

The Only Way to Escape the World's Corruption

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Date: 09 April 2017

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[0 : 0 0] Well, now we come to our Bible reading. Perhaps you turn with me to the second letter of the Apostle Peter, to Peter. And you'll find this on page 1018, towards the back of the Bible.

Page 1018. And we're due to be spending several Sunday evenings, over this next six or eight weeks, I think it is, in 2 Peter. So do let me encourage you to read it through.

It's not so very well known. And to sit down with a large cup of tea sometime in the next two or three days and work your way through it. It's quite a short letter, as you can see. But that would help, I think, to prepare for our studies over these next few Sunday evenings.

So the second letter of Peter, and I'll read the first 15 verses tonight. Simeon Peter, or Simon 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. May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

[1 : 1 0] 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, 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.

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

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.

For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure.

For if you practice these qualities, you will never fall. For in this way, there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[2 : 4 1] Therefore, I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I'm in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.

And I will make every effort so that after my departure, you may be able at any time to recall these things. Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us.

Well, I remember reading somewhere that East Lothian is one of Scotland's best-kept secrets. A beautiful area, but rather off the beaten track, and therefore rarely visited.

And I think you might say that Peter's second letter is one of the Bible's best-kept secrets. It's a great letter, but it too is rarely visited. It sits towards the back of the New Testament, and can seem rather overshadowed by the great letters of Paul, and even by one Peter, which is longer and I think better known.

But even though this is relatively short, this letter, it has a powerful message for the modern church about how to understand the gospel better, and how to live the Christian life more effectively. So I do trust it will be a blessing to us as we think about it over these next few Sunday evenings.

[4 : 11] What I'd like to do tonight is, first of all, to introduce the letter as a whole, and then to look at just the first four verses of chapter 1. Now, have you ever wondered why there might be so many letters in the New Testament?

An interesting question. The New Testament contains 27 books, and 22 of them are letters. There are the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, but then 22 letters, 13 by the Apostle Paul, four by the Apostle John, if you include the book of Revelation, two by Peter, one each from James and Jude, and then we have the letter to the Hebrews, and nobody knows who wrote that.

But it seems that God takes this letter form of communication very seriously, and no doubt one reason for this is that a letter is personal and persuasive.

Which would you rather receive from a good friend? An email or a handwritten letter? I think I would go for the letter every time. I know that emailing is quick and easy and handy and so on, but the very fact that a handwritten letter is slower and more costly to the sender makes it much more precious to the receiver.

You know that the author has put time and effort into it, and consequently you as the receiver put time and effort into reading it. When an email comes, you tend to scan it quickly just for a few seconds and then put it on one side.

[5 : 37] But when a handwritten letter comes, you sit down and give it much more careful attention. And these letters, of course, are much more than handwritten letters. They were very costly. To buy the parchment and so on and to get the things sent from A to B would have cost hundreds of pounds in modern terms.

So it really was quite an undertaking to write one of these New Testament letters. And the apostles who wrote these letters, Peter and Paul and John and the others, they were loving pastors with a deep concern for the health of the churches.

And that surely is why God places so much value on the apostles' letters as a means of instructing the churches. They are very loving documents, pastoral, personal, and persuasive.

And Simon Peter, the author of this letter, was actually writing out of obedience to Jesus. Now I say that because, you may remember this, at the very end of John's Gospel, John chapter 21, after the resurrection of Jesus, Jesus meets Peter and various other disciples on the seashore.

And after breakfast, which Jesus has cooked, Peter and Jesus walk along the beach together. And Jesus three times asks Peter, do you love me? And each time Peter replies, yes, Lord, I do love you.

[6 : 52] Now the background to that is that Peter had three times denied that he knew Jesus on the early morning of Good Friday, just before the crucifixion. So Jesus now gives Peter three opportunities to reverse his denials and confess his love for him.

So Peter says, yes, Lord, I do love you. And each time he says that, Jesus immediately says to him, well then, feed my sheep, or tend my lambs.

In other words, if you truly love me, you will now look after my flock. You'll feed them and you will care for them. And that's what we find Peter doing in both of his letters. He is simply feeding the flock.

He's obeying Jesus's command to him. By this stage, of course, 30 years and more have passed. This letter was probably written sometime between 60 and 65 AD.

Both Peter and Paul were thought to have been executed in Rome during the early 60s AD when that arch enemy of the church, the Emperor Nero, was on the throne. So this letter was written to feed the flock, to give its readers strength and encouragement and nourishment.

[8 : 02] All the letters of the Bible, of the New Testament, are designed to give strength and encouragement and perseverance to the readers. Now let's be a little bit more specific about the purpose of this particular letter.

Can we turn to the last two verses of the letter, which I actually quoted just before praying a few minutes ago? Chapter 3, verses 17 and 18. Because these two final verses sum up the reason or the reasons why Peter has written this letter.

So verse 17, you therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you're 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. So in those two verses, Peter's readers are to take care over two things.

First of all, there's a danger, a danger from lawless people, people who have no respect for God's laws and principles. Now Peter actually has a lot to say about them throughout chapter 2.

[9 : 09] He doesn't just say very briefly, beware of false teachers. He goes into a great deal of detail in chapter 2, not only about what these people are teaching, but also about their lifestyle.

Chapter 2 is a pretty distasteful chapter, but God has included it for the very good reason that the kind of errors and lawlessness that were common in the first century are equally common today.

They've been common throughout all the centuries. Patterns repeat themselves. Just turn back to the final verse of chapter 2. What the true proverb says has happened to them.

That's these lawless people. The dog returns to its own vomit and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire. Vomit and mire.

Nobody likes either of those things. But the Lord, because he loves us, is using Peter to teach the church to recognize these influences that have power to ruin churches.

[10 : 12] Chapter 2 is designed to mature us, to bring us out of naivety so that we can protect the churches. Protecting the church from false teaching and bad influence is a major part of the pastor's responsibility, but that's a responsibility that all of us share in to some extent.

So that's Peter's first purpose, to expose the thinking and the lifestyle of a group of false teachers who were threatening the stability of the early churches.

But his second great concern comes through in the final verse of the letter, in chapter 3, verse 18. But grow, he says, grow, in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So he's saying to them, have you, have you, my readers, experienced something of the grace of Christ in your lives already? Yes, of course you have. You're Christians.

You've come to believe the good news about Christ. And do you know him to some degree? Yes, of course you do. But you must grow now in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus.

[11 : 16] Whatever you do, don't be satisfied with the level of experience and understanding of him that you have at present. Take care to keep growing. attend to the means of growth.

Now, do you see how closely these two purposes are linked together in real experience? It's only as we grow in our knowledge of Christ that we become strong to resist the allurements of false teaching.

Let me give just one simple example. Peter speaks there in chapter 3, verse 17 of lawless people. So here's an example of lawlessness. A false teacher might say, according to the gospel, we are now freed from the straight jacket of law.

The law of God, oh, it had a purpose, certainly, a good purpose, because it brought us to Christ. But now that we're Christians, we're in the sphere of grace. As the apostle Paul teaches us in Romans, we can never be justified by obeying the law.

We now, therefore, have a moral freedom to which our Old Testament ancestors were strangers. Grace is free. Grace has no boundaries. Therefore, let us enjoy our freedoms.

[12 : 31] Now, you can soon see where that leads to, can't you? The problem with it is that it sounds quite good initially. It is true that one of the purposes of God's law is to show us our moral bankruptcy and our sin and to lead us to Christ.

And it is true that Paul teaches that there's no justification through trying to obey God's law. But Paul goes on to teach that once we are justified through faith in Christ, we then need to return to God's law and follow it because it teaches us how to live in a way that pleases God.

There's no justification through law-keeping, but the law of God and the law of Jesus becomes our delight and shows us how to live a happy and self-disciplined life within the right boundaries.

As Jesus says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. So the one who says that obedience to the Bible's ethical teaching is no longer required is not somebody who loves Jesus.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. So to return to these final verses in Peter's letter, the way not to be carried away by the error of lawless people is to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus.

[13 : 45] The purpose of this letter then is to expose false teaching and the dangers it brings in order that the churches may be able to stand firm and not be carried away into ruin or lose their stability.

Now you might think, but the Tron church, isn't this a strong church? There can't be any danger of lawless false teaching creeping into a church like this, can there?

Well friends, there is always danger. Peter says in his first letter, be watchful, your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

No church is ever impervious to the attacks of the devil. Church history is littered with examples of churches which were once strong but have now disappeared. Think of Western Europe.

We're part of it. Western Europe was once known as Christendom. But the dominant mindset today from Scandinavia down to Greece is one of agnostic secularism.

[14 : 48] We must be very watchful and to Peter will help us in the words of chapter 3 verse 17 to take care that we're not carried away with the error of lawless people because then we would lose our stability.

Now one or two other things by way of introduction. First of all, this letter seems to have been written shortly before Peter's death. And that gives it a certain poignant power.

Just look with me at chapter 1 verse 13. I'll read 1 13 and 14. I think it right, he says, as long as I'm in this body to stir you up by way of reminder since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.

And that word soon should really be translated swiftly or suddenly. What Jesus had told Peter about Peter's death is again recorded for us in John's Gospel chapter 21.

Jesus said this to Peter, Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk about wherever you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.

[16:06] this he said to show by what kind of death Peter was to glorify God. So Peter had been living now for about 30 years with the knowledge that in old age he was going to have his hands stretched out and that he would die in that posture.

And that surely could only be crucifixion. And early church history tells us that that's exactly what did happen to Peter, that he was crucified in Rome, possibly upside down in the persecutions of Emperor Nero.

So it means that this letter has a certain last words feel about it. And in that sense it's a little bit like Paul's second letter to Timothy where he says to Timothy, the time of my departure has come.

I've fought the good fight, I've finished the race, I've kept the faith. You get a similar thing right at the end of the book of Deuteronomy where Moses passes his final messages, his last sermons to the people of Israel.

There's something weighty about last words. So Peter is saying in this letter, my beloved, after this letter my pen is laid down, my voice is silent, so give special attention to these words of mine.

[17:18] Now just one more thing. To Peter, it seems, is written to the same group of people, the same churches, as those who received one Peter. Just look at chapter 3, verse 1.

3-1. This is now the second letter that I'm writing to you, beloved. In both of them, I'm stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder. Now we'll look at this theme of reminding in a week or two because it's an important thing in this letter.

But I just want at this point for us to see that the two letters were written to the same recipients. But Peter is not working over just the same kind of ground in these two letters.

The purpose of this letter is to strengthen the Christians against false teaching, whereas 1 Peter is written to strengthen them in the face of persecution. So that means that between them, these two letters are dealing with Satan's two main methods of attacking the church.

First of all, persecution, which is forceful and brutal and completely unsubtle. But secondly, false teaching, which is deceitful, insinuating, and hard to detect.

[18:27] Well, that's enough preliminary. Let's get to the text now and think about the first four verses of chapter 1. And my title is There is Only One Way to Escape the World's Corruption.

I've got two headings tonight. First then, from verse 1. There is only one faith. Now when I say that, I'm not thinking about Hinduism and Islam and Buddhism in relation to Christianity.

It is true, of course, that those faiths are false faiths because they're invented by men and not revealed by God. But when I say there is only one faith, what I mean is there is only one Christian faith, which is the faith taught by the apostles.

Just look at the way Peter writes up verse 1. Don't you think it's rather odd? To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours. What Peter means is your faith is of the same worth and quality as the faith of us apostles.

When he says ours, he means us apostles. So let's remember who Peter is writing to. It's the same people as his first letter is written to. And at the beginning of one Peter, we find that he's writing to a number of churches that are scattered around Asia Minor, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Bithynia, and so on, which are all areas in western Turkey as we think of it today.

- [19 : 55] In other words, Gentile areas. Now one of the big questions that the apostles had to deal with in the first century was the question of whether the Gentiles who were responding to the gospel had to become Jews before they could really become Christians.

Did they have to submit to circumcision and the kosher food laws and other regulations in the law of Moses? Now the answer was a resounding no. And it was Paul who led the way in teaching the churches that Jew and Gentile were on exactly the same footing before God.

One of the main themes of the epistle to the Romans is that Jew and Gentile alike can only be justified in the sight of God through faith in Christ. That's the only way. But it took a long time, certainly at least several decades, before this vitally important point really sank into the church's understanding.

The Jews historically looked down on the Gentiles. Think of Peter himself when he first went to visit the Gentile Cornelius in Acts chapter 10.

Cornelius was quite a senior Roman soldier and Peter received a vision to go down and find this man called Cornelius and tell him the gospel. But Peter went to Cornelius' house very squeamishly.

- [21 : 12] If you read the account in Acts chapter 10, it's as though as he steps over the threshold, he feels as if he's almost stepping into a pan of sewage. It's as though he says, oh dear, dear, I don't normally associate with people like this.

It's very strange. He's not the eager missionary at all. He's really got his arm twisted up his back like that. The Jews looked down on the Gentiles and the Gentiles were painfully aware that that's the way the Jews regarded them.

Now, Peter eventually had to learn his lesson from Paul, finally. But here in the very first verse of his letter, many years later, he's assuring his Gentile Christian readers that their faith is of equal standing with that of the Jewish apostles.

That's a very similar thing today. Or we can apply this in a similar way. Think of Christians who belong to churches which have long histories. Christians from Scotland, for example, or England, or America, or Germany, have long historical credentials.

They've supplied great leaders of the Reformation. They've had fine traditions of scholarship and learning and so on. There might be a temptation then to think of Christians from Asia or Africa as being a bit lightweight by comparison, having less depth, less background, less understanding.

- [22 : 33] But a shorter history does not mean less depth. In fact, it can often mean more because our brothers and sisters from Asia and Africa and the Middle East have often had to endure persecution of a kind that we haven't known in this country for a very long time.

But Peter's point here in verse 1 is that there is only one faith. It's the same for people of all nationalities, all classes, and all groups. And it's one of the glories of the gospel, it always has been, that it breaks down any sense of group superiority.

In the world, in the non-Christian world, a sense of group superiority lies at the bottom of almost every conflict. Tribalism in Africa and the Middle East, clan warfare in Scottish history, Anglo-Saxons and Normans in English history, or think of Hitler's polluted dream of a superior race, or think of recent and current British history, upper class and middle class and working class, Tories and socialists, toffs and laborers, and right bang up to date nationalists and unionists, in Scotland now as well as in Ireland, Brexiteers and Remainers.

Now as Peter tells us in Acts chapter 10, God is no respecter of persons. The gospel breaks down all those walls of partition. It's only in the Lord's church that human beings can experience that kind of unity.

it's a wonderful thing. It's lovely and to be treasured. But there's another aspect to this that we need to understand. This one and only faith that we share is the faith of the apostles.

[24 : 22] You see, Peter is writing here not only as a Jew to Gentiles, but as an apostle to Christians who were not apostles. He reminds his readers at the beginning of verse one that he is a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.

He does the same thing at the start of his first letter, just as Paul does at the beginning of many of his letters. And it's highly significant, this business of being an apostle, a representative of Jesus, not simply one who is sent out, but one whose very words carry all the authority of Jesus himself.

Think of the book of Acts, the only New Testament book that records the history of the church's initial expansion, those first 30 years. Acts, the Acts of the Apostles centers upon the apostles.

Ninety percent of it describes the work of Peter the Apostle, the apostle to the Jews, and Paul the apostle to the Gentiles. Early on in the book, at the end of chapter two, at the end of the day of Pentecost, we read that the new Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.

Why? Because the apostles were uniquely commissioned by Jesus himself to be the foundation layer of the church's teaching. All later teaching in the church is derivative.

[25 : 38] The apostles' teaching is primary. It is the words, the commands of the Lord Jesus himself. Just turn over the page to the very beginning of John's first letter.

There's two pages on, one John chapter one. Because John also puts this truth forward in a very striking manner. I'll read from verse one where John is talking about Jesus.

Talking about the audible, visible, tangible, historical Jesus, the incarnate Jesus. So when he says, that which was from the beginning, he's talking about Jesus.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard with our own ears, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life, the life was made manifest and we have seen it and testified to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us, that which we, we apostles, have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you so that you too may have fellowship with us.

Isn't that remarkable? We are the apostles. We're the ones who saw and heard and touched Jesus. Our testimony is eyewitness testimony. And we apostles proclaim Christ to you, non-apostles, so that you too may have access to our fellowship.

[27 : 05] In Peter's language, so that your faith may have an equal standing with ours. And what is this fellowship into which we apostles are inviting you? There it is at the end of verse 3 in 1 John chapter 1.

Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. So this means that there is no fellowship for us with the Father and the Son, us who are non-apostles, unless we submit to the teaching of the apostles and share fellowship with them.

We cannot know the Father and the Son unless we know them through the teaching of the apostles. Now this has a most important implication for us today.

Think of the last 20 centuries. The world was changing, I think we can say, rather gradually in all sorts of ways between roughly the first century AD and the 19th century AD.

Since the 19th century, the speed of change has become much more rapid, especially in medicine and science and technology, and most particularly in the technology of electronic communication.

[28 : 11] And it's for this reason, because of this very rapid change, that voices are raised in public to argue that changing times demand a changing gospel. There are some church leaders who are saying, we've got to present to our generation a gospel which our generation can accept.

Public ethical standards are rapidly changing, and if we don't offer a gospel which can accommodate these changes, we shall be becalmed in a backwater, and nobody will pay any attention to us anymore.

We'll be like the dodo, interesting but deceased. Now the truth is that if we unshackle our moorings from the apostolic teaching, we shall unshackle ourselves from the Father and the Son.

The only true Christian faith is the apostolic faith. Of course the surface trappings and trimmings of our Christian life change. For example, we can heat this building now by gas.

Isn't that terrific? If you'd mentioned gas to Peter and Paul, they wouldn't have known what you were talking about. We can wear trousers and long johns because of our northern climate. We can use every form of electronic aid in our evangelism and our in-house communications, of course.

[29 : 27] But we cannot alter the apostolic gospel or the ethics that are taught by the gospel. These things have been given by God. There is only one faith, and it's the faith and teaching of the apostles.

Now second, Peter teaches Peter teaches us that there is only one ultimately worthwhile knowledge. Here it is in 2 Peter 1, verse 2.

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Verse 3 picks up the same idea.

Think of knowledge, but picks it up in a slightly different way. So verse 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.

And you'll see if you glance down the column there that Peter emphasizes the importance of knowledge again in verse 5 and 6 and verse 8. And in the final verse of the whole letter, as we've seen, he says, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[30 : 40] Now the false teachers, as it's put in chapter 2, verse 1, are rejecting the knowledge of Christ. They're denying the master who bought them. But true Christians are urged by Peter to grow in our knowledge of him.

To deny him is to say, I don't want to know you. It's to push him out of our lives. But to grow in knowledge of him is to open our ears and our hearts to him more and more.

So friends, let me ask, do you know him? When you pray on your own, on your own, with no other human being listening to your prayers, do you speak to him as you do to your best friend?

How well do you know him? Peter is talking here about personal knowledge and friendship and intimacy. And this is the kind of knowledge to be desired above every other kind of knowledge.

It's good to have knowledge in other branches. It's good to know about politics and science and history. It's good to know about sport and music and how to cook. But there is only one ultimately worthwhile knowledge, and that is the knowledge of God and the knowledge of Jesus.

[31 : 51] Remember the words that Jesus himself prayed to God the Father in John chapter 17. This is eternal life. He's talking to the Father. This is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Eternal life consists in the knowledge of God. So this is the real heart of the Christian life. The great goal of the Christian life is not that we should have great experiences.

We'll get experiences if we obey the Lord, but that's not the great goal. Nor is it that we should develop certain views about life. It's not that we should achieve wonderful things.

The great goal of the Christian life is that we should know God the Father and know the Lord Jesus better, because to do so is to taste eternal life in the midst of this damaged old world.

And how do we come to know the Lord better and better? Well, by listening to him. That is, by devouring and digesting everything that the Bible says about him. Man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

[32 : 58] The Bible is God's self-portrait. The Bible is God's self-revelation. So if we're not serious about devouring and digesting our Bibles, we are denying ourselves access to the knowledge of God.

Now, Peter goes on to show us here, in these verses, what great benefits come to us as we grow in our knowledge of God. The first two are grace and peace.

Look at verse 2 again. May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Who wants grace and peace to be multiplied in their experience?

I think we all do, don't we? I certainly do. Grace is the power of God that strengthens us to serve him, and peace is that ongoing inner contentment and joy that prevents us from being rocked and destabilized by adverse events.

And in verse 2, Peter is showing his readers that as their knowledge of the Lord grows, grace and peace will be multiplied in their experience. But it's not only grace and peace that will be multiplied as we get to know the Lord better.

[34 : 11] verses 3 and 4 develop Peter's theme. Notice at the beginning of verse 3, the phrase, granted to us. His divine power has granted to us.

And you'll see that same phrase again at the beginning of verse 4, by which he has granted to us precious and great promises. And then halfway between those two phrases, you'll see again the phrase, through the knowledge of him.

So Peter is telling us that as we come to know the Lord better and better, we become aware of two wonderful grants or gifts which the Lord, in his divine power, has given to us in our weak and helpless natural condition.

Well, I'll take these two gifts in reverse order because I think we'll grasp Peter's logic a bit better that way. First verse 4, here's the first grant or gift. The Lord has granted us his precious and very great promises.

Now we human beings, we quite often make promises to each other, but we don't always keep them. Sometimes because we can't, sometimes of course because we won't. But God is not like that about his promises.

[35 : 22] He makes them and he can be relied upon to keep them. Let me mention just a few of the great promises of the Bible. John 3.16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

It's a promise, isn't it? John 1.12, but to all who did receive him, Jesus, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Romans 5.1, therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 8.1, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Isn't that terrific? John 6.35, Jesus says, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

John 6.37, whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. That's just half a dozen out of hundreds. No wonder Peter describes the promises of God as precious and very great.

[36 : 35] And if you ask the question, what is a believer? What is a believer? The Bible's answer is that a believer is someone who trusts the promises of God, who trusts that whatever God says he will do, he will do.

But Peter doesn't just tell us in verse 4 that God has given us precious and great promises. He tells us why God has given us these promises. Look at the words with me in verse 4.

Why these great promises? So that through them, through the promises, you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

So what's happening is that these promises of God find their way into our hearts and memories. They lodge there as we grow in our knowledge of God and they enable us to become partakers of the divine nature.

Now what a phrase that is. It doesn't mean that we become God. We remain human, not divine. But it does mean that we become increasingly like him.

[37 : 44] His spirit comes to live in our very heart and being. the Holy Spirit causes us to be born again, to become children of God. And his gracious work in us is to reproduce the very characteristics of God in our thinking and our behavior.

Love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and somebody, Josh, self-control.

Thank you very much. Didn't mean to pick on you, but your face looked eager and knowledgeable. In other words, the fruit of the Spirit, what happens is that the features of Jesus himself begin to be seen in us.

And you know this so well, don't you? Of course, you always see it more clearly in other people than you do in yourself because you remain so conscious of your own sinfulness. But over time, the fruit of the Spirit, the character of Jesus himself begins to emerge in our lives.

Just as a sculptor causes a human figure to emerge from the hard rock by skillful sculpting, tapping away, so the Lord causes the likeness of Jesus to emerge in our features.

[38 : 54] We become partakers of the divine nature. But Peter goes straight on to tell us what we've been rescued from in order that this refashioning can take place.

Having escaped, he says, from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. So how is it, what does it mean that the world is filled with corruption because of sinful desire?

I think it works like this. The unregenerate human being, the non-Christian, does not ask what is good, what is true, what is approved by God, what is pure, what tends to the glory of God.

No. He asks, what do I want? What do I want? I want recognition, so I shall assert myself. I want power, so I shall bully other people.

I want wealth, so I shall cut corners to get it. I want sex, so I'll get it in the way that I want it, not the way that God wants it. I want pleasure, so I will put pleasure before duty.

[40 : 03] That's the kind of corruption that fills the world. Men and women desire things in a sinful way and press forward to get the things that they desire and human life becomes skewed and rotten and unhappy.

This is the life of the world that we know so well. But what the gospel does is to wake us up to this fact, the fact that we're all infected with this corruption, that we don't want to love God or serve him or delight in what is pure and true in God.

Yes, there's plenty of corruption out there in the world, but there's plenty of corruption deep in our own hearts as well. But Peter is assuring us here in verse 4 that we are able to escape this corruption and its power because as Christians we are growing more like the Lord Jesus.

We are partaking of the divine nature. The likeness of Christ is being reproduced in us. And this is happening because God is keeping his precious and very great promises to us, his promises that we are being saved and transformed.

What God promises, God performs. And that's why God's people are increasingly able to escape the corruption of the world even in this life.

[41 : 17] And of course, ultimately, his people will be delivered completely from the corrosive presence of sin. Let's long for that day, friends. It'll be soon here. So the grant, the gift of verse 4, is the promises of God and they bring new birth and a new nature along with the joy of escaping the corrupting power of the world.

Well, now finally then, what about the grant of verse 3? Well, it's the grant or gift of being able to live a godly life. Look at verse 3 again. 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.

So again, it's through the knowledge of him. Through knowing him, through getting to know him better, his divine power has granted to the church, now just notice the next word, all, has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

He has omitted nothing that the church needs in order to live a godly life. So if I were to ask this question, what do people feel that they need in order to live a godly life?

What does the Tron church feel that it needs in order to be more godly? If I were to ask that question, I guess there'd be plenty of heartfelt answers. Somebody would say, I need more perseverance in my life.

[42 : 46] Another person would say, I need more love. Somebody else would say, I need to be more thankful and grateful. Somebody else would say, I need more joy, more determination, more boldness, more self-control, more contentment, more patience in suffering.

Well, says Peter here in verse 3, these things are available to the church. The grant has been made already. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

Nothing is lacking. Full provision has been made. Well, how do I tap into it, we ask? Peter replies, read the next five words.

It is through the knowledge of him. It's through knowing him. And more than that, it's through knowing him who called us to his own glory and excellence.

That's who our God is. He has called us. John, Rita, Frida, Anthony, I'm calling you to my own glory.

[43 : 51] Do you want to come? Yes, Lord. Good. Well, if you're a Christian, you're on your way. And through knowing me and getting to know me better and better, you will find that all things that pertain to life and godliness have been granted to you by my divine power.

You will learn patience and suffering. You'll learn perseverance. You'll find that joy grows in your heart and self-control and all these other things as you get to know me better and better.

That's God's message to us in these verses. All things that we need to live a godly life are available. I think these two verses, three and four, are real East Lothian verses.

They're lovely, but they're not often visited. But do you see how they chart, in a sense, the whole map of the Christian life from start to finish? We start there at the end of verse four with the corruption, the grip of the corruption that is in the world, the stinking swamps of the human heart.

We all start there. Smell your own heart with an honest nose and you'll know that there's something rotten there. And the corruption of the world is not just what's in there. It's piled up.

[44 : 59] It's the corruption of six billion human hearts. But God provides escape from this corruption. How? By giving us a new nature so that we partake of the divine nature.

We're born again. We become children of God. And what assurance do we have of this great escape and this new nature? We have God's promises, precious and very great.

And we learn over time to believe these promises and to hold on to them and trust them. And then we find, perhaps gradually at first, but with increasing certainty, we find that it is possible to be godly.

We grow in patience and perseverance and self-control and love and joy. And with the eyes of faith, we see the great figure up at the end of the road calling us, calling us to his own glory, to the excellence of his heavenly home.

So casting a backward glance over our shoulder at the stinking corruption of the world, we pick up our feet and we run to the one who is calling to us. I'm calling you to glory, he says.

[46 : 06] I'm coming, we say. And how does this radical transformation take place in our hearts? This transformation from corruption to glory?

By one means only. Verse 3. Through the knowledge of him. Let's bow our heads and we'll thank him.

How we thank you, our dear heavenly father, that your divine power has made us these wonderful grants so that all things pertaining to life and godliness are available.

And you've given us these great promises. Help us to love them and to learn them, to appreciate them and to have them deeply buried in our hearts so that our lives are built around them.

So that we experience the joy of receiving what is promised even in this life as well as all that is promised for the world to come. And we pray, therefore, that you will help us in our church, in our fellowship together, to grow in our knowledge of you and of our Lord Jesus in whose name we pray.

[47 : 17] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.