

2. Knowing and growing in Christ

July 31, 2008

We can make a big promise even though we may not be able to fulfill it. Apostle Peter did too. He was a boisterous and self-overconfident former fisherman who became a disciple of Jesus Christ. He also was a self-appointed spokesman for the disciples.

Peter rushed ahead when he should have waited; he slept when he should have prayed; he talked when he should have listened. He was a courageous Christian, but careless, like many of us.

Matthew 26:35 Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples.

That very night, however, the echo of the words of Jesus and his own words of denial cracked like a whip over his broken heart to drive him through the streets, weeping.

Mark 14:30 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times."

A rock? Hardly. Peter felt as if his life had been shattered into a hundred useless pieces. But he didn't stay there. According to a tradition, Peter was crucified upside down at his request because he felt that he was not worthy of having the same kind of death like his Master Jesus.

Now at the latter part of his life, as he looked back what the Lord Jesus had done in his life and the people whom the Lord touched through him, this old fisherman couldn't help himself but to pen this letter to exhort and to warn them about the false teachings in the midst of believers who were unaware. He wanted to tell them not to be overconfident like once he was.

Peter opened his letter with a description of the Christian life. Before he described the counterfeits, he described the true believers. The best way to detect falsehood is to understand the characteristics of the truth.

A. A BONDSERVANT AND AN APOSTLE

2 Peter 1:1 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:

Even though he possesses the authority of an apostle, he describes himself first as Christ's servant. You don't find any self-confidence in his letter any more. He have learned it.

According to the biblical scholars who specialize in ancient Greek grammar, the way Peter said "*our God and Savior Jesus Christ*" should be translated as "*our God and Savior, Jesus Christ*". In other words, God and the Savior Jesus Christ are the same person. We find the same expressions by apostle Paul in the Book of Titus.

Titus 2:9-10 Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

Titus 3:4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared

The way Peter wrote in this opening, He included every believer – Jews and Gentiles alike in Christ Jesus – in the same category of his faith. That means that there are no special groups of people who have a special salvation advantage. We all come to Jesus in the same way – His way.

B. GRACE AND PEACE

2 Peter 1:2-3 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, 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,

I want you to pay a special attention to the way Peter wrote here.

We cannot have grace and peace unless we, first, have the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. NIV

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

May God bless you with his special favor and wonderful peace as you come to know Jesus, our God and Lord, better and better. NLT

The term used here for ‘knowledge’ isn’t referring to simply compiled information. It signifies a knowledge that comes only from intimate fellowship with the Lord. Because the more we can comprehend the meaning of who Jesus Christ is, the more we can understand the meaning of grace and the experience of peace.

According to v3, God’s divine power has given to us all things that are concerning to life and godliness. When we are born into the family of God by faith in Christ, we are born complete. God gives us everything we will ever need “for life and godliness.” Nothing has to be added. We must and need to understand this fact clearly. This is the reason why Peter wrote this letter. The false teachers claimed that they had a special doctrine or revelation from God to add. Nonsense.

C. GOD’S PROMISE AND OUR PARTICIPATION

2 Peter 1:4 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.

God has not only given us all that we need for life and godliness, but He has also given us His Word to enable us to develop this life and godliness.

Someone once counted the number of promises made by God to mankind in the Bible and came up with a total of 7,487! Though not every promise applies to us today, there are still hundreds, even thousands that do. Promises such as eternal life for the believer (John 3:16), strength for the weary (Isa. 40:28-31), rewards for the obedient (Rev. 22:12), comfort for the struggling (2 Cor. 1:3-5), and hope for the dying (1 Cor. 15:53-57). Through these promises, Peter says, we become partakers of the divine nature, a nature that will enable us to escape the corruption of a world driven by lust.

Before we move on, let’s name a few promises of God we can think of. So many!!!

The corruption that is in the world expresses itself through lust – the ungodly desire of this world which does not limit itself to sexual content, but also it expands to any and

every carnal desire. God is above and beyond the corruption of this world. It should also be that way with those who are the partakers of the divine nature.

If we feed the new nature the nourishment of the Word, then we will have little interest in the garbage of the world. But if we “make provision for the flesh”, our sinful nature will lust after the “old sins” and we will disobey God. Godly living is the result of cultivating the new nature within.

The promise of God is not to be underlined or highlighted only, but to be practiced and trusted. Otherwise, it is nothing more than an unclaimed promise.

D. CULTIVATION WITH DILIGENCE

2 Peter 1:5-7 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

So we have everything we need for life and godliness as well as God’s promises through His Word, the Bible. Then what? Wouldn’t it be great if everything just happens altogether without our effort and diligence? That would be a cakewalk, fishing in a barrel, too easy. The problem is that we don’t learn how to be Christlike in that way. So what does God do? He makes us work with diligence.

- **Faith:** It is the foundation of Christian life. It’s the firm conviction that God’s Word is true. In practical terms, it means abandoning ourselves to His will, His strength, and His wisdom.

- **Virtue or ‘moral excellence’:** At the root of this term is the idea of ‘courage’ in classical Greek it was used to indicate bravery and valor. So by using this word, Peter is encouraging us to strengthen our faith with the courage to stand firm in the truth, unswayed by majority opinion.

- **Knowledge:** The Greek term ‘gnosis’, meaning practical knowledge, is one of Peter’s favorite words. It refers to a common sense approach to applying biblical principles in our daily circumstances.

- **Self-control:** Literally, this word means, “the ability to take a grip of oneself.” Nothing is to master us but the Master Himself. Not work, sex, food, or any of the other things that can so easily control our lives. Self-control means that, with God’s help, we can live a more balanced life – even in a world where overindulgence is hyped as the highway to happiness.

- **Perseverance:** The Greek word for perseverance is often translated “patience.” But patience is too passive a word. It is a voluntary and daily suffering of hard and difficult things, for the sake of honor and usefulness.

- **Godliness:** This refers to an authentic piety with two ways.

- 1) There’s a right attitude toward God, reflected in worship and obedience.

- 2) There’s a right attitude toward others, evidenced by showing respect and a servant’s heart.

- **Brotherly kindness:** The brotherly kindness that Christ intends for us to display involves bearing one another’s burdens. We’re to come out of our ivory theological towers and get involved in helping others in the trenches of life. We need to make

room for other people's opinions, feelings and suggestions. And we've got to be willing to see life through their eyes.

- **Love:** The top rung of Peter's eight step ladder is love. It's the one virtue that comprises and unites all the others. The term used is agape, which is best defined as seeking the highest good of the other person. And that includes loving the unlovely, just as God in Christ has done for us.

E. FRUITFULNESS AND UNFRUITFULNESS

2 Peter 1:8-9 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

We just read two individuals' cases – both Christians, one is a fruitful believer who exercises what he learns from the Lord and brings the glory to Him, the other who has all the things he needs for godliness yet does nothing with them. Peter calls him shortsighted and even blinded by his own selfish attitude.

Please note the word 'abound'. It means flourishing. It should not be a one time deal, rather it should all the time.

F. ETERNAL SECURITY

2 Peter 1:10-11 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It is not our profession of faith that guarantees that we are saved. It is our progression in the faith that gives us that assurance. The person who claims to be a child of God but whose character and conduct give no evidence of spiritual growth is deceiving himself and heading for judgment.

Let me put it in simpler term: A person who is truly born-again will start to change his or her lifestyle, vocabularies, action and everything that affects him as a person. In other words, if that person lives long enough, that person would not continue in sinful life.

Since the meaning of the word 'election' is very close to 'predestination', we need to think about a very important thing.

Peter points out that election is no excuse for spiritual immaturity or for lack of effort in the Christian life. Some believers say, "What is going to be is going to be. There is nothing we can do." But Peter admonishes us to "be diligent." This means "get at it, boy." While it is true that God must work in us before we can do His will, it is also true that we must be willing for God to work, and we must cooperate with Him. Divine election must never be an excuse for human laziness.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) Living a useful life on earth begins with salvation and requires diligence.

2) Leaving a fruitful life behind at death results in motivation for others and guarantees rewards.

Hebrews 6:10-12 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.