

Truth for Today

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Lessons from 2 Peter: The Believer's Blessing - 2 Peter 1:1-21

As we travel about more widely now than ever before, it is not surprising for any of us to visit an area which is outside of our knowledge. In these circumstances we often seek help from those who have experience of the area. Directions are given, sometimes written down to help us to remember the course ahead. This was part of the purpose of the Apostle Peter as he wrote 2 Peter.

Our purpose today is to begin to look at 2 Peter. The Bible contains two letters he has written. The first, 1 Peter, was particularly to Jewish believers who were suffering persecution and were forced to move away from their homeland to other countries. They needed encouraging and strengthening.

Later the Apostle decided that there was more to say to them. He knew he was coming to the end of his life and wanted to reinforce some of the important matters which had previously been discussed. Like other writers in the New Testament, he saw that there were false teachers entering the Church and he believed it necessary to make this plain to the believers, so as to be sure these false teachers would be recognised. Secondly, Peter wants to remind the believers that the Lord is coming back. He does not speak concerning the moment when all believers will be called out of this world, but of the time when the Lord comes to reign. He is particularly setting out some of the problems linked with those who would deny the coming of the Lord and warns his readers to be aware of this false teaching too. As Peter writes to "them that have obtained like precious faith with us" (2 Peter 1:1), his letter is for us too. It is right and valuable for all of us to accept the teaching of the Scriptures and the wisdom of one who has learned and passed on the truth. Notice how often Peter reminds his readers that he wants them to remember those things they have already heard and accepted as truth. We find this mentioned in 2 Peter 1:12-15 and 2 Peter 3:1.

Let us look now at this letter. We can see that it is divided into three sections with the chapters. They are:

- Chapter 1: The Gracious Provisions of God
- Chapter 2: The Evil of False Teachers
- Chapter 3: The Future of the Earth.

Our purpose today is to consider the gracious provisions of God. The wise teacher, before going into the problems, has set out the blessings he desires his readers to concentrate upon. So Peter wants to cheer up his readers with all the good things that God has done. That is always a good starting policy for all of us. Then, if necessary, we can go on from there. Are you depressed today? Are the troubles surrounding you seemingly too great? Read 2 Peter 1 today and rejoice in all the Lord Jesus has done for you. Take these positive statements and give the Lord thanks for every one of them.

We can break down 2 Peter 1 into three sections:

- 2 Peter 1:1-4: God's Gracious Provisions are through Christ.
- 2 Peter 1:5-11: The Development of the Divine Nature we have Received.
- 2 Peter 1:12-21: The Promises we have gained through Prophecy.

God's Gracious Provisions are through Christ (2 Peter 1:1-4)

Let us first note the humility with which the Apostle commences; he calls himself Simon Peter. He uses the name Peter, given to him by the Lord. The name indicates his responsibility as an Apostle, and means a small stone, as compared to a Rock, as the Lord describes Himself (Matthew 16:18). Peter was told by the Lord to feed the sheep (John 21:17) and his ready desire was to encourage and maintain those believers, particularly those who had problems. But he also uses his old name Simon, as he sees that old human nature of a humble failing disciple. Next, he calls himself a "servant" or rather, a bond-slave. He now longed to do exactly as his Master required. His activity as a servant was of more importance to him than the title of an Apostle. How do we regard ourselves? May we be equally bond-slaves, doing only what the Lord Jesus Christ would have of us!

The letter is addressed to “them that have obtained like precious faith” (2 Peter 1:1). Here is the first gracious provision, **faith**. Every believer who has trusted wholly in our Lord Jesus Christ has received this as a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). It has not been earned, nor gained, in any other way. This verse also describes a number of qualities concerning this faith.

It is called “like precious faith”, a one word qualification in Greek. The faith of his readers was “like precious”, just as precious and of equal value to Peter's faith, although not necessarily in the same quantity. This faith changes us; we all find true faith very precious, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

It has come to us “through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:2). God is faithful to His promises. The Lord Jesus has brought salvation to us through His death on the cross and, when I accept that the punishment He bore has dealt with my sin, God acts in His righteousness to the Saviour in confirming it and He clears my debt. Had He refused this gift, the whole work of the cross would be nullified, and the work of the Saviour would be ineffective. But God is righteous! Thus the work of our Saviour has made faith or complete trust available as a gift through His divine power ever since.

Let me next read 2 Peter 1:3 from a modern translation. “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.” (English Standard Version). Life and glory are the gifts of grace; we receive life at the time of our new birth and this fits us for certain glory. Glory is the object before us. Godliness and virtue, or excellence, are the practical results of the grace in our life. What a transformation has already taken place in our life through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus as Saviour!

In calling us to glory and excellence, God has granted to us, as a gift, some exceeding great and precious promises, spontaneously made. Now as we read and appreciate this tremendous statement we become, through growth, more mature sharers in the divine nature, God's nature, seeing things as He sees them. Then through the same power of the Lord acting in our lives, we are delivered from the lust displayed in the corruption we find around us in this world. The life of a believer, then, should be victorious. It is not just a “holiness experience” which somehow takes us apart from the world but a life lived, although surrounded by the world, with the divine power of the Lord. We are to be occupied with Him and with the glory which is coming. Do we regard all these statements to be precious? Then we will be rejoicing daily in their great blessings.

The Development of the Divine Nature we have Received (2 Peter 1:5-11)

Now that we have grasped the first section and appreciate the unity we have with the Lord through all He has done for us, this section explains to us that there is a method of growth so that this unity may increase. We should want nothing more to do with the corruption of the world and all its affairs. But how do we keep away from it? The Apostle explains how we should act.

It is first achieved with **diligence**. No university student will expect to achieve a top qualification without study. The more diligent the study of the subject, the greater will be the expectation of the result at the end. So it is with the believer. We need diligence, and Peter says “giving all diligence” that is, concentrating our effort to **build up our faith**. This is a vital necessity for each and all of us. So how should this focus be used? We find the Apostle saying “add to”. The phrase would make truer sense by using the word “supply” or “have”. The qualities Peter enjoins us to have in our faith are all readily available to us from God. We do not need anything that He is not able to supply.

In looking at 2 Peter 1:5, the first thing is **virtue**. We may take this to mean energy, the vigorous action a believer must use for the Lord's work. If we are not prepared to expend time and trouble, we will not attain excellence in appreciating all the Lord has purposed for us.

We then come to **knowledge**. This is enjoyed by putting in the effort necessary. When a young man is looking for a partner in life and meets someone who attracts him, the first thing he needs is to get to know her. The more he learns, the more sure he becomes of the quality of this lady for him. If the choice is right, there will be a deepening of love so that marriage will take place. I knew a young lady once who was converted to Christ. Following this she was always spending her spare time in reading her Bible; she was gaining knowledge of her Saviour and the ways of God. Now she is my wife!

In 2 Peter 1:6 the next need, Peter tells us, is for **temperance**. The Biblical usage of the word is self-control. Were we once unable to control some aspect of our life? Some gave their lives to uncontrolled pleasure, some to uncontrolled temper. Peter has said that we now have the “divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), within us. There is no room for the corruption of the world around us and its lusts. Therefore, as we progress, particularly with our knowledge of our Saviour, we learn self control.

Self-control is a vital need if we are to go on to **patience**. How different the circumstances of this world are. The attitude to life is "have it and have it now". There is no waiting. For the believer, we have what the Lord allows us, in His good time, and with His blessing. Patience, for the Christian, is to wait the Lord's will and provision and, in the meantime, to bear all circumstances through which we pass, knowing He is in full control. It is, in fact, the readiness to surrender our will to the will of God. Paul wrote to Timothy in the same way (1 Timothy 6:11) and although it is not easy, this is the point that Peter presses.

Now we come to **godliness**. The sense of this word is that of living a life which is true to our confession of knowing the true and living God, expressing worship to Him in the ordinary activities of life. A young man, new to the office and making friends there, was invited to join some of them in an evening leisure event. As he thought about this, he questioned himself as to whether the Lord would be welcome at that occasion and came to the conclusion that there would be no recognition of his Saviour there. He told his new friends that he was unable to go and the reason for it. He felt that his life must be lived in a way pleasing to God and this could not be so if the Lord was not to be respected there. Such a visit would not feed the divine nature he now had. The Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16, English Standard Version).

2 Peter 1:7. **Brotherly love** is now added to the list. This expression means "love of the brethren", kindness, affection. Love is always an active term. We cannot claim to love and be inactive in our love. Peter says love the brethren, those Christian fellow believers who share your faith, those in the church you go to. Show affection to them. Paul qualifies this practical experience of love in saying, "especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). Kindness and affection is expressed when needs arise. One has a sick relative, maybe there is some help to be given; another may have lost their job and need comfort; and what of one who seems to be downcast when you meet them at church? Perhaps a Bible verse quoted will cheer them up. How many other ways there are of showing "love to the brethren" including possibly discipline.

Lastly, Peter says, **charity**, or love. Isn't this a duplication? No, this last charge is far more than affection; it is love, the divine love shown by God Himself. The Lord charged His disciples "that ye love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). He had told them already "Continue ye in **my** love" (John 15:9). This divine love is made part of our character. Allow that love to govern your life. Let that love shine out in all your relationships, then there will be blessing.

Peter has given us much food for self-examination and gives us some of the results that should follow. For the believer who follows the course he sets out, there will be no barren life but a life of fruitfulness "in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8). Failure to follow this course leads to blindness and short-sightedness, even to a believer forgetting that he is saved from his sins (2 Peter 1:9). The joy and peace of the Holy Spirit is missing. So the Apostle encourages every reader to have the conscious "sureness" of salvation and be looking for that richly provided entrance into the everlasting kingdom (2 Peter 1:10-11). There is no failure in 2 Peter 1:10. How do we measure up to the Apostle's declared path for blessing?

The Promises we have gained through Prophecy (2 Peter 1:12-21)

Knowing that he would shortly be taken from this world, the Apostle is now anxious that the believers remember what he has told them concerning prophetic events. Peter generally refers to the coming of the Lord to reign in this world. He refers first to the occasion when, with James and John, he witnessed the glory of the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration scene (Matthew 17:1-13). That was a fact, he says, and no myth. It foreshadows the way the Lord will return to this world one day in glory. The reality of the transfiguration brings added assurance to the statements in prophecy of the Lord's return. Peter says (2 Peter 1:19), that the word of prophecy is "more sure" because of it. Prophecy lights up in our hearts the truth concerning the coming of the Lord, as does a lamp shining in a dark place. Let us keep these truths well to the fore in our minds and we will rejoice that the Lord will have such glory.

It is just as important to remember that no personal interpretation should be given to prophecy. It has all been dictated by the Holy Ghost and is not of man. The different statements of prophecy need to be taken together to appreciate the great importance of the purposes of God for the future. How can we dare to ignore them? Consideration of all the Lord has planned for the future will challenge our hearts to follow Him more closely while we remain here. May we seek the Lord's help, day by day, so that we live more closely with Him.

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