

seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (1:3–4)

In 2 Corinthians 9:8, the apostle Paul makes an amazing statement of the overwhelming, generous sufficiency of God’s salvation: “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.” The word rendered “sufficiency” (*autarkeia*) refers to self-sufficiency, which means having all that is necessary. It further means to be independent of external circumstances and from what outside sources may provide. Believers’ spiritual resources, provided lavishly by divine grace, are sufficient to meet life’s demands (Phil. 4:19; cf. 2 Chron. 31:10).

But in spite of God’s revelation of His tremendous generosity (cf. 1 Chron. 29:10–14), Christians often think He was somehow miserly in dispensing His grace. He may have given them enough enabling grace for justification (Rom. 3:24), but not enough for sanctification. Or some believers have been taught that they received enough grace for justification and sanctification, but not enough for glorification, and thus fear they may lose their salvation. Even if they believe there is enough grace for final glorification, many Christians still feel there is not enough for them to handle life’s problems and trials. But there is no reason for any believer to doubt the sufficiency of God’s grace or to look elsewhere for spiritual resources (cf. Ex. 34:6; Pss. 42:8; 84:11; 103:11; 107:8; 121:1–8; Lam. 3:22–23; John 1:16; 10:10; Rom. 5:15, 20–21; 8:16–17, 32; 1 Cor. 2:9; 3:21–23; Eph. 1:3–8; 2:4–7; 3:17–19; 1 Peter 5:7). Paul admonished the Colossians:

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority. (Col. 2:8–10)

Jesus compared salvation to a wedding feast: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. . . . ‘Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast’” (Matt. 22:2, 4; cf. Luke 15:17–24; Rev. 19:6–9). He used that analogy because in first-century Jewish culture the wedding feast epitomized lavish celebration. In the same way, when He redeemed His own, God lavishly dispensed through the indwelling Holy Spirit all the grace and spiritual resources (Rom. 12:5–8; 1 Cor. 12:8–10; Eph. 3:20–21) they would ever need. Four essential components reminded Peter’s audience of the reality of their sufficient salvation: divine power, divine provision, divine procurement, and divine promises.

DIVINE POWER

seeing that His divine power has granted to us (1:3a)

Whatever spiritual sufficiency believers have is not because of any power they possess in themselves (cf. Matt. 19:26; Rom. 9:20–21; Eph. 1:19; Phil. 3:7–11; 1 Tim. 1:12–16; Titus 3:5) but derives from **His divine power**. Paul expressed it this way: “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (Eph. 3:20). The **power** that operates in believers is of the same divine nature as that which resurrected Christ (cf. Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:16–17; 2 Cor. 13:4; Col. 2:12). That power enables saints to do works that please and glorify God (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6–8; Eph. 3:7) and accomplish spiritual things they cannot even imagine (see again 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 (cf. John 10:30; 12:45; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:16; 2:9; Heb. 1:3) and also refutes any lingering doubt some readers may have had concerning that reality (cf. 1 John 5:20). Peter himself had been an eyewitness to Christ’s divine power (1:16; cf. Mark 5:30; Luke 4:14; 5:17).

God’s supply of spiritual power for believers never fails. They

may distance themselves from the divine source through sin, or fail to minister and use what is available, but 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.

DIVINE PROVISION

everything pertaining to life and godliness, (1:3b)

Because of their constant sins and failures as Christians, many find it hard not to think that even after salvation something is missing in the sanctification process. This faulty idea causes believers to seek “second blessings,” “spirit baptisms,” tongues, mystical experiences, special psychological insights, private revelations, “self crucifixion,” the “deeper life,” heightened emotions, demon bindings, and combinations of various ones of all those in an attempt to attain what is supposedly missing from their spiritual resources. All manner of ignorance and Scripture twisting accompanies those foolish pursuits, which at their corrupt roots are failures to understand exactly what Peter says here. 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 result of God’s limited provision. There is no temptation and no assault of Satan and demons that is beyond their resources to overcome (1 Cor. 10:13; 12:13; 1 Peter 5:10). 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 believers’ self-sufficiency.

The great power that gave Christians spiritual life will sustain that **life** in all its fullness. Without asking for more, they already have every spiritual resource needed to persevere in holy living. **Life and godliness** define the realm of sanctification, the living of the Christian life on earth to the glory of God—between initial salvation and final glorification. With the gift of new life in Christ (John 3:15–16; 5:24; 6:47; Titus 3:7; 1 John 2:25) came everything related to sustaining that **life**, all the way to glorification. That is why believers are eternally secure (John 6:35–40; 10:28–29; 2 Cor. 5:1; 1 John 5:13; Jude 1, 24–25) and can be assured God will empower them to persevere to the end (Matt. 24:13; John 8:31; Heb.

3:6, 14; Rev. 2:10), through all temptations, sins, failures, vicissitudes, struggles, and trials of life.

The word translated **godliness** (*eusebeia*) 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).

DIVINE PROCUREMENT

through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. (1:3c)

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 *gnōsis*, which means simply knowledge. But Peter is referring to more than a superficial knowledge of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Christ Himself warned of the peril of an inadequate knowledge of Him, even for those who minister in His name:

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” (Matt. 7:21–23; cf. Luke 6:46)

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 (John 3:27; Rom. 2:4; 1 Cor. 4:7; cf. Jonah 2:9). Theologically, God’s call comprises two aspects: the general call and the effectual call. Theologian Charles M. Horne succinctly defined the two aspects as follows:

The general call is a call which comes through the proclamation of the gospel: it is a call which urges sinners to accept salvation. “On the last day, the great day, of the feast, Jesus stood and cried aloud, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink!’” (Jn 7:37, Williams; cf. Mt 11:28; Is 45:22; etc.).

This message (*kerygma*), which is to be authoritatively proclaimed—not optionally debated—contains three essential elements: (1) It is a story of historical occurrences—an historical proclamation: Christ died, was buried, and rose (1 Co 15:3–4). (2) It is an authoritative interpretation of these events—a theological evaluation. Christ died for our sins. (3) It is an offer of salvation to whosoever will—an ethical summons. Repent! Believe!

The general call is to be freely and universally offered. “Jesus came up . . . and said, ‘Full authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go then and make disciples of all the nations’” (Mt 28:18–19, Williams).

The effectual call is efficacious; that is, it always results in salvation. This is a *creative* calling which accompanies the external proclamation of the gospel; it is invested with the power to deliver one to the divinely intended destination. “It is very striking that in the New Testament the terms for calling, when used specifically with reference to salvation, are almost uniformly applied, not to the universal call of the gospel, but to the call that ushers men into a state of salvation and is therefore effectual.” [John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 88.]

Perhaps the classic passage on the effectual call is found in Romans 8:30: “Whom he did predestinate, them he also called” (KJV). Other pertinent references include: Romans 1:6–7; 1 Corinthians 1:9, 26; 2 Peter 1:10.

The efficacious call is immutable, thereby insuring our perseverance. “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Ro 11:29, NASB). (*Salvation* [Chicago: Moody, 1971], 47–48; italics in original. See also these other New Testament references: John 1:12–13; 3:3–8; 6:37, 44–45, 64–65; Acts 16:14; Eph. 2:1, 5, 10; Col. 2:13; 1 Thess. 1:4–5; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5.)

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.

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 (cf. Ex. 15:11; Deut. 28:58; Pss. 8:1; 19:1; 57:5; 93:1; 104:1; 138:5; 145:5; Isa. 6:3; 42:8, 12; 48:11; 59:19; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 21:11, 23). Thus when sinners see the glory of Christ they are witnessing His deity (cf. Luke 9:27–36; John 1:3–5, 14). Unless through the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:14–17) they realize who Christ is (the glorious Son of God who is Savior; cf. John 20:30–31; 2 Peter 1:16–18), and understand their need for repentance, so as to come to Him in faith, pleading for salvation, sinners cannot escape hell and enter heaven.

So, 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 (cf. Matt. 20:28; Luke 2:52; 22:27; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:17; 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:21–23; 1 John 3:3). All salvation blessings, power, and provision come only to those who see and believe the words and acts of the sinless God/Man (cf. John 14:7–10; Acts 2:22; 1 Cor. 15:47; 1 John 1:1–2; 5:20).

DIVINE PROMISES

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (1:4)

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 believers' 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 effects.

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 (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1), such as: spiritual life (Rom. 8:9–13), resurrection life (John 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:21–23), the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33; Eph. 1:13), abundant grace (John 10:10; Rom. 5:15, 20; Eph. 1:7), joy (Ps. 132:16; Gal. 5:22), strength (Ps. 18:32; Isa. 40:31), guidance (John 16:13), help (Isa. 41:10, 13–14), instruction (Ps. 32:8; John 14:26), wisdom (Prov. 2:6–8; Eph. 1:17–18; James 1:5; 3:17), heaven (John 14:1–3; 2 Peter 3:13), eternal rewards (1 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12).

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 (cf. John 1:12; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27). **Partakers** (*koinōnos*) is often translated “fellowship,” and means “sharer” or “part-

ner.” Believers are in this life partners in the very life that belongs to God (Col. 3:3; 1 John 5:11; cf. John 6:48–51).

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 (Phil. 3:20–21; 1 John 3:2–3; cf. Titus 1:2; James 1:12; 1 John 2:25; Rev. 2:10*b*–11). **Corruption** (*phthora*) denotes an organism decomposing or rotting, and its accompanying stench. The world’s moral decomposition is driven by sinful **lust** (*epithumia*), “evil desire” (1 John 2:16; cf. 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 (cf. Phil. 3:20–21; 1 Thess. 5:4, 9–10; Rev. 20:6). At glorification, believers will be redeemed completely so that they possess eternal life in perfect holiness in a new heaven and new earth where no sin or corruption will ever exist (cf. Rev. 21:1–4; 22:1–5).

It is noteworthy that Peter borrows from the terminology of mystical, pantheistic religion that called for its adherents 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 spiritually born anew (John 3:3; James 1:18; 1 Peter 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 (cf. 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 (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–17).