

Serving God Faithfully To The End

2 Peter 1

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Preface

The series of *Sound Words* radio programmes on 2 Peter follows on from a similar series produced in the year 2005 on Peter's first letter. As then, I am grateful to acknowledge the excellent help received for those radio programmes from Howard Sayers, a pastor of many years' experience in the Lord's service.

It is thought that Peter probably wrote this letter towards the end of his life as he was martyred during the reign of the emperor Nero who himself died in the year A.D. 68, so a time just before then is the most likely. Those who have studied this book will perhaps be aware of the parallels there are with the book of Jude, particularly Peter's second chapter, but there are also many things unique to each book. The main difference between this book and Peter's first letter is that there he was dealing with what we might call opposition from without, mainly in the form of harsh persecution. In 2 Peter he is more concerned with the opposition that had come from within the Church in the

form of false teachers who were spreading dangerous error. Peter exposes his pastor's heart as he writes to these troubled believers helping them to counter false teaching by encouraging them to adhere to the truth of the gospel and not to swerve from the path of righteousness which is a mark of the true people of God. He does this by urging them to grow in spiritual maturity by adding things to their faith in chapter one, by giving teaching that exposed and warned about the false teachers in chapter two, and in chapter three by encouraging them to be always prepared for the return of Christ and all that will happen when that occurs. May the Lord's Word through Peter stimulate us to a similar faithfulness to Christ.

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Chapter 1: General Introduction (2 Peter 1:1-2)

“Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”

1) The Author

Sometimes when you buy a book there is often a short description of the author on the cover, usually on the back. The details are normally quite short, but they are not

always very instructive and can leave you wondering what the author was really like. When we come to the Bible, however, the situation is quite different because here the details recorded about the various authors the Holy Spirit used to bring us God's Word give us a wealth of information. 2 Peter is no exception.

a. His identity

The opening words of the book (1:1) tell us immediately who he was, namely,

“Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.”

This description immediately identifies him as the disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ whom we find in the four Gospels and the book of Acts. He was originally a humble fisherman (see Matt 4:18), and was also known by the term ‘Zealot’ (see Matt 10:4; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:5 and Acts 1:13). This indicates he was probably one of the radical political activists of the day and that he was also in business devoting his time and his energy in providing for his family. It is worth noting that there is absolutely nothing wrong in being involved in politics or in business, because both are legitimate activities and many true believers are involved in both. But a day came when Peter came face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ and he became his true disciple. We read in John 1:42,

“Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).”

From that time on he lived for his Lord and his Saviour. One day he gave a remarkable testimony concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and this testimony has become the benchmark of orthodoxy and indeed very foundational in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ. We find this in Matthew 16:16 where Peter answered Jesus who had asked his disciples, *“Who do you say that I am?”* This is what Peter said,

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

b. Peter's qualifications

The Bible gives us ample reasons to ensure we take Peter's letter very seriously. We have already referred to the first of these because he was a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was not writing from some obscure position but he was writing out of his own God given experience of faith in Jesus Christ. Peter's faith and belief in Jesus Christ was a God given faith and that really is the first reason why we should listen to him, and the other qualifications for Peter writing this letter do not really hold good without this basic thought that he is a Christian believer.

The next qualification is that he was a bondservant of Jesus Christ. Notice the word *‘servant’* in the first verse. It means someone who belongs completely to his owner and is often translated ‘slave’. In other words Peter was one who was bound to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. You may recall that a few days after Peter had denied that he had anything to do with Jesus three times – something Peter deeply repented of – the risen Lord Jesus very

graciously reinstated Peter to his service (John 21:15-19). This was pivotal for the future of Peter's life and ministry. Jesus said he was to follow him and to feed his sheep and lambs, and that this was to continue until he died. This of course gives him that added authority to speak to us, and so we must give careful attention to what he has written.

Then we are told that Peter was an 'apostle of Jesus Christ'. This means Peter was one of the select band of twelve men directly commissioned by the risen Saviour, as for example we read in Acts 1:8 where Jesus said to them,

"... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

So these twelve apostles were commissioned directly by **the risen Lord** and Peter as one of them. He had both seen the risen Saviour and was directly sent by him to bring the word of Christ to others. This being a witness of Christ's resurrection is quite an important qualification for this reason. The word 'apostle' just literally means 'a sent one' and in one sense we could use that word apostle today of missionaries. They have been sent out by their churches, but they are not apostles like Peter was because they have not witnessed or seen the risen Lord Jesus. See Acts 1:21-22. Further, these twelve apostles were given that special endowment of the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth and bring to us the Word of the Lord. They were directly commissioned by Christ himself for the whole Church and

so when Peter wrote he did so with the authority of Jesus Christ.

There is also something else that we learn about Peter from his own writing here in 2 Peter 1:16,

"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty."

Peter says he actually saw what we call the transfiguration of Jesus recorded in Matthew 17. He was an eye-witness of his majesty. What happened on that occasion was that Peter joined James and John on a mountain top and saw Jesus in a unique way. He had seen that Jesus Christ is superior to Moses and Elijah. He had learnt from that that the Gospel of God's grace surpasses the Law and the Prophets. When in this letter Peter deals with the coming Day of the Lord and the glorious things that would accompany that time he had an authority to do so for he had seen the majesty of Christ.

2) Peter's original readers

Peter was writing to fellow believers. He says so himself in verse 1.

"Simon Peter ... to those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours."

We note a number of things from this description.

First, they had become Christians not by their own doing. It was not through some righteousness of their own, for they had none (see Rom 3:10; Isa 64:6). They had become Christians through the righteousness of Christ; through his merits, his obedience, his offering for sin, all of which was perfect.

Second, the people that Peter is addressing in this letter possessed the same faith that Peter had. They were Christian believers. We need to note that this faith was not something they manufactured by their own power, it was something they had received. In other words it was a God given faith, given to them according to his sovereign purposes. Here Peter is very similar to what Paul has written in Ephesians 2:8-9 that it is by grace we are saved through faith and not of ourselves. It is the gift of God. This is the same for all true disciples of Jesus: we are truly blessed people because we have received saving faith from God that has enabled us to trust in Christ for salvation. An important consequence therefore, if we are believers in Christ, is that the entire glory and praise for our salvation belongs to the Lord alone, and none to us. It also means our faith is something very precious indeed, because it admits us into the salvation that God has provided through Christ's death and resurrection!

Third, it is significant to note Peter's description of Jesus in this opening verse. He is both '*God and Saviour*'. Peter is declaring the deity of Christ. Paul did a similar thing in

Romans 9:5 and John did in John 1:1-2. How precious then to have a faith that unites us to him and his saving work.

3) The Greeting Peter Sent, verse 2

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

What a lovely greeting this is because it describes Peter's own desire and prayer for his fellow believers. Grace has been described as God in action in mercy and love. It was in grace that God has saved them (see Ephesians 2:8-9), and here Peter is reminding us we continue to stand in need of God's grace throughout our Christian lives. We need his keeping grace so that we will not fall into error. We need his sustaining grace so that we can combat error. We need his sanctifying grace so we can progress spiritually in the Lord, living holy and pure lives.

4) The Issues These Believers Faced

a. They were believers who faced real dangers

As we work through the letter we find that these dear children of God were in danger on at least three fronts. We will just summarise these here and look at them in detail as we work through the entire letter. First, from chapter one, they were in danger of not developing their spiritual understanding and walk with the Lord, so spiritual stagnation was something they had to avoid. Peter encourages them to grow into strong and mature believers.

Second, from chapter two, they were being tempted to listen to false teachers and false doctrine which needed to be recognised and resisted. Then third, in the final chapter, there was the danger of forgetting the Lord's promise that he would one day return to this earth, so they needed to be stimulated to remember this each day and to be ready for it. We have to say that these are temptations that believers in every age have faced, and we are no exception.

b. Peter's themes in the light of these dangers

Peter's overall message can be summed up by two words, reminder and warning.

In the first chapter he reminds us what a Christian really is. He stresses the necessity and importance of each believer's spiritual development in both our understanding of Biblical doctrine and corresponding holy living. He particularly shows us the authority of Scripture which is to be the believer's only source of reference for the things we believe and do in our lives.

The second chapter largely comes under the heading of warning as Peter exposes false teachers in a masterly way and the errors they bring. The call is to recognise and resist all who fall into this category and not to be led astray by their falsehood. He also warns all false teachers that God will call them to account for their evil ways and they will not escape his judgement.

The last chapter combines the two for there is a clear reminder of the Lord's return and a searching warning to

make sure we are prepared for whenever it will take place. The Day of Christ will be both glorious and terrible, presenting great hope for every faithful believer and fearful condemnation and destruction for those who do not believe in Christ.

These are serious issues and we must prayerfully consider our own hearts to see if we really are those who truly trust in Christ.

Chapter 2: The Lord's Great Provision (2 Peter 1:3-4)

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

I am sure you have discovered that even after the most careful planning it is easy to forget something. For example, you may be going to stay with someone only to discover after you have arrived that you forgot to pack an important piece of clothing or your wallet with your money in! That kind of thing never happens to God. By complete contrast to us, the Lord never forgets to make provision for anything he puts his hand to do. All his works are perfect (see Deuteronomy 32:4). As we come to 2 Peter 1:3-4 this is Peter's theme: the fullness of God's wonderful provision

for his people. All that is required for our salvation he has already amply supplied. Peter's particular area of interest is the holiness of life that God looks for in those who are saved through faith in Christ (see also 1 Peter 1:14-15). The great encouragement is that the Lord has provided all we will ever need to fulfil his requirements.

1) The Provision

"...everything we need for life and godliness..."

There is a marvellous breadth and depth in these words! Everything we need, complete salvation is provided for. It is quite literally 'all things'. Whatever requirement or demand we may ever face in the Christian life, ample provision is already made by the Lord. There is no need to add anything, neither is there any need for us to despair by thinking, 'Is there sufficient to save me and to see me through to the very end and enable me to produce a holy life, pleasing to God?' Remember we have a perfect Saviour who was blameless (1 Peter 1:19). He offered a perfect sacrifice and was able to cry, *"It is finished."* We have a perfect Scripture, the Word of God, to guide us (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17). We are indwelt by a perfect Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to enable us (see 1 Corinthians 6:19). And God has provided a perfect armour to protect us (see Ephesians 6). How good God is! He does not save us and then leave us to fend for ourselves on our own. He supplies all we ever need in the Christian life.

This should encourage us to go to God daily for his enabling and grace. It means we can rest in Christ absolutely secure, for he has supplied all our souls will ever need. But it also means we have no excuse if we are not living in real, vital and daily fellowship with God in prayer and through his Word. We can never excuse ourselves for any ungodliness or sin in our lives. It means no temptation or obstacle in the way of holiness can be too great to be overcome, because the Lord has provided for that. There is power to overcome sin, and we must avail ourselves of it by going to him every single day of our lives. One godly Christian believer of a former generation used to pray each day, *'Lord, make me as holy as it is possible for a saved sinner to be.'*

2) The Source of This Provision

"His divine power has given us..."

'His' refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Christ who has made this provision, and he has done so lavishly and abundantly for this is what the original word 'given' signifies. The tense of the word Peter uses means a past completed act with present day effects. It is our permanent possession, given to us out of his pure grace. And the great reservoir or bank from which this all comes is his divine power. Indeed, how glad we should be that this is so, for we stood in desperate need of God's power to be at work in us because we were dead in our sin and ruined and without strength to change ourselves. It needed a miracle to change our hearts and God has done that for us. But the Lord's

divine power helps us to appreciate the effectiveness of what the Lord has provided for us, because his power is limitless. It created the universe, parted the Red Sea at the exodus, calmed the storm on Galilee, healed the sick, and triumphed over sin and death and Satan by his death and resurrection. It is powerfully effective because every Christian believer is a new creation (see 2 Corinthians 5:17).

3) The Means By Which The Provision Came To Us

“...through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

The Lord’s enabling came to us when we came to know him, and therefore this is something given to every believer. It is not for an exclusive favoured few, but given to all who trust in Christ. It is as we get to know Christ that we enjoy the power to live a holy life. And how did we come to know Christ? The answer is because he

“...called us...”

Christ called us effectually. Just as he called Lazarus from the tomb in John 11 and Lazarus came forth, so the Lord called us to himself and we came to him. God in his power and grace gave us ears to hear his voice and so we came to know him, to become members of the family of believers and to become his friends, to be in intimate fellowship with him. And how did he do this?

“...by his own glory and goodness.”

As we saw the attractiveness of Christ; his personality, his beauty, his majesty and his grace and mercy to die for sinners, our hearts saw in him all that our souls would ever need and we could not stay away. The Lord became like an irresistible magnet that drew us to himself. Here was one who was perfectly suited to our need as guilty sinners, the crucified and risen Lord. We saw him as one who was glorious and virtuous and who was worthy of our all and much more. All our previous hesitancy, or obstinacy and inability was overcome in an instant and we came to Christ for salvation. And from beginning to end it was the Lord’s doing. What a reason for praising him this is!

4) The Promises In The Provision.

“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises...”

Through Christ’s glory and goodness he has opened to us the vast resources of the promises of God. They become personally ours through Christ. For example, the Lord has promised forgiveness to the sinful, rest to the weary, comfort to the sad, hope for the dying, life to the dead, glory to the believer. This last one is a particular emphasis of this letter. The Lord is coming again (3:4) as he himself promised, and that will be followed (3:13) by

“... a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”

These promises are very great and precious.

5) The Purpose Of The Provision.

“...so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

This is quite an amazing statement that Peter is making, and it is also one that we must handle with great care. The word ‘participate’ means sharers or partakers. It does not mean that we are absorbed into God, nor do we become God as some have taught. Instead, Peter is referring to real union with Christ, so that the life of Christ lives in us. In John’s Gospel Jesus described it in this way: he is the vine and believers are the branches (John 15). Other parts of the New Testament shed further light on what Peter is referring to. Paul wrote this in Galatians 2:20,

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”

In 1 John 5:1 John has written,

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...”

And in Romans 8:9 Paul gives this further help

“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.”

So when Peter says we participate in the divine nature he is referring to being born again or born from above (John 3:3), of being the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), of being in Christ (Eph 1:13), of being the dwelling place of God (John 14:17-23). And the wonderful effect of this is that because the life of God is in our hearts we begin to show his likeness in our lives. This energy gives us both the desire and the power to do the will of God. We now participate in holiness for we have

“...escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

That word ‘escape’ means to flee from and the mark of being a genuine believer is that we flee from the ungodliness of the world. The corruption that is caused by evil desires and which is seen all around us in the rebellion against God by so many is something the true child of God runs from. The reason for this is that in Christ the power of sin in our lives has been broken and we have been set free and empowered to escape from all that is corrupt in our impure world.

Therefore it does matter how we live. Holiness is both God’s provision for us and a responsibility he has given to us. Life and godliness are the clear marks of salvation, and all of this bountiful provision is by the grace of God alone. We owe him everything!

Chapter 3: Growing In Christ (2 Peter 1:5-11)

Introduction

One of the first things that children learn at school is simple addition. Indeed some children are able to do a little of this even before they start school, and it is one of the fundamental building blocks of a good education in mathematics. In the verses from 2 Peter we are looking at in this chapter Peter teaches us that this is also something every serious Christian will be concerned with. He is not thinking about adding up numbers, but of adding spiritual qualities to our faith, and the reason for this is that every believer should be a growing Christian. The kind of growth Peter has in mind is growing in likeness to Christ.

Now when a child stops growing something is wrong, and it is usually a sign of ill health. This is equally true spiritually. A healthy believer will be a growing believer and not one stunted in their spiritual growth. When a believer stops growing then this usually indicates something is dreadfully wrong in their spiritual lives. To help us with this Peter's instructions place the responsibility for this growing or adding to our faith firmly with us. This is something we are to do. Now you will know that in the Bible the Gospel of Christ emphasises both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Peter has already reminded us of God's sovereignty in our salvation in verses one to four, and he refers to this in his opening phrase in verse five,

“For this very reason...”

In other words, because God has already saved us in his sovereign mercy, in particular so that we may (v4)

“...escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

Because the Lord has done this he places on us the responsibility of ensuring that we become growing Christians. Peter indicates that this business of growing in Christ is not an armchair or spectator activity. Instead we are competitors in the race! (v5)

“...make every effort to add to your faith...”

The Greek word that Peter uses and which is translated “*effort*” means to be diligent and eager and to make haste. It means to do one's very best. And Peter puts this in the form of a command which means it is not for just a few Christians, but for all. If we are not adding these things we are being disobedient disciples, so it is obviously something to which we must give our careful attention.

1) The Additions We Are To Make, verses 5-7

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to

godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.”

Peter begins right at the beginning with the first characteristic of every believer; all believers have “*faith*”. This is the one essential, this is the first mark, this is the beginning of the Christian character that we possess and exercise true saving faith in Christ. The words of Hebrews 11:6 underline the importance of faith,

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

It is by faith that the sinner receives the mercy of God through Jesus Christ. Faith is a laying hold of Christ for pardon, cleansing and eternal life. It is the initial acceptance of the love of God shown to us in Christ so that without faith no one can be a true Christian. Every true Christian has this faith, but no genuine believer is to stop there because this is but the beginning of a life in which many other things are to be added to our faith. Now the term ‘add’ which Peter uses means to supply in generous manner. It was used of the rich person responsible for clothing the entire chorus in the ancient Greek theatre. This was to be a lavish provision. Peter is teaching us that every Christian is to do their very best for the Lord by ensuring we lavishly add the seven qualities he lists to our trust in Christ. Indeed, the exercise of one should lead to

the exercise of the next, and so on. Let us consider each of these seven qualities we are to add to our faith.

- i. Goodness, or virtue and excellence. It is the same word used for the Lord in verse 3. We are to display the excellence of Christ in our own lives. This means practical goodness and growth in holiness and especially in help given to others. It involves vigorous action. It is faith at work (see James 2:26).
- ii. Knowledge or learning. This is achieved by discovering more and more about the Lord and his Word, and by maintaining daily and frequent fellowship with him.
- iii. Self-control. This describes one who masters his desires, holding them under control. We see the opposite when there is loss of temper or covetousness or illicit sexual desires. The true believer will seek not to give in to such temptations and pressures, but resist them.
- iv. Perseverance. This means we are to endure and to be patient and to bear up in difficulties. It literally means ‘to remain under’, not giving up at the least excuse, but pressing on. A growing Christian’s spiritual life will last and be seen to last.

- v. Godliness or piety and living for God. Here we see that true knowledge of God leads to true reverence for him and respect for others.
- vi. Brotherly kindness. This lovely term means brotherly friendship, an affection and fondness for our Christian brethren, even when they do not always agree! It includes bearing one another's burdens, guarding the unity of the Spirit by avoiding gossip, prejudice and narrowness and accepting a brother Christian for what he is in Christ!
- vii. Love. This is not love stimulated by the attractiveness of its object, as in human love, but is evoked by the heart of the one doing the loving. Supremely this is seen in God himself. His love for us was not caused by what we are, but by what he is. It is the deliberate desire for the highest good for the one loved, and shows itself in sacrificial action for that person's good. This is what God has done for us in Christ, and what he expects us to do for others.

2) The Encouragement Peter Gives, verse 8

“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

To encourage us Peter outlines the effect of these additions to our faith. First he writes:

“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure...”

He is telling us that adding to our faith is not a one off affair, but a lifelong matter. The Christian is to be continually increasing in these virtues. That is, constantly and consciously adding to our faith, even abounding in them. You will note that this passage completely rules out any thought of sinless perfection. We can compare Peter's words with those of the great Apostle Paul's own testimony in Philippians 3:12:

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”

He refused to stunt his spiritual growth and did all he could to cultivate it. There will never be a time this side of heaven when we will ever be able to say there is no more for me to attain, no more additions to make. This is the mark of healthy life, it progresses and when progress is being made, deficiency is being prevented.

“...they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

They will protect us from deficiency and danger and act as a safeguard. The word 'ineffective' really means 'barren', and comes from 'no work' or 'being idle'. Peter is teaching that adding these qualities to our faith as a lifelong activity will keep us from making no impact on the world. They will make our lives effective witnesses for Christ, because the world will see that our actions and attitudes go with our profession that Christ has transformed us. Sadly some believers are experts in camouflage because they never stand out as distinct from the world, and it is as if their testimony is non-existent. But we shall be kept from such deficiencies if we keep on adding to our faith.

The word 'unproductive' means to be unfruitful, like a tree that never produces its promised fruit. These qualities will make our lives productive in the Lord's service. Sin will be restrained in us and others. Souls will be directed to the Saviour. Let us never forget that impure or stagnant vessels are of no use to the Lord.

3) A Stimulating Warning, verse 9

“But if anyone does not have them, he is short-sighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.”

Failure from anyone to add to their faith shows they have forgotten what the Lord has done for them. In graphic terms Peter describes such careless believers as 'short sighted' where everything is a blur to them, or worse, 'blind'. In other words they have lost sight of heavenly

matters, and have been taken up with things temporal and not eternal. Such a person has become forgetful of the central benefit of the gospel; the Lord's cleansing from sin. It is astonishing that a believer can fall into such a condition! How grievous to the Lord, to the Church, and to the needy world in which he lives. Such careless people treat the precious blood of Christ with contempt, and abuse his forgiveness and act as if unconverted and simply by not adding to their faith. Surely that is warning enough not to become like this!

4) The Benefits We Shall Reap, verses 10-11

“Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

In order to ensure that verse 9 is never true of us we are to be “*all the more eager*” - that means resolved and determined - “*to make your calling and election sure.*” By giving careful attention to the qualities listed in vv5-7 we will satisfy ourselves that we are saved! We will produce the guarantee of the genuineness of our profession. Proof of God's calling and election – which are God's sovereign and gracious works alone - from the human standpoint is holiness of life, this growing in Christ. We are to show we possess salvation and the great benefits of this are:

- i. We will never fall. Peter's term means to fail, to stumble, get hurt, or fall into misery. It is not falling from grace, but saving us from ruin and shipwreck. Such a Christian will be spared a disastrous coming to grief and escape the pain of backsliding.
- ii. We will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Peter heaps one reason upon another to encourage us to grow spiritually. This one crowns them all if we add to our faith we shall receive a rich welcome into heaven. It is a reward of grace – for God's grace gives us faith, creates the desire in us to add to our faith and enables us to actually do it. And then astonishingly we are told the Lord will reward us for what are the results of his mercy towards us! Grace really is amazing! That reward will be an eternal one, for Christ's kingdom is such, it will never end – glory!

In the light of what is held out before us, the struggles and effort required in this life to add to our faith and ensure that we grow in Christ, pale into insignificance to what we shall in the end receive. The kingdom belongs to Christ and we belong to him! Hallelujah!

Conclusion

What greater encouragement could we be given! If we grow spiritually, our present life will become gloriously fruitful and death will bring a glorious transformation.

Chapter 4: The Certainty Of What We Believe (2 Peter 1:12-21)

Introduction

Being certain about what we believe as Christians is of major importance. It brings assurance to our own hearts because what we believe is God's truth. It gives comfort and hope when we are in personal trial and difficulty because the truth of God is sure. It gives strength and stability when what we believe is under attack, because God's truth stands secure, it never alters and will never fail. Knowing this enables us to stand firm and not fall away from him. Peter's readers were in that situation. The Gospel, the very truth they believed, was under attack, so Peter writes to encourage and confirm them in the faith.

1. A Pertinent Reminder, verses 12-15

“So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.”

We see Peter's heart in his concern for his brethren, linked with his awareness of his approaching death. Note that Peter considered his body as a tent, v13-14 (see 2

Corinthians 5:1), a temporary dwelling. This shows us he was not earth bound. He also knew he would soon leave it and we see that life beyond death is clearly taught here. The manner of his death had been made clear to Peter by the Lord Jesus himself in John 21:18-19. It is thought Peter was crucified upside down. But as Peter considers his own death there is the complete absence of fear in Peter's heart and mind. In spite of the pain he would suffer, he knew that through Christ death has lost its sting and cannot separate the believer from the Lord.

Now Peter's concern in mentioning this is not so much with himself but with his brethren. He had them upon his heart and their spiritual and eternal well being was uppermost in his thoughts as he faced the prospect of death. They were in need of help, but for Peter, the time was running out. So he gave them a pertinent reminder of the truth of the gospel of God's grace which they already knew. As Christians they needed to be constantly reminded of this to encourage their growth in grace and endurance to the end. So Peter makes every effort in order that they will not forget and make shipwreck when he is gone. We see here the importance of regular personal Bible study and church attendance, because they stir up the memory, and help and encourage our faithfulness to Christ. We need reminding of the truth.

2. A Personal Testimony, verses 16-18

“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus

Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”

The Gospel of Christ is not a myth or fairy story or fable, it is the truth. It seems in particular some were attacking and denying the future resurrection and the Lord's return in glory, *“the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...”* Though some were saying that will never happen, Peter had actually witnessed this glory of the Lord Jesus Christ! He was an eyewitness, and Peter uses a legal term when he says that. This testimony will stand in the court of God. He had actually seen the majesty of Christ, the visible splendour of his deity. Peter is referring here to what is known as the transfiguration of Jesus. The details are found in Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7 and Luke 9:28. On that mountain Jesus received 'honour' in the voice which spoke to him, the voice of God, and he received 'glory' in the light which shone from him. Peter, along with James and John, had such a view of his glory as to convince them beyond any doubt that Jesus was the Messiah. The voice of God clearly declared Jesus was his son, and glory of Christ then was a glimpse of the glory in which he would return. We were there, Peter declares (v18). We heard the audible voice of God, a high privilege indeed, afforded to only few. This was a solemn experience he could never forget. Peter's personal testimony was something those

who denied the Lord's return could never deny or take from him, and it was a pledge of the future coming in glory.

3. The Powerful Scripture, verses 19-21

“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

We need to note two important points from these verses. First that the word of Scripture is a sure word (v19). It's as if Peter was saying, *“If you don't believe me, go to the Scriptures.”* It was not that Peter's reminder and testimony contradicted Scripture, but the Scripture foretold all that Peter had proclaimed – grace, holiness and heaven (v3ff and v12). The Old Testament prophets spoke from God; therefore we must pay attention to them. You see Scripture is like a lamp and we must walk by the light of Scripture until Christ the morning star appears. [For Christ as a star see Numbers 24:17, Malachi 4:2, Luke 1:18, Ephesians 5:143, Revelation 2:28 & 22:6] We are on a pilgrimage throughout our lives in this dark world. God has provided us with a lamp (Psalm 119:105). If we pay attention to the Scriptures for instruction, reproof, warning, guidance and

encouragement, we shall walk safely, but if we neglect them we shall be engulfed by darkness.

Peter's second point in vv20-21 is that the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God. The Scripture did not originate with men, no prophet made it up. Scripture is not a man made word with man's fallibility, sin and mistakes. If it was it would be quite useless. Instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. These men were bearers of God's message. The term 'carried' (v21) is used of a ship carried by the wind. The prophets raised their sails, so to speak. They were obedient and receptive, and the Holy Spirit filled them and carried them along in the direction he wished. He took up the background, life situation, limitations, education etc. of these men and used them to bring us God's Word. Scripture is reliable and trustworthy – each word is true. It is authoritative – to be accepted and submitted to and must not be ignored or undermined. It is enduring – it is God's Word for today. It is also powerful – the mighty Word of God, sharper than a two edged sword (see Hebs 4:12). In evangelism it is the Word we are to proclaim. In doctrine and conduct it is the Word we believe and obey, and not our own likes and dislikes. The Word of God stands and those who believe it will stand also while all others will fall.

Conclusion

In each of these areas Peter presents the Christian with the truth. The certainty of what we believe, of what Peter saw

and heard, of what Scripture records. In days when our Saviour, his person and work and return, and his Gospel, one is under attack, let us hold firm to the truth of Scripture.

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” (Eph 4:14)

Let us then praise God for the certainty of the Gospel and stand fast for Christ our Saviour.

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