

2ND PETER

Faith, False Teaching, and the Future



▶ BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How To Use This Guide

We have arranged these materials with three basic elements in mind: personal study, the preaching of the Word, and discussion in community. We believe that where these three combine, personal discipleship will flourish. To get the most out of this guide, begin by reading the introductory material. Then, in the days leading up to each Sunday, study the passage for yourself. During the sermon, listen and take notes. Finally, throughout the following week find time to discuss the questions with others.

Lastly, we have included a glossary of biblical and theological terms in the back. If a word is in **bold**, you will find a short definition in the glossary. Happy studying!

About 2nd Peter

Author: The Apostle Peter

Date: Around 65 AD (just prior to Peter's martyrdom)

Genre: Epistle (Letter) to Christians in Asia Minor

Theme Verses: "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."
(2 Peter 3:17-18)

▶ INTRODUCTION

In 2017, The New York Times released an ad that resonated with the experience of many. It displayed a pure white background and a singular line of small bold black text. It read, “The truth is...” followed by a series of controversial statements:

“The truth is our nation is more divided than ever.”

“The truth is the media is dishonest.”

“The truth is women’s rights are human rights.”

Along with each line, there is an accompanying audio recording of news anchors making these claims. And as each phrase gives way to the next, the speed increases until the words and audio become essentially unintelligible. Everything from the audio to the text, from the minimalist aesthetic to the quickening pace signify the point. But in case we missed it, the end of the video tells us: “The truth is hard to find,” “The truth is hard to know,” “The truth is more important than ever.”¹

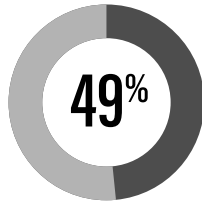
“What Is Truth?”

When Pilate asked this famous question at Jesus’ trial, he was not interested in a philosophical answer. He was trying to wash his hands of responsibility by casting doubt over our ability to know the truth. Like Pilate, our culture is, at best, skeptical of the truth and, at worst, flat out disinterested. We live in what is known as a ‘post-truth’ society, which means “objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”² *In other words, truth takes a backseat to feelings and vibes.* What someone has to say matters less than the experience it evokes.

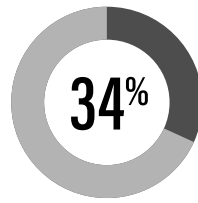
In many ways, this is the natural result of a world that is dominated by images and videos³. A shocking 53% of people receive at least some of their news, not from newspapers, or articles, or even TV, but from social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.⁴ In these spheres, visuals and audio win the day. Who cares if the video is real or made by AI? The real question is: what emotions does it stir in the audience? We follow pages for the vibes, not for the accuracy of information. In fact, entire accounts exist for no other purpose than to promote misinformation. Misinformation isn’t a bug on social media, it’s a feature. Given this reality, are we actually shocked that a growing number of people now believe the earth is flat, ancient aliens built great civilizations, and birds may or may not be government-controlled drones?

Unfortunately, this phenomenon has also leaked into the spiritual realm. Journalist

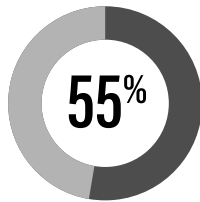
Bonnie Kristian wrote, “Our information environment is chaotic and overwhelming, rife with conspiracy theories, ‘fake news,’ and habit-forming digital manipulation. It is breaking our brains, polluting our politics, and corrupting Christian community. *It may be the most pressing and unprecedented challenge in discipleship in the American church.*”⁵ She’s right. Christians struggle just as much as anyone else to know what truth is and how to find it. The 2025 Ligonier *State of Theology* study revealed these shocking beliefs among professing **evangelicals**⁶:



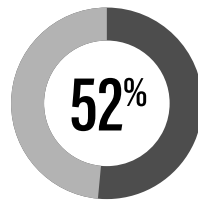
Believe God accepts the worship of all religions.



Believe Jesus was a great teacher, but he wasn't God.



Believe everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature.



Believe the Holy Spirit is a force, but isn't a person.

The evangelical church clearly is a mixed bag chock full of truths, untruths, and half-truths. And our post-truth, social-media-informed culture is a fertile breeding ground for errors and false teachings of all kinds.

What's the Big Deal?

Is this really a problem though? Some of you might think, “Isn't it a good thing that we're not so uptight about **dogma** and separating over minor points of **theology**?” The problem is that bad theology hurts people. Paul repeatedly refers to “healthy” (or “sound” in the ESV) doctrine throughout the **Pastoral Epistles**, implying that good theology leads to spiritual health, whereas bad theology culminates in a sick spirit.

One of the great Scottish theologians of the 17th century, James Durham (1622-1658), wrote, “error is an evil that jeopardizes many souls, for never has a plague so badly destroyed the lovely face of the visible church, nor carried so many souls to hell, as error has.”⁷ Over the past decade, Evangelicals have been very concerned about

plagues, wars, and politics. Yet, many remain unconcerned about our more spiritual ailments. But this is not the posture of Scripture.

An awareness of the dangers and deceptiveness of false teaching is thoroughly biblical. Every book of the New Testament (except Philemon) warns believers against false teaching. It seems as if almost every church the Apostles planted quickly encountered some form of it as soon as they cut the ribbon. We would be foolish to not expect the same.

False Stories

How do you spot false teaching? This is one of the main questions that 2 Peter was written to answer. As a follow up to his first letter (1 Peter), the apostle wrote to a collection of churches to equip them with the resources they needed to address and avoid the false teachers in their midst. While we don't know much about these figures, they still teach us much about the nature of error and false teaching.

These teachers are dangerous because they offer their hearers a narrative, and not just any story, but one that is compelling and includes a desirable end. In their case, the end is unbridled freedom (2 Peter 2:19). However, they fail to realize that by pursuing total autonomy to satisfy their pleasures, they actually become slaves of their own passions. This is how false teaching works: it offers a compelling story and then traps you in it. Consider a few modern false stories:

1. **Consumerism:** Tells the story that you are what you possess: you can be happy, secure, and significant if you just possess the right things. However, in the end, you are a slave to more and more stuff. It's never enough.
2. **Romanticism:** Tells the story that you are what you feel: you can be happy, secure, and significant if you are authentic to your inner feelings. However, in the end, you are a slave to your feelings. There's no stability.
3. **Rationalism:** Tells the story that your knowledge and reason is all you need: you can be happy, secure, and significant if you just trust your intellect and experience above all else. But then, of course, you are a slave to your limited understanding. There's no certainty.
4. **Politicism:** Tells the story that your political party having power is all you need: you can be happy, secure, and significant if the right people get elected. In the end, you become a slave to the changing political winds. There's no security.

Errors such as these are the air we breathe and their teachers are ubiquitous. They lull us to sleep with their soft story-telling and suave speech only to leave us trapped in patterns that result in misery and dissatisfaction.

A Vaccination for False Teaching

The best way to avoid a false story is to tell a better one. That’s exactly what Peter does: he helps us by “out-narrating” his opponents. But “out-narrating is not about telling the better story in the sense of being the most gripping or necessarily satisfying; it is about telling the bigger story, the story within which all other stories find their place.”⁸ To do that, the apostle takes us on a wild journey beginning with the foundation of the Christian faith in chapter one, continuing with the identity of false teachers in chapter two, and finishing in chapter three with the future realities of judgment and salvation.

The overarching theme of the book is that the way to fight false teaching is by growing in your knowledge of the truth—in particular, the truth of the Scriptures and what they say about where all of this world is headed. What you believe about tomorrow will always determine how you live today. **Eschatology** leads to ethics. And if, in the end, Christ is returning to judge the living and the dead and to make all things new, then “what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Peter 3:11-12)?

Preparation & Reflection

Where do you see error in the Church today?

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What false stories are you most susceptible to believe?

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Take a minute and pray for yourself and our church that God might prepare and teach us as we walk through this book.

1

FAITH

Peter begins by reminding his readers of the basics of the Christian faith.

We will see the essence (1:1-4), marks (1:5-11), and foundation (1:12-21) of Christianity.

"Realize your dignity, O Christian! Once you have been made a partaker of the divine nature, do not return to your former baseness by a life unworthy of that dignity. Remember whose head it is and whose body of which you constitute a member!"

Leo the Great

"Really great moral teachers never do introduce new moralities: it is quacks and cranks who do that... The real job of every moral teacher is to keep on bringing us back, time after time, to the old simple principles which we are all so anxious not to see; like bringing a horse back and back to the fence it has refused to jump or bringing a child back and back to the bit in its lesson that it wants to shirk."

C.S. Lewis

"I forget things almost instantly. It runs in my family. At least I think it does."

Dory (Finding Nemo)

▶ 2ND PETER 1:1-4

¹ Simeon Peter, a **servant** and **apostle** of Jesus Christ,

To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the **righteousness** of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

² May **grace** and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

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, 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.

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Questions For Discussion

- If faith is received and not achieved, how should this affect the way we see ourselves and others?
- Grace and peace are multiplied through the knowledge of God. Where might you be pursuing peace through the wrong channels?
- How would your walk with God look if you became more confident that he has given you everything you need?
- If you have escaped from the corruption that is in the world, then what does this mean for you today? How can an unchecked, sinful desire drag you back toward corruption?
- What is one way in your daily life you can pursue God's likeness, not just his forgiveness?

I am a... Christian?

Today, there are many different types of “Christian.” There are “Cultural” Christians, “Spirit-filled” Christians, “Bible-believing” Christians, “Evangelical” Christians, “Ex-vangelical” Christians, “Liberal” or “Conservative” Christians, and please don’t forget those “Born Again” Christians.

So, what does it even mean to be a Christian? You’d be hard-pressed to find a consistent answer even among many church-goers. Some might say it means you vote a certain way. Others think it describes the way you were raised or what you do on Sundays. Sadly, many just associate it with what Christians are opposed to: premarital sex, abortion, and homosexuality to name a few. But is any of this really the core of what it means to be Christian?

Before going any further, how would you describe what it means to be a Christian?

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Around 1670, a Scottish pastor named Henry Scougal set out to answer this question in a letter to one of his friends, later published under the title, *The Life of God, in the Soul of Man*.⁹ He begins by highlighting three “pretenders” of Christianity followed by the real thing. Let’s consider each of these and examine our own hearts in the process.

Understanding. Scougal laments that many locate the essence of Christianity in their theological positions. Today, some “**theology buffs**” might include in their social media bios that they are a Reformed, Complimentarian, Cessationist, Amillennial Baptist (which sounds about as confusing as the typical order from Starbucks: “Triple blonde espresso with two pumps of caramel, oat milk, and cinnamon dulce on ice, please!”) But theological knowledge is not the essence of true religion.

Actions. He also recognizes that some stake their faith on the outward behavior. That is, a “constant round of duties and observances.” In other

words, they look at their record: how often they're at church, how little they curse, how many sourdough starters they've kept alive, how many books they've read, or how much they give. But as the example of the **Pharisees** reminds us, outward actions do not equate to true religion.

Emotions. Scougal held his strongest words for those who ground their faith in their emotional life. These people try to “court their Saviour,” through passionate prayers and devotions until “they persuade themselves they are mightily in love with him, and from thence assume a great confidence of their salvation” (ouch!). Emotional highs are extremely unpredictable, and therefore, they cannot be where true religion is found.

Lest we take this too far and look down on theology, obedience, and emotions, he reminds us that these can all be evidence of Christianity. They are just not the core of the faith. Now, you may look at this list and wonder, is there anything left? Scougal answers,

“True religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul, or, in the apostle's phrase, ‘It is Christ formed within us.’— Briefly, I know not how the nature of religion can be more fully expressed, than by calling it a Divine Life.”

The true center of Christianity is becoming a “partaker of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). It's God putting his very own life and love into us by his Spirit (Rom. 5:5), so that we might enjoy the warm eternal communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14).

Which “pretend” Christianity do you lean towards?

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Why is Scougal's answer more satisfying?

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▶ 2ND PETER 1:5-11

⁵ For 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. 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. ⁹For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. ¹⁰Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and **election**, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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Questions For Discussion

- Where is your pursuit of Christlike character more passive than active?
- What rhythms or habits help you remember what you've been cleansed from?
- What would it look like to pursue these virtues from a place of assurance rather than attempting to prove yourself?
- How might keeping the promise of verse 11 in view change the way you pursue growth today?

Spiritual Growth vs. Self-Optimization

People in the modern world are obsessed with self-optimization. We micromanage our routines, diets, careers, and relationships all so that we can be as healthy, happy, and productive as possible. While the desires for these things are not inherently bad, our culture’s fixation on “perfecting” ourselves is deeply disordered.



THE SELF MADE MAN
BY BOBBY CARLYLE (1987)

To start with, the culture of self-optimization is fundamentally selfish, placing our own well-being at the center of every aspect of our day. Similarly, it’s self-defeating. When we obsess over “optimizing” our lives, we become less resilient, more particular, and less able to enjoy ourselves. Additionally, our drive to self-optimize is troubling because it objectifies the world around us. We don’t enjoy food; we eat it because it’s healthy. We don’t spend time with people because we love them, but because “studies show that humans need social connection.” In short, we interact with the world and with other

people primarily based on how they help build us up, rather than seeing their innate worth and beauty. A life devoted to self-optimization is unfulfilling and alienating.

Where do you drift towards self-optimization? How is it affecting you?

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The **gospel** also calls us to do and be better. In 2 Peter 1:5-11, Peter urges believers to pursue spiritual growth in virtue, knowledge, and self-control, which might sound like our self-optimization culture, but it’s different in three ways: its origin, orientation, and outcome. Self-optimization arises from a desire for control and a love of self, while spiritual growth is rooted in God’s **grace** and the pursuit of Christlikeness. Relatedly, this yearning for Christlikeness speaks to the true orientation of spiritual growth. In the world, we pursue growth so that we can be happy,

healthy, and strong. In the kingdom, we seek to grow so that our lives would become more like Jesus'. When we live this way, there are utterly different outcomes. First, we will not treat people as means to an end. Christ-centered spiritual growth leads to "brotherly affection" (2 Pet 1:7), while self-optimization treats others as a path to our own happiness. Second, there is less risk of burnout and frustration because growth is not rooted in our own strength, but in God's power (Rom 8:28). Finally, we are promised eternal life (2 Pet 1:11). When we obsess over our daily routine, we focus on something that is going to pass away. But when we seek to live for Christ, we participate in a kingdom that is without end. In a world where the self is often put first, we are called to remember that it is the one who lays down their life that will ultimately find it (Matt 16:25).

What is one area of your life you could shift from self-focused optimization to Christ-centered transformation?

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▶ 2ND PETER 1:12-19

¹² Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. ¹³ I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, ¹⁴ since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. ¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic **Glor**y, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from **heaven**, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,

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Questions For Discussion

- What role does reminding play in the Christian life? How can we learn to not become bored with reminders?
- How have you seen Christians “stir up” others spiritually?
- What are some practical differences between myths and eyewitness testimonies? What are current myths that we should warn people of today?
- Peter was on the **mountain of transfiguration** with Jesus, but he calls the Scriptures “more sure.” How would you describe the relationship between spiritual experiences and the Word of God?

The Marks of a Christian

Do you ever wonder how we know if someone is a Christian? I mean, really know, not just take at face value a verbal confession. Are there signs? Are there attitudes or behaviors that we should expect from someone who really believes in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior?

These kinds of questions motivated Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) to write the book *The Religious Affections*. At the work's beginning, he asks "What are the distinguishing qualifications of those that are in favor with God, and entitled to his eternal rewards... what is the nature of true religion... and wherein do lie the distinguishing notes of that virtue and holiness that is acceptable in the sight of God?" In short, what looks different about a genuine Christian?

What would you say are signs that someone is a Christian?

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For Edwards, true Christianity is not simply an intellectual assent to the "facts" of the gospel. After all, even the demons know that Jesus is God's Son (Lk 4:41). It's also not defined by strong emotion when confronted with the gospel's power. Beyond that, it's not even primarily characterized by good deeds. Instead, true religion is found in a person's affections, which is to say that a real Christian wants the right things. To Edwards, this idea means that Christians ought to "want what God wants."

Now, while this response may seem obvious, it also begs other questions, like "What does God want?" and "How do we know what God wants?" The answer to both questions, for Edwards, is found in beholding the beauty of Christ. After all, Jesus is God's beloved Son who reveals his very character and nature (Jn 14:9; Col 1:15). If we desire to "want what God wants," then we must draw close to Jesus, contemplate him, and imitate him.

As Christians, we do this primarily through engaging the Word of God in the context of a faithful community. We come to the Word because it is where we see Christ. Then, when we behold him, we must ask "Do we love the same things he loves? Do we want what he wants?" Do we love

the Church as God loves his people (2 Chron 9:8)? Do we want the lost to know the Good News (Lk 19:10)? Do we want to be like Jesus more than we want anything in this world (Rom 8:29)?

Are our affections revealing a heart transformed by Christ? It's a question we all need to ask ourselves throughout our Christian life because all our knowledge of God, all our spiritual gifts are nothing if we lack love, if we do not desire God and aim to want what He wants (1 Cor 13:1-3)

Is there a danger of examining fruit too much?

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How does looking at Christ not just teach us who God is, but also comfort us when we fail to look like him?

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2ND PETER 1:20-21

²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

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Questions For Discussion

- Ever since the Garden of Eden (3:1-5), false teachers have tried to undermine God's Word. Where do you see this pattern in either the culture or your own heart?
- With so much error and false teaching always floating around, there is a call to "pay attention" to the Scriptures. What patterns have you set in your daily life to do this?
- What are ways people read the Bible as if it was written by just "the will of man"? How might remembering its divine origin change the way we read it?
- If someone to whom you are witnessing denies the **inspiration** of scripture, what could you say that might help them?

From Worms to ChatGPT

Modern people tend to be pretty confused about the Bible. Its origins are mysterious; its contents are strange; and its commands seem outdated. So why do so many people still center their lives on it? Don't we have more reliable and relevant sources?

From the very beginning, Christians have been people of the book, and later, the **Protestants** crystallized this commitment to the Bible in the Latin phrase *sola scriptura*, meaning "scripture alone." The Second London Confession of Faith (1689) unpacks this phrase: "*The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.*" It's worth noting that the Christians who wrote this did not believe that scripture is the only authority or that the Bible speaks infallibly about every topic (ecology, physics, medicine, etc.). Instead, the claim is very modest: the Bible is the only "rule" for knowing God.

What is a rule? It's a standard. It's something we use to determine the trustworthiness of everything else. We all have them, we just tend not to notice them until something disagrees with them. But then we say things like, "Well, that's just not reasonable!" or "Well, science says..." or "Well, ChatGPT says..."



However, science, reason, experts, and even AI are not necessarily bad tools but they are awful rules. In Martin Luther's (1483-1546) day, the popular rules were the Pope and Church counsels. But this German monk began to see that this foundation was shaky and littered with cracks. And the more he expressed his concerns, the more the **Roman Catholic Church** pushed back until

he was eventually charged as a heretic and invited to recant at the Diet of Worms (1521)—which was not the name of an earthy food trend from back in the day. It was a church council located in the German city of Worms (pronounced "Vorms"). In this moment, in the heat of the battle, where would Luther stand? He planted his feet firmly on the scriptures: "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."

The problem with other rules, as Luther saw, is that they contradict. New science debunks old science. ChatGPT is often wrong. Our “experts” disagree even with themselves. But what makes the Bible so reliable is that it’s sufficient, certain, and infallible. The claim of *sola scriptura* is not that there is no other authority besides the Bible, but that the Bible is the only one that will never err. It is the only way to know God truly and live rightly before him.

WAIT

Before You Read The Bible, Ask:

There are many great questions to ask when we approach the Bible: In what order should I read it—chronologically or straight through? When should I read it—morning or night? But before any others, we should ask, “How?” How does the Bible want to be read? Here are three ways we are to read the Bible:

With Humility. In Isaiah 66:2, God says, “this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.” We always come to the Bible with a posture. We might sit back and wait for it to impress us, or sit above it as we examine and critique it, but the Bible calls us to sit beneath it. We humble ourselves before the God who speaks to us.

As One Story. The Bible is not an encyclopedia made to answer all of our questions (e.g. “Do angels use the restroom?”). It’s also not just a collection of stories. After Jesus rose from the dead, he taught a Bible study to a couple of unwitting disciples and showed them how to read it: “he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). The entire Bible is one story that culminates in Christ. Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, the Temple, sacrifices, Israel, kings, prophets, and priests all find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Read it as a singular story and watch it come alive!

For Relationship. Words are the primary way we create and deepen relationships. And it’s the same for God and us. He did not give us his Word so that we can simply become smarter, feel spiritual, or check off to-do lists. We’re invited to commune with him. He graciously has brought us into a conversation we have no business being in, and the goal is that we might enjoy one another: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

2

FALSE TEACHING

Peter continues his letter by exposing false teachers.

He highlights the certainty, the condemnation, and the characteristics of heretics.

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

Jesus Christ

"It is the nature of all hypocrites and false prophets to create a conscience where there is none, and to cause [the] conscience to disappear where it does exist."

Martin Luther

"You can shine your shoes and wear a suit. You can comb your hair and look quite cute. You can hide your face behind a smile. One thing you can't hide, is when you're crippled inside."

John Lennon

▶ 2ND PETER 2:1-10

¹ But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive **heresies**, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. ⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; ⁵ if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of **righteousness**, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶ if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked ⁸ (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); ⁹ then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, ¹⁰ and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

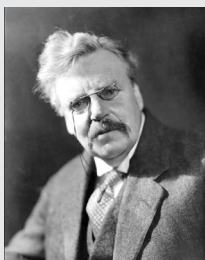
Questions For Discussion

- When you think of a false teacher, what kind of person comes to mind?
- According to this passage, what are some dead giveaways for false teachers?
- Do you feel confident in your ability to identify heresy? How can you grow in this?
- How does God's dealings towards different types of people in this passage strike you? Does it bring comfort, discomfort, or something in-between? Why?

How (Not) To Be A Heretic

How do you become a **heretic**? Do you have to start a cult? What if you plant “a new kind of church for a new kind of Christian?” Those might put you in contention for “Heretic of the Year” award, but what if it’s even simpler than that?

It might surprise you, but the word “heresy” in Greek (*haireisis*) doesn’t actually mean “false teacher.” It’s related to the word “to choose.” The idea is that a heretic is someone who is a chooser, as in they do not submit to a tradition. They are trailblazers, innovators, free-thinkers, those who don’t settle for the same old same old.



What’s fascinating and terrifying about this description is that these are the personalities our society promotes. We are a culture of autonomous individuals. We’re Americans after all. We are innovators, the leaders of space exploration, the discoverers of things like electricity, and inventors of the telephone and Big Macs for crying out loud! We don’t let others tell us where to stop and definitely not what to believe: “It’s a free country!” But when this is the air we breathe, we’re all choosers, and therefore, we’re all in danger of becoming heretics. We pick and choose our beliefs just as we do our favorite brands, our college, our spouse, and our jobs.

But choosing alone is not necessarily what makes you a heretic. It’s what you choose. And the choice is quite simple: that which is new and exciting or old, tried, and tested. The number one reason why we’re all only a hop, skip, and jump away from heresy is because we tend to become bored with the old. **Orthodoxy**: Even that word alone conjures up images of dusty books and dead guys. But orthodoxy is anything but boring as G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) reminds us:

“People have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum, and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy... The Church in its early days went fierce and fast with any warhorse; yet it is utterly unhistoric to say that she merely went mad along one idea, like a vulgar fanaticism. She swerved to left and right, so exactly as to avoid enormous obstacles... To have fallen into any

*of those open traps of error and exaggeration which fashion after fashion and sect after sect set along the historic path of Christendom—that would indeed have been simple. It is always simple to fall; there are an infinity of angles at which one falls, only one at which one stands. To have fallen into any one of the fads from **Gnosticism** to Christian Science would indeed have been obvious and tame. But to have avoided them all has been one whirling adventure; and in my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect.”*

Isn't that good news? Heresy is "obvious and tame!" Orthodoxy on the other hand is thrilling! The best way to not become a heretic is to be enthralled by this "whirling adventure!" Don't try to teach something new, that's predictable and boring. But refresh yourself regularly in the waters of orthodoxy. Read the scriptures, creeds, confessions, and teachers of the past. Respect them, and pass them down.

How can you avoid becoming bored with orthodox theology?

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Where are you most tempted to "choose" your beliefs rather than receive them?

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What is one way you can root yourself to the historic Christian faith this week?

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▶ 2ND PETER 2:10-16

¹⁰Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, ¹¹whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. ¹²But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, ¹³suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. ¹⁴They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! ¹⁵Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

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Questions For Discussion

- According to this passage, what signs should you be looking for as the fruits of a false teacher?
- Why is there a temptation to be drawn to someone who is a false teacher? What desires of the flesh do they exude that we find attractive?
- Do you think the markers of these false teachers will be obvious immediately? Or will they take time to blossom? How would you even begin to notice these faults?
- What do you think is potentially the worst effect of false teaching?

Duck, Duck, Heretic!

We attend church for several reasons, whether it be because of good fellowship, proximity to home, or quality worship. However, a core reason we attend church is that (hopefully) the people there believe and teach Christianity accurately and authentically. After all, what's the point of going if what the preacher says and the people believe is not true?

While this statement isn't controversial, it sets the scene for some relevant questions such as: How do we understand other churches that don't believe what we do? Where do we draw the lines between differences of opinion, denominational disagreements, and genuine heresy? When does a group just stop being recognizably Christian?

Sometimes, both rightly and wrongly, Evangelical Christians have been accused of "witch-hunting," and it's likely that we've all met people who seem ready to call anybody with a difference of opinion a heretic. "That church up the road doesn't have elders. Heretics! This church does not preach the end times every week. Heretics! The baptists up the road have crimson carpet. Tacky...but also heretics!" This kind of attitude can be exhausting and is usually misguided. However, while we might want to avoid seeming overly exclusive and judgmental, we cannot forget that truth matters and that heresy exists. The **gospel** is to be taken seriously and not every belief can be tolerated in a congregation. Are you more prone to draw lines too tightly or too loosely? Why?

Therefore, it's helpful to consider how we can understand the variety of views present in churches today. To undertake this task, it's useful to think in terms of **orthodoxy**, **heresy**, and **heterodoxy**. Heresy is teaching that denies or twists core tenets of Christian belief, like the **Trinity**, the authority of the Bible, or the resurrection of the dead. A denial of such beliefs renders Christianity incoherent, jeopardizes our understanding of salvation, and obscures the character of God. A clear example of heresy and its logical effects appears in 1 Cor 15:12-19, where Paul confronts people who deny the resurrection of the dead. If Jesus was not raised, then the apostles' teaching was a lie, we are still in sin, and we have no reason to hope. *In short, heresy involves beliefs that compromise the heart of the gospel.* Of course, there is a difference between heresy and honest confusion or immaturity. Not every incorrect belief makes a person a heretic. The Bible's harshest words are directed towards those who *knowingly* teach falsehood and mislead others.

Beyond heresy, we have heterodoxy, which refers to beliefs that may not match the witness of Scripture (at least in our understanding), but they do not cause us to dispute a person's status as a believer. For example, this category may deal with differing views on communion, baptism, or church governance. Heterodoxy does not just denote a difference of opinion. After all, we are called to take all aspects of our faith seriously. Heterodox beliefs may be reasons not to worship together even if the people holding them have not damaged the core of the gospel.

Finally, orthodoxy simply means "right belief," and it entails convictions that accurately match what the Bible says about God, humanity, **redemption**, and creation. While it is easy to state these definitions, the actual work of determining the lines between heresy and heterodoxy, between acceptable differences and irreconcilable convictions, is something that can only be determined by people immersed in the Word, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we must approach every conflict of beliefs with both humility and assurance, with an awareness of our limited knowledge but faith that God will make the truth known.

How willing are you to be corrected in your theology? What would it look like for you to be convinced you are wrong?

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2ND PETER 2:17-22

¹⁷ These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. ¹⁸ For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. ¹⁹ They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. ²⁰ For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. ²¹ For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. ²² What the true proverb says has happened to them: “The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.”

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Questions For Discussion

- What are some specific signs in a teacher's life, message, or methods that should raise red flags for us today?
- Like the false teachers here, we live in a culture that prioritizes unrestricted freedom. How can we fight becoming enslaved to our passions?
- Share about a time when you were tempted to turn away from your faith. What helped you to remain steadfast?
- How does a right understanding of our identity and position in Christ motivate us to pursue a life of **righteousness** and obedience?

What's At Stake

There's a way of thinking among many Christians today that **doctrine** is really not all that important—or at least not as vital as the more “practical” matters of the faith. Others are suspicious of **theological** jargon because it just brings more confusion to the words of scripture. In both of these perspectives, debates and arguments are looked down upon. “If we all believe in Jesus, then what’s the big deal?”

The problem with this way of thinking is that theology is unavoidable. Everyone does theology. The question is, is it good theology? Even the person who says, “But we still believe in Jesus” is doing theology, because which Jesus are we talking about? Let me give you a few options:

1. *The Jesus who appeared to be a man?*
2. *The Jesus who is the first and best of God's creation?*
3. *The Jesus whom God the Son partnered with to save the world?*
4. *The Jesus who is a blend of divine and human natures?*
5. *The Jesus who is just a good teacher and wants us to be happy?*

These are all different types of “Jesus,” but none of them are biblical. They each represent a different heresy throughout Church history.

1. **Docetism** – One of the earliest heresies which held that Jesus was not fully human, he just appeared to be (from the Greek word *dokeō* meaning “seem/appear”). 1 John may have been written in response to this.
2. **Arianism** – The heresy that split the church in the 4th and 5th century and led to the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). A modern equivalent is held by Jehovah's Witnesses.
3. **Nestorianism** – 5th Century heresy which stated that the Son of God worked through the human person of Jesus. This led to the idea that there are two Sons.
4. **Eutychianism** – A response to Nestorianism that combined Jesus's humanity and divinity leading to some third kind of mixture of the two.
5. **Moralistic Therapeutic Deism** – The modern belief system (that a lot of Americans believe without realizing it) which sees God as a distant creator who wants us to be good and happy.

The tricky part of this is that they all believe in a “Jesus”. But since they all mean different things, they lead to different gospels. And this is the main problem with all heresy: it always corrupts the heart of the gospel message. Here’s what’s at stake:

If Jesus is not fully human, then we cannot say in any meaningful way that God lived, died, and rose as and for us (Acts 20:28). In that case, we are still separate from God and left in our sins (*sorry, Docetism, Nestorianism, and Eutychianism*).

If Jesus is not truly God, then, for one, he cannot truly reveal who God is—there could always be another God behind him. Second, he could not give us God’s very own life and so make us “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Once again, we are still separated from him (*apologies, Arianism and Eutychianism*).



If Jesus is just a moral teacher who wants us to be good and happy, then we are still bound by the law and spiritually dead. Yet again, we are still separate from God (*Yikes, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism*).

Do you see how with each heresy, we are always left apart from God? This is why theology and heresy matter because so much is at stake in the gospel. If we lose the gospel, then we lose the God who has given himself to us in Christ.

Do you bristle at theological disagreements? Why or why not?

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Before You Listen, Ask:

Peter provides us multiple tell-tale signs of false teachers. Here are three to consider before you buy into someone's teaching:

Are they reverent? (2 Pt. 2:10-13) Does this teacher talk about God's **holiness** or do they only help you become "happier and healthier"? Do they address sin and the need for salvation or just encourage you to be more "spiritually minded"? Do they give the impression that they tremble before the Lord, or are they flippant and trivial?

Do they question answers more than they answer questions? (2Pt. 2:1, 13, 21-22) False teachers love to throw shades of skepticism on the truth. "Is the Bible *really* infallible?" "Did Jesus *really* pay our penalty?" It makes them sound intelligent, but as Ego, the food critic in *Ratatouille* said, "In many ways, the work of the critique is easy. We risk very little yet enjoy a position over those who offer up their work and themselves to our judgment." It's easy to tear down, but does this teacher build up? Do they stand for something?

Do they sacrifice? (2 Pt. 2:14) Who pays more in their ministry: them or their hearers? Do they require others to give up and go without while they only improve from good to better? If so, they might be motivated by greed.

Are they truly free? (2Pt. 2:19) The gospel frees (Gal. 5:1)—and true teachers should represent this freedom—in two ways: it frees from sin, not from responsibility, and it frees them for obedience not to satisfy passions. False teachers often indulge in their passions and downplay responsibility.

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THE FUTURE

Peter closes the letter by reminding his readers that we all live in light of the end. Therefore, we are to avoid teachers who deny Christ's second coming (3:1-7), consider the patience of God (3:8-10), and orient our lives toward the end of this world and beginning of the next (3:11-18).

"The future ain't what it used to be."

Yogi Berra

"The fundamental thing behind all motivation and all activity is the constant struggle against annihilation and against death. It's absolutely stupefying in its terror, and it renders anyone's accomplishments meaningless... Until those issues are resolved within each person - religiously or psychologically or existentially - the social and political issues will never be resolved, except in a slapdash way. They'll never be resolved as long as people wake up each day and worry that they're finite, that they don't know why they're here or where they're going or when they're going to die."

Woody Allen

"I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this."

From "The Last Battle" by C.S. Lewis

▶ 2ND PETER 3:1-7

¹ This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ² that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your **apostles**, ³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” ⁵ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, ⁶ and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. ⁷ But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until **the day of judgment** and destruction of the ungodly.

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Questions For Discussion

- Do you think the church today is more or less concerned about “scoffers” or false teachers than in the past? Why or why not?
- Why would false teachers doubt the second coming of Christ? Do you ever doubt it? Why or why not?
- What does it look like to “remember” that Christ is coming soon?
- What practical steps can you take to ensure that you are not following your own evil desires, like the scoffers?
- In what ways can the certainty of future judgment influence your daily decisions and priorities? What is one decision you are currently facing that you would handle differently?

You Can't Be Serious

We live in a meme culture. Everything from Kermit the Frog drinking tea to Michael Jordan crying is meme-able. In this strange online world, no jokes are too soon, nothing is too sacred, and no event, no matter how dark, is safe from being curated into a funny cultural icon. However, what if these aren't just harmless jokes, but instead, reveal a tendency (dare we even say 'pressure?') to trivialize everything we see?



In 1985, Neil Postman wrote *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. At the time, the television was changing the way the world communicated and spent time. But Postman wanted to draw attention to the more subtle and yet sinister ways it was affecting people. One result was that it turned everything (movies, weather, news, sports, etc.) into entertainment. The news was no longer any more important than “*Seinfeld*.” And the down stream consequence of this fact is that if everything is entertainment, then everything is trivial. How much more so with the internet and social media?¹⁰

The Bible has a label for someone who views everything as a joke: *scoffers*. Peter warns that “scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing” (2 Peter 3:3). In Psalm 1, the scoffers are the worst of the ungodly (Ps. 1:1). Proverbs 21:24 says the scoffer takes a fundamentally arrogant view of the world. He sits above it all and mocks it. In Psalm 73, we even see God himself as the butt of their jokes. The scoffer, therefore, never sees their wrongs. She never repents because she never sees her need—it’s all just one big funny joke called “life.” In a culture dominated by the internet, we’re all in danger of becoming scoffers.

What, then, do we do? What we and our culture need is a sense of the **glory** of God. Glory in the Old Testament comes from the Hebrew word “weight.” For God to be glorious, then, is for him to be weighty, to have substance. He is not frothy or vaporous, like so much of online culture, he is rock-bottom fundamental reality. He’s the one who flattens mountains, raises valleys, quakes the earth, and levels entire cities. And it is this spiritual sense of the weightiness of God that the Psalmist experienced in Psalm 73 which helped him see the fragility of scoffers: “until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin” (Ps. 73:17-18). The glory of God will not be experienced on the internet but in “the sanctuary of God.” This

is instructive. If we're going to not become scoffers, we must be people who have a deeper community than just friends we send memes to. We need to get off our phones and touch grass. Spend face to face time with real people, tremble together before the Word of God, and talk about the important things of life.

In what ways could the modern culture be shaping you to become a scoffer?

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What practical steps can you take to avoid this?

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▶ 2ND PETER 3:8-13

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach **repentance**. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of **holiness** and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of **the day of God**, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which **righteousness** dwells.

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Questions For Discussion

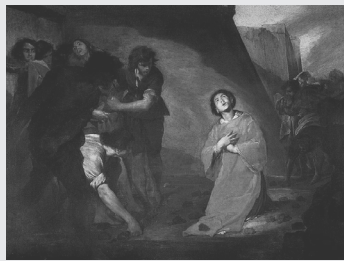
- How does remembering God's relationship with time protect us against cynicism regarding Christ's return?
- How should God's desire for people to **repent** in this passage shape our **evangelism** as we balance urgency and personal patience?
- In light of the fact that this world will eventually be dissolved, where might you be over-investing in the temporary and under-investing in the eternal?
- How does the promise of a future, permanently righteous world provide comfort to you right now as you struggle against your own sin and navigate a broken culture?

More Than Heaven

When many people imagine the afterlife, they picture clouds, angels, and harps, but this is a shallow portrait of eternity. God didn't make us embodied creatures only to turn us into disembodied spirits, nor did He give us dominion only to usher us into eternal retirement.

Because modern life can be pleasant and comfortable, we rarely think about the afterlife beyond the good news that death is not the end. The early Church, however, was laser-focused on eternity. Martyrs faced death because of their hope in the resurrection, and evangelists spread the **gospel** to the ends of the known world proclaiming the promise of life after death. Christianity has always set its sights on eternity, so it's worth reflecting on the nature of our hope.

The Bible offers a richer image of eternity that should shape our daily lives. When we consider the Christian hope, we don't imagine a disembodied existence in **heaven**. Instead, we are promised a new heaven and a new earth (e.g. Rev 21).



THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. STEPHEN
BY BERNARDO CAVALLINO (1616-1656)

Our hope is resurrection, that the very same power which raised Jesus from the grave will one day give life to our bodies (Rom 8:11). When loved ones die, we often hear people say something like, "Well, they're in heaven now." While the dead in Christ are in the presence of God (e.g. Lk 23:43), the final Christian hope is not that they are floating around with Jesus. It's that we will all dwell together with the Lord in *body* and *soul*.

Our hope is also for renewal and justice. This world we live in is full of sin, suffering, and injustice, but God promises that He will one day make things right (Acts 10:42, Rom 8:19-23, Isa 11:6-9). He will free captives, care for the poor (Ps 12:5), and destroy death forever (Isa 25:8). He will also reward us for our obedience and faithfulness, even if nobody noticed them this side of eternity (Gal 6:9).

God promises us resurrection into a new heaven and a new earth.

Creation groans for its **redemption** (Rom 8) and it will come. This reality of a future resurrection in a restored world should give us renewed vigor in building God's kingdom. Often it feels like we are fighting a losing battle against evil or that only saving souls truly matters. However, if we take God's promises of resurrection, renewal, and justice seriously, then Christians should be eager to make the world a better place today. We can work towards a better future because we believe that good wins in the end (1 Cor 15:58). Therefore, Christians cannot think about eternity only when confronted with death. Instead, we need to live every day in light of God's promise to bring about a new heaven and a new earth.

What do you most look forward to about heaven?

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How does enduring suffering help prepare us for heaven?

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What would it look like to live for the resurrection?

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2ND PETER 3:14-18

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. ¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. ¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. ¹⁸ But grow in the **grace** and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the **glory** both now and to the day of eternity. Amen

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Questions For Discussion

- Diligent waiting can sound like an oxymoron. How do you reconcile this in real life?
- The "ignorant and unstable" twist the Bible to justify lawlessness. How can committing ourselves to a local church protect us and avoid this danger?
- Where do you feel the strongest cultural currents trying to "carry you away" from biblical fidelity right now? What practical boundaries can you establish to maintain your footing?
- Why do you think growth has been so important to Peter throughout this letter (recall 1:5-11)?
- Why are both "**grace**" and "knowledge" necessary for a balanced, healthy Christian life? What happens if a church emphasizes one to the exclusion of the other?

Glossary

Apostle – The word in Greek means, “sent ones.” It describes the office in the early church of the twelve men who saw the resurrected Jesus and were sent out to share the gospel.

The Day of Judgment/God – Also called “the Day of the Lord,” this refers to the time at the end of history when God will bring final judgment. The first coming of Jesus was the beginning of this “day,” and it will be completed when he returns. For Christians, this will be the moment of final salvation, but for unbelievers, final condemnation.

Doctrine/Dogma – An established teaching of the church

Election – God’s eternal choice of some persons unto everlasting life—not because of foreseen merit in them, but of his mere mercy in Christ—in consequence of which choice they are called, justified, and glorified. (Rom 8:30; Eph 1:3-6; Acts 13:48)

Eschatology – The study of last things. It consists of two Greek words: *eschaton*, meaning “last”, and *logos*, meaning “

Evangelicals – The word comes from the Greek word *euangelion* meaning “gospel” or “good news.” Evangelicals, then, are gospel people. In more recent history, this title has been used to describe a religious movement within Protestantism (for definition of “Protestant,” see below) and identified by four main priorities: biblicism (focus on the Bible), crucicentrism (focus on the cross), conversionism (emphasis on life-changing conversion), and activism (expression of the gospel through effort).

Evangelism – The act of sharing the gospel (Greek: *euangelion*)

Gnosticism – An ancient and diverse cult which held that salvation was freedom from this physical existence came through special or hidden knowledge (in Greek *gnosis*).

Orthodoxy – Beliefs that match the testimony of scripture and the witness of the church. It consists of two Greek words: *orthos* meaning “right” or “straight” and *doxa* meaning “glory”.

Glory – The manifestation of God’s presence. The Hebrew word (*kabod*) is related to the idea of weight, substance, and heaviness. It also carries connotations of beauty and splendor.

Gospel – (Greek: *euangelion*) The good news that God sent his Son, Jesus, to live a perfect life, die on the cross, and rise from the dead so that we can be reconciled to God through faith. For a more detailed description of the gospel, see *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert.

Grace – (Greek: *charis*) God giving us what we do not deserve.

Heaven – The current spiritual dwelling place of God.

Heterodoxy – Beliefs that do not match the testimony of Scripture, but they do not cause us to dispute a person’s status as a believer. It consists of two Greek words: *heteros* meaning “different” and *doxa* meaning “glory”.

Heresy – Teaching that denies or twists core tenets of Christian belief, like the Trinity, the authority of the Bible, or the resurrection of the dead.

Heretic – Someone who teaches heresy.

Holy (Holiness) – Conveys something being set apart. For God, it highlights how he is unlike creation (totally pure, loving, and just). For humanity, it refers to being set apart from others to God for a particular task.

Inspiration – The belief that the Holy Spirit of God governed the writing of scripture through human authors. It comes from the Greek word *theopneustos* (literally, “God-breathed”) in 2 Timothy 3:16.

The Mountain of Transfiguration – The momentous event described in the Gospel accounts (Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9) where Jesus unveiled his glory before Peter, James, and John, met with Moses and Elijah, and received the words from the Father, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.”

Pastoral Epistles – The New Testament books associated with the office of pastor: 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus.

Pharisee – Sect of Jewish religious leaders who took seriously obedience to God’s law, oftentimes, from the wrong motivation to earn right standing before God.

Protestants – A movement in the sixteenth century, whereby church leaders and members “protested” the theology, liturgy, and leadership in the Roman Catholic Church. It was a “Reformation” in that those leading the movement wanted to reform the church to the standard of scripture. At the center of this conflict were disagreements over what later became known as the five solas (Latin for ‘alone’): *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture is the only infallible authority), *Sola Gratia* (salvation is a work of God’s grace alone), *Sola Fide* (salvation is by faith alone, and not works), *Solus Christus* (salvation is in Christ alone), and *Soli Deo Gloria* (for God’s glory alone).

Redemption – A way of referring to salvation. It is usually associated with the marketplace: to redeem something is to buy it back. In terms of salvation, God has purchased his people by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Repentance – The act of turning from sin and disobedience to trust in and obey God.

Righteousness – Right living or standing before God. God is righteous and gives righteousness to those who trust in Jesus. Christians, are able to walk in this righteousness, not to earn God’s favor, but because they already have it.

Roman Catholic Church - One of the three main branches of Christendom (the other two are Protestantism and Eastern Orthodox). The word "Catholic" literally means universal, which described the state of the Church when Rome had conquered most of the known world. And the word "Roman" identifies its association with and submission to the Bishop of Rome (aka the Pope).

Servant - (Greek: *doulos*) literally means "bond-servant" or "slave."

Theology - The study of God. It consists of two Greek words: *Theo*, meaning "God", and *logos*, meaning "word/speech/study."

Trinity - The belief that the one God eternally exists as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Endnotes

¹ Codigo Web, *The New York Times - The Truth Is Hard DROGA5*, 2017, 0:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ax1eCYDXhdY>.

² Oxford Word of the Year 2016 | *Oxford Languages*, n.d., accessed March 17, 2026, <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/>.

³ For a fantastic explanation of how social media contributed to our post-truth culture, see Brett McCracken et al., *Scrolling Ourselves to Death: Reclaiming Life in a Digital Age* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2025).

⁴ Sara Atske, “Social Media and News Fact Sheet,” Social Media & the News, Pew Research Center, September 25, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/social-media-and-news-fact-sheet/>.

⁵ Bonnie Kristian, *Untrustworthy: The Knowledge Crisis Breaking Our Brains, Polluting Our Politics, and Corrupting Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos), 1. Quoted in *Scrolling Ourselves to Death*, 106.

⁶ “The State of Theology,” Ligonier Ministries, accessed March 17, 2026, <https://thestateoftheology.com>.

⁷ James Durham, *The Scandal of False Teaching*, ed. Matthew Vogan and Catherine Hyde (1659; Reformation Heritage Books, 2023), 10.

⁸ Christopher Watkin and Timothy Keller, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible’s Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 21.

⁹ For an updated version, see Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, ed. Robin Taylor (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2022).

¹⁰ For a great resource that applies Neil Postman’s insights to the internet and social media, see McCracken et al., *Scrolling Ourselves to Death*.