



SAVED!



RIGHTEOUS



GROW



VIRTUE



KNOWING THE
LORD

2 PETER 1.1-11

GETTING ON WITH THE LIFE OF FAITH

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

A ReVision Resource

Getting on with the Life of Faith: 2 Peter 1.1-11
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2 Peter 1: Introduction

Peter continues the themes he pursued in his first epistle, but with more intensity in 2 Peter.

He is aware that his time is short. He urges believers to take their faith seriously, and to work hard to realize the full promise of it. He warns that false teachers are afoot, and must be resisted. Time is rushing forward to the consummation of all things, and we must be sure we are ready.

And how do we do that? Grow in the knowledge of Christ we possess, and become full and flourishing citizens in the Kingdom of God.

Peter begins with a reminder that salvation is all of grace, but only because of the work of Jesus Christ. In Him we have precious and very great promises that make it possible for us to partake of the divine essence. This being the case, we must get on with the life of faith, no matter the obstacles, for the time is short.

In his second epistle Peter lays out clearly what it means to know Jesus Christ, what it costs to follow Him, and what we can do in order to realize more of the knowledge of the Lord which is eternal life. Great things very often come in small packages, and 2 Peter certainly falls into that category.

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1 and 2 Peter can encourage, embolden, and instruct us, if we're willing to take the Apostle's words to heart. My prayer is that all who take up this study will do just that. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Salvation by Works

2 Peter 1.1, 2

¹ Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

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

The Story: Peter begins his second epistle to the churches in northern Asia Minor by reminding them that, contrary to what we often hear, salvation *is* by works – only not ours. We enter the salvation that God offers through faith, which is a gift of God (Eph. 2.8, 9). But it is the righteousness of Christ alone that makes faith an effective means of attaining to God’s salvation. The righteousness of Christ works for our salvation in two ways. First, Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of God’s Law, perfectly, exhaustively, and without fail or intermission. All the righteousness any of us could ever require to have a good standing before the Lord is to be found in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. As His grace is multiplied toward us day by day (Jn. 1.16), we increase in righteousness, but not our own. Sanctification is by grace as much as is justification, and the righteousness we express is that of Christ, worked out in us by the Spirit of God. Second, Jesus bore all the wrath of God’s Law against unrighteous sinners – wrath *sufficient* to pay the debt of every human being (1 Jn. 2.2) but *efficient* only for the salvation of all who believe (cf. 1 Tim. 4.10, note that word, “especially”). We are saved by the works of Jesus, by grace through faith.

The Structure: In this period of history, when the Spirit of God is working restoration by advancing the rule of King Jesus, God’s people should think of themselves as Peter did. We are, first, servants of one another and of the sinful world. We are not here for ourselves, but, in the name of Jesus, for others. Second, we are all apostles in that we have been sent to the world as Jesus was sent, and as He sent His apostles with the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Jn. 20.21). Our objective, in our mission of serving others for Jesus’ sake, is to cause grace and peace to be multiplied wherever we go. But this can only come to pass as people acquire and then increase in the knowledge of Jesus our Lord. Peter will end this epistle in precisely the same place, making an *inclusio* out of his book as a whole. Nice touch for an unschooled fisherman – carried along by the Holy Spirit (1.19-21).

Do you see your life as a mission of service to others in Jesus’ name? What will that mean for you today?

2 Precious and Very Great

2 Peter 1.3, 4

³ ...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, ⁴ by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The Story: There are a number of passages in Scripture that encapsulate the life of faith in a brief and powerful way. This is among the best of them. Notice, first, the end of our salvation and the means to it are the same. We are saved by coming into the knowledge of God Who calls us – which is eternal life (Jn. 17.3) – in order that we may grow in the knowledge of God. Moreover, that growth “into” God is so intimate and personal that Peter describes us as becoming “partakers of the divine nature.” Paul summarizes this process in 2 Corinthians 3.12-18. As we stand in the hope of glory (Rom. 5.1, 2) and engage the glory and excellence of the Lord, revealed in His Word, we are transformed into that same image of glory and excellence as we “partake” of the Lord Himself. The promises of God are at the heart of this – all that covenant language of hope and blessing. But to attain to this we must leave behind the corruption of the sinful world (cf. Eph. 4.17-24). And how shall we attain to such an awesome way of life? Only by grace, through the “divine power” of God Who gives us all we need for life and godliness through the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The Structure: In our callings as servants and apostles we must strive to improve in the glory and excellence of the Lord in every area of our lives. We will not be credible unless it is seen by those we seek to serve, and to whom we proclaim the Kingdom, that this “Good News” really makes a difference in our lives. The knowledge of God, which we strive to improve in day by day, becomes the glory and excellence of God as we attain the promises and the blessings they hold out to us. By turning away from all sin and eagerly seeking to lay hold on the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus, we can effectively fulfill our calling to know the Lord and to show Him to the world through our transformed lives and power-assisted speech. Unless this is your aspiration in life, Peter’s not writing to you. And if he’s not writing to you, then you need to consider whether or not you have “obtained a faith of equal standing” with his (v. 1).

Would those who know you describe your life as increasing in the knowledge of God? Do they see, in every area of your life, the evidence of divine glory and excellence?

3 Daily Supplements

2 Peter 1.5

⁵ But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge...

The Story: We really need to slow down here because Peter begins an extremely important summary of the life of faith in vv. 5-11. He begins with the motive for growth: “for this very reason...” What reason? For the reason that God has saved us, holds out to us precious and very great promises, and draws us into Himself with divine and transforming power! Because of this, Peter says, because of what God has done and is doing, we need to get busy and get serious about our faith. We must make every effort to supplement the present condition of our faith with more of the evidence of faith which is the outward expression of our inward hope (Heb. 11.1). Faith by itself is worthless, as James explained (Jms. 2.14-26). Faith must bear fruit or we will not be able to know that, indeed, the Lord has chosen and redeemed us (Jn. 15.4-16). The fruit of faith is virtue, which is expressed in good works of service and witness (Eph. 3.10). Those who have true faith will press on to bring forth virtue. And, when they do, it won’t be their virtue, but that of Christ Himself.

The Structure: We cannot fulfill our callings as servants and apostles in this age of restoration, this time before the Lord returns when the Gospel and Kingdom of Christ are advancing on earth, unless we work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2.12). This is hard work, daily work, supplementing faith with virtue so that our lives display the glory and excellence of the Lord as we go about to serve and bear witness in His name. If the love of God, His promises, and His power are not sufficient incentive to get us growing into His glory and excellence, then we have to question seriously whether or not we know the Lord at all.

Do you have a rule of disciplines that you follow each day, to help you supplement your faith with virtue? How’s that working?

4 The More You Know

2 Peter 1.6, 7

⁶ ...to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷ to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

The Story: Growing as “partakers of the divine nature” (v. 4) is an ongoing, increasing adventure. But consistent growth in the Lord depends on increasing in the knowledge of God more and more. This is not just head knowledge – Bible knowledge or doctrine – although it involves that. This is *relationship* knowledge, encounter-the-glory-of-God knowledge, knowledge which is acquired through resorting to the Word of God and prayer, day by day, moment by moment. As the knowledge of God increases in us, our ability to exercise self-control will improve, until self-control – for example, in dealing with temptation – brings forth the fruit of steadfastness, and steadfastness matures, by degrees, into godliness. Here, with “godliness”, we come back to “partaking of God” and, hence, knowing Him better. This brings forth affection for our Christian brethren which, the more we nurture it, blossoms into real and genuine love. Love is the end of all our instruction in the Lord (1 Tim. 1.5).

The Structure: The Christian life is a dynamic way of life. There’s no standing still. There are no plateaus. We are called to press on, strive day by day, and increase in fruitfulness for the Lord. In a very real sense, the individual Christian life in this time of restoration should be a microcosm of the progress of the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. As those who know us see us growing in the knowledge of the Lord and fruitfulness in expressing His glory, they should understand that this is what God is doing everywhere in the world, growing and advancing His Kingdom like a precious, irresistible stone in the midst of the nations of the world (Dan. 2.44, 45).

Is your life a microcosm of the Kingdom? How could you begin, today, to know more consistent growth in knowing the Lord and showing Him to the people around you?

5 If...

2 Peter 1.8

⁸ For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Story: Whenever we come upon a conditional clause like this (“if”), we need to ponder it carefully. As Peter understood the life of faith, the knowledge of Jesus Christ is supposed to lead to fruitfulness in Him (cf. Matt. 7.20). If we say we know the Lord, then that *knowledge* of Christ should be apparent in the *virtues* coming forth from us. So Peter says, “If...” Unless these virtues of godliness and love are in us *and increasing*, we are going to be unfruitful for the Lord. And an “unfruitful Christian” is a contradiction in terms, as the writer of Hebrews observes (6.1-9). That “If...” looms really large, because it implies an “if not...” on the obverse: If there is no evidence of these qualities, or if we have become stagnant in our growth, such that we are not bearing fruit, to what will we point to justify our claim of being a servant and apostle of Christ?

The Structure: Peter’s language sounds almost like unfruitfulness is the “natural inclination” or bent of many who claim to be followers of Christ. Something needs to be happening in us to “keep” us from falling into that natural state. But what needs to happen is in our power to determine. We must take up the means of growth and apply ourselves to escaping the downward drift of our souls into unfruitfulness. The witness of the Christian community today would be greatly strengthened “if” only more believers took Peter’s words to heart.

How do you encourage your fellow believers to grow in the knowledge and virtues of the Lord (Heb. 10.24)?

6 More Diligent!

2 Peter 1.9, 10

⁹For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

¹⁰Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble...

The Story: The unfruitful Christian may not necessarily be not a Christian at all. But he should be concerned. He's so "nearsighted" that he spends all his time thinking about having been forgiven and going to heaven. It's all he can see. And he gives little if any attention to the daily walk of following Jesus. This is not what God intends. Are you blinded by your salvation so that you are actually unfruitful in it? If so, it's time to ratchet-up the diligence of making your calling and election sure. We can be sure, Peter implies, that God has saved us. But that certainty doesn't come from remembering that we've prayed to receive Jesus. It comes from being "all the more diligent" to bring forth the virtues of godliness and love in our daily walk. Further, the more diligent we are in acquiring and expressing these virtues – the virtues of Christ at work within us, making us willing and able to do the pleasure of God (Phil. 2.13) – the greater will be our strength against all temptation, so that we will stumble and fall less frequently.

The Structure: Believers need to encourage one another in giving all diligence to grow in virtue and good works, just as Peter was doing with these believers (Heb. 10.24). The life of a Christian is not easy. It's like running a marathon race, boxing against a powerful opponent, fighting a war, or bringing a crop to fruitfulness. This is hard work, and each of us needs friends to encourage and help us in the journey. We're bound to stumble and fall from time to time, but if we can pick one another up and help one another avoid the pitfalls of temptation next time around, our witness to the watching world will be strengthened, not merely by our own improved righteousness, but by the love we bear for one another.

Who encourages you in the life of faith? Do you have soul friends to share and pray with in your journey?

7 Right This Way

2 Peter 1.11

11 ...for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Story: “For so...” of “For in this way...” What way? And to where? *To where* is to the eternal Kingdom of the Lord Jesus. This is a Kingdom we enter *now*, increasingly, and finally on the day of Christ’s return. All who have tasted of the Kingdom want more. And, as they attain to more of the righteousness, peace, joy, and power of the Holy Spirit – which is the Kingdom of God (Rom. 14.17, 18; 1 Cor. 4.20) – they long all the more earnestly for the final appearing of their King and His glorious reign. Do you want to be in that company? Then, Peter says, the only way to be sure of this is by giving all diligence to grow in the knowledge of God and the godliness and love that issue from that. How shall we walk? And to where? Right this way!

The Structure: It is important to remember that this community of believers to whom Peter is writing had been experiencing persecution for their faith (1 Pet. 1). It’s not like they were on “cruise control” in their walk with the Lord. They were up against it, and giving all diligence to serve and witness was rather a hard slog. Peter might have excused them, given the adversity they were facing. Instead, he urged them on in their calling, so that they might be even more effective as servants and witnesses for the Lord. Not even persecution can excuse us from giving all diligence in bearing fruit for the Lord. What about the excuses we muster each day for why we aren’t growing, serving, and bearing witness any more than we are?

Meditate on Romans 14.17-19. How do Paul’s words supplement and reinforce what we see in 2 Peter 1.1-11?

For reflection or discussion

1. What are the “exceedingly great and precious promises” of God? How do these relate to our everyday lives as followers of Christ?
2. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 1.19, 20. In what sense are the promises of God “Yes” and “Amen” in Jesus?
3. What does it mean to be a “partaker” of the divine nature? What is the pre-requisite for experiencing this? How do you experience this?
4. Explain each of the virtues to must “add” to our faith in order to ensure entrance to the Kingdom of God (vv. 5, 6, 11)? How can believers help one another grow in these virtues
5. Peter expects us to be fruitful “in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” What kind of fruit should we be cultivating in our souls and lives?
6. What is your current practice of being “even more diligent to make your calling and election sure”? Can you see any areas where this could be improved?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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