

2nd PETER BIBLE STUDY

2 Peter 1:1-15

Lesson #1

Introduction

We're about to begin our study of second Peter. As I hope you'll recall, we just completed our study of first Peter. Peter's first epistle was centered around the theme of maintaining godly behaviors in the face of persecutions. In fact, one might argue that all of the epistles, by all of the writers of the New Testament, are essentially exhortations unto godliness under all of the various and diverse situations of life throughout the centuries. The New Testament epistles provide us with great and precious promises that affect us right now in this life, and even more in the life to come. They motivate us to words and behaviors and attitudes that honor God and display His glory. It is these precious and magnificent promises of Scripture, as administered through the workings of the Holy Spirit within the transformed hearts and minds of the redeemed, that feed and fuel the fruits of genuine regeneration. And in turn, it is these same fruits that demonstrate the power and mercy of God toward His chosen children, and thereby openly display the moral and virtuous excellencies of His glory.

And at the same time, in addition to encouragement and exhortation, they provide us with much-needed warnings against serious threats that are coming. It would be wonderful if the Christian life were simple and free from dangers and deceptions, at least that's what we think. But it's obviously not what our heavenly Father thinks, because that's anything but the Christian life. The Christian life is fraught with perils and dangers and deceptions on every side. There are dangers that come from outside the church, and dangers that come from inside the church. The ones that come from outside the church are usually easy to recognize because of their hostility and brutality, their animus is no secret and they're quick to accuse and criticize. This kind has always been around and has done much to hamper the activities of the church, as Alexander the Coppersmith did to the apostle Paul. But take note that they have never succeeded in eradicating the church, all they ended up doing was purifying it. They are able to damage the flesh and blood bodies of the believers, but they had no power or influence over the spirits and souls of the body of Christ.

However, there is another breed, another category of threats. A type that operates by stealth, as Satan did in the Garden of Eden. They speak kind words, and make enticing promises that they can't deliver. They appeal to the base and fallen elements of the human nature to entice the unlearned into dangerous and damaging behaviors. The Scriptures call these false prophets, or false teachers, and Peter is about to warn us about these in this, his second epistle.

Before we start, I want us to take notice that in this epistle Peter tells us quite plainly that he knows he's about to pass away. He says the Lord Jesus has made it clear to him that he's about to die. And we're not talking about a simple comfortable death from old age, but a brutal death on a cross. So the words that are recorded in this short epistle are the words that Peter and the Holy Spirit wished to be his last will and testament to the beloved Church of Jesus Christ. It's interesting that this epistle is not a great treatise on theology, but an exhortation to persevere in Christian virtue and godliness, and a stern warning to be on the lookout for sure and certain threats that face the church in the immediate future. The saints already have the theology, they've been taught by the apostles directly, and some probably even heard Jesus himself, but Peter realizes that he and his fellow apostles are about to pass away, and when they're gone the false prophets and teachers will begin moving in with little or no resistance.

As long as the apostles were present there was someone with recognizable authority. There was someone who could render a verdict as to true or false, as to right or wrong with divine authority. With the passing away of the apostles that absolute authority which was vested in known and recognized men passed away with them. Now it was much more difficult to get a decision that one could trust as divinely inspired. When the Lord Jesus departed, He left us 12 men that He had personally commissioned to be His representatives in His absence. These men had divine authority to speak on His behalf, and to provide guidance and teaching, but when these 12 men passed away what did He leave us as their replacement? Did He leave us entirely on our own to just figure everything out as we go? No, of course not, this would be anarchy. By the time these 12 men had passed away the Holy Spirit had, through them, produced the divinely inspired and inerrant New Testament Scriptures, which is everything we need for life and godliness until His return.

Now I've spoken a little about false teachers, and we'll discuss that again when we get to chapter 2, because that whole chapter deals with this topic, and it's actually the main theme of the epistle. But, before he gets to the warnings about false teachers that we'll be seeing in Chapter 2, Peter begins his epistle with an exhortation unto the virtuous behaviors that are characteristic of genuine saving faith in verses one through 15, and it's this specific section of passages that we'll be dealing with in this first lesson. So now let's begin our study of this short little epistle of Peter which he left us as his last will and testament. The title of this lesson is:

A Faith the Same Kind as Ours

1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, 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;

2 Peter 1:1-2 (NASB)

In this, his second epistle, Peter begins in a very similar manner to his first letter. He wastes no time whatsoever in addressing God as our Father, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and our faith being caused by God and not ourselves. Peter says his letter is addressed to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours. The faith of which Peter speaks is a very specific faith, given as a gift of God, and is afforded by His righteousness through his only Son Jesus Christ. We don't know for certain what the general trends might have been in Peter's day, but today there is much talk of faith. People say they have faith in a great many things. There are even people who say, and songs that repeat, that people have faith in faith itself. Or faith in the human heart. Or faith in some nebulous cosmic good that they can tap into somehow, if they just believe. There's no shortage of those who say they have faith, so the question we have to ask, as a Christian is, is it the same kind as ours? When we speak of faith, do we mean the same thing?

There are some who object to the question. Who are we to question the faith claims of others? If they say they believe then that should be good enough for us. This may sound benevolent, but it certainly isn't scriptural. James said that even the demons believe in Jesus, and they tremble, but that doesn't make them acceptable. Paul told the Thessalonians to examine everything carefully, and to hold onto those things which were true and good, and reject the things that were not. (1Ths 5:21-22) The very thought of questioning anyone's claims, and seeking to verify their authenticity, is almost unthinkable by today's standards. That would be unloving, and even arrogant according to contemporary thought. But it certainly wouldn't be unscriptural.

Peter says this is a faith that we have received. Received is an easy enough word to understand. It means we got something from someone or somewhere other than ourselves. If it was a realization of our own minds, or a decision which we had come to from within ourselves, it would not be possible to use the word "received." There was not the slightest question in Peter's mind that the faith which he had did not come from within himself, by way of some realization, or informed decision, but was unilaterally caused by God (1Pet 1:3) through His gracious gift of saving faith. (Eph 2:8-9)

Peter further defines the nature of this faith as coming through the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is not a faith in faith itself, or a faith in the human heart, or a faith in some cosmic force. This is a very specific faith, which has a very specific source, and always produces very specific results. Those results, as defined by Peter in his first epistle, are a visible and consistent obedience to Jesus Christ. (1Pet 1:2)

A faith that is simply in faith itself, will not produce obedience to Jesus Christ. A faith in the goodness and kindness of the human heart, will not produce obedience to Jesus Christ. A faith in some nebulous cosmic force of love will not produce obedience to Jesus Christ. And there are countless other examples we could use. To add just one or two more, faith in some statue, maybe of Mary, or some other dead saint, or some perceived high church authority; these will not produce obedience to Jesus Christ. In fact, if those who cling to these things will be perfectly honest, they will acknowledge that they hold on to these things precisely because of their understanding that their lives are not in obedience to Jesus Christ, and they hope these things will be somehow accepted as a substitute. But, obedience to Jesus Christ is only produced through the agency of the Holy Spirit working upon the regenerated soul of man. Only a regenerated spirit, and a transformed mind can be brought into willing obedience to Jesus Christ. Therefore, to simply accept any and every claim of faith as valid and genuine, is to open the doors of the church to any and every form of idolatry.

In an examination of just what the Christian faith is, and what it does, and what distinguishes it from all other ideas of faith, one must ascertain first its source, and then its effects, and then its ultimate purpose. If we understand these three then we understand Christian faith. While I'd love to do a thorough exposition on all three, it's obvious that such a work would exceed any single lesson. But we need this information as a foundation for what I wish to teach right now, so let me just provide very short answers to these three questions so we'll have that information.

1. Source: Christian faith is a gift of God. It isn't available anywhere else or attainable by any other means. (Eph 2:8-9)
2. Effects: Christian faith produces sanctification of lifestyle and progressive obedience to Jesus Christ (1Pet 1:2)
3. Purpose: Christian faith ultimately produces a family of believers who are progressively transformed into the image of Jesus Christ whereby they are made suitable as Christ's bride and eternal worshipers of God in His eternal kingdom. (Rom 8:29; Rev 19:7; Jn 4:23)

To recap what we've just said, the sole and only source of saving faith is God's gracious gift. The inevitable effect is sanctification by the Holy Spirit that produces obedience to Jesus Christ. And the purpose is to produce for God a suitable body of worshipers through whom He is glorified.

Now, given that we've provided answers to these questions, I freely acknowledge that every one of them is contested by one group or another within what we call evangelicalism. It is a sad commentary indeed when the community that calls itself Christianity can't even agree on the source of that faith that makes them a Christian, nor on just what are the effects of that faith, if there are any at all, nor even what the whole point of Christian faith actually is. But this is exactly the situation. For example:

Concerning the source of saving faith, there are those who are absolutely adamant that all mankind has this faith resident within themselves, and all they need is someone to persuade them to make a decision to exercise that faith. Those who believe this also usually believe that the effects of faith are of secondary importance, because the whole purpose of faith is to keep people from perishing in hell. To them this is God's grand mission of creation, and the whole point of Christianity, and the singular mission of the church.

In contrast to these, there is another group who takes the position that saving faith is not something that is resident within humanity, but rather attainable only as a gift of grace according to the sovereignty of God. Those who take this position traditionally also believe that the effects of faith are a direct part of the very purpose of faith, which are, an inevitable sanctification of life, and progressive transformation to Christlikeness in thinking and behaviors. And furthermore, they believe that God's purpose for salvation is first and foremost the demonstration of His glory through the production of these acceptable worshipers.

And, in addition to the foregoing, there are vast multitudes who just don't know one way or the other, and really aren't concerned about such matters. To them, it's all about love and companionship, and troublesome debates over doctrine just damage the unity and ought to be avoided entirely. After all, Jesus loves everybody, doesn't He? So what does it matter what we believe, as long as we all love Jesus? Why make a fuss over truth, doesn't everybody have the same right to make up their own mind's what's true or not, isn't that what the priesthood of the believer's means?

Now I acknowledge that there's probably other small groups and ideologies within evangelicalism, and I'm ignoring the charismatic movement intentionally, but I believe the three that we've discussed above capture about 99% of what is today, popular evangelicalism. In today's climate, a statement like Peter's regarding "a faith of the same kind as ours" is really a very difficult thing to define, and there are many who don't even think that we should try, because doing so is either irrelevant or contentious.

Now I don't want to get too far ahead of myself, but Peter is laying the groundwork in these opening statements for a serious warning about false teachers that are going to rise up after the apostles die. There is only one protection from false teachers, and that is a sound and thorough and accurate knowledge of the truth. This was true in Peter's time and it's true today. There is no such thing as Christianity apart from truth. Christianity could be defined as the knowledge of

the truth, inasmuch as the Lord Jesus said that He himself was the truth. (Jn 14:6) Therefore, Christianity is a thorough and accurate knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, including His ultimate objective; anything else is just religion.

A proper and accurate understanding of exactly what is, (a faith of the same kind as Peter's,) is absolutely essential, if we believe that God has some kind of predetermined systematic plan for creation, and that each one of us has a designated part in the carrying out of that plan. So, if we feel like truth actually matters, and accuracy of interpretation makes a difference, then it's incumbent upon us to diligently seek to know the truth, and be firmly rooted and grounded in it, lest we discover too late that our concepts were flawed, and our mission perspective was incomplete.

We are not told to examine everything carefully just for the purpose of being critical of our brothers and sisters, but for the protection of the saints, and the purity of the church. I understand that there are many who truly believe that the primary purpose for which we assemble together on Sunday mornings is to get as many unbelievers as humanly possible to come into our assembly so that we can try to get them saved. Yes, we practice worship also, and we want God to appreciate it, but the main point of the worship, if we're honest, is to impress the unbelievers in such a way as to get them to make a profession of faith at the end. The altar call is the grand finale, and measures the true success of the worship service. Regardless of what was preached, gospel or whatever, if a few came forward and answered the altar call, then the service was deemed a success. But if not, we feel like we just somehow fell short of our mission. We don't seem to feel that having assembled together and offered worship to God through the preaching of His word and exhortations unto godliness, by itself alone, constitutes a fully successful assembly. But Isn't worshipping the Lord supposed to be the reason that we assemble, and converts, if they happen, just a wonderful by-product of that worship?

I have no doubt that there are many who would object to the specific wording that we've used in this foregoing description, but there can be no denying that it pretty accurately captures the essence of the present day thinking of our denomination. As a denomination, we are absolutely convinced that evangelism sits at the very top of the priority list for the Church of Jesus Christ. It has literally become a sacred cow, if you dare to touch it, or even question it, you'll pay the price of immediate rejection. But is this biblical? Is this truly a faith of the same kind that Peter says we received through the righteousness of Jesus Christ? Well, is it intended to produce the same results as the faith which Peter preaches? In his first epistle he said it produces obedience to Jesus Christ. (1:2) Now in this, his second epistle, he is about to go on and tell us the very same thing, but with different words. The conclusion is inescapable. What Peter is telling us is that this saving faith is a gift which is intended to produce obedience, and virtuous behaviors, and moral excellence amongst the recipients, as its first and foremost priority, because it is these fruits alone that honors and glorifies God, and the Father seeks such as these to be His worshipers. (Jn 4:23) It's not supposed to be primarily about converts, it's supposed to be primarily about acceptable worship to God.

Of course the churches must evangelize, as this is the God ordained **means** by which the chosen are brought to saving faith. But they are brought to saving faith for a **purpose**, and that purpose is not just to keep them out of hell. Keeping them out of hell actually does absolutely nothing for God, and make no mistake, mankind was made for God's purposes. Every New Testament writing tells us plainly and repeatedly that the chosen of God, those whom He redeemed with the blood of His Son, were specifically intended for the purpose of being transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29) for the purpose of growing in the knowledge of God, and attaining to the moral and virtuous excellencies that are displayed by the fullness of the stature of Christ Jesus, (Eph 4:13) so that we might become a suitable mate for His Son (Rev 19:7) and acceptable worshipers of God. (Jn 4:23) Salvation is only the beginning step in a predestined process of sanctification and transformation to bring the redeemed to the point where they are useful to God the Father. To stop short of this in our teaching, and our exhortation, is to abort our mission midstream. It is abandoning our post, It is desertion under fire. For Example:

God the Father didn't call the Jews out of Egypt simply for the purpose of saving them from Pharaoh. He called them out of Egypt for the purpose of separating them from sin so that they could worship Him. His purpose was to make suitable worshipers, not just free some people from slavery. What good would they be if after leaving Egypt, they were perfectly satisfied with their new freedom and paid no attention to God whatsoever? But yet, that's exactly what we do now.

We enthusiastically preach the gospel to get people saved from hell, and then completely ignore the fact that the reason they were saved from hell was so that they could be sanctified from sin and made suitable to worship God. Once we feel like we've got them saved we abandon the remainder of our mission.

It is for this divine purpose (acceptable worship) that the church was planned by God from eternity past. And it is for this purpose and this mission that it exists today. How is it that the church just somehow doesn't get it? How is it that our whole purpose and intention, as designed by God, seems to escape our notice? How is it that we have reduced the high and holy calling of God for a people for His own possession, who are zealous for good and holy deeds that honor and glorify Him, into nothing more than a rescue squad with no higher purpose, or greater objective, than simply trying to see how many perpetual sinners we can keep from ending up in hell?

When did this happen, how did it happen, how long has it been since the church has known what its true mission and purpose and calling actually is? But thank God that He always keeps a remnant. Though the vast majority may assemble in ignorance, or in error, there are a few who have been preserved in the truth by the gracious mercy of God.

Those who have received a faith of the same kind as that of Peter, and the same kind as ours, are the ones in whom the work of the Holy Spirit is evident. Those in whom the results are consistent with the holy Scriptures, and who understand their calling and their mission. Yes, evangelism is a noble and indispensable work, and every church needs some of them, Ephesians 4:11, but the priority of the church, its primary purpose in the eyes of God, is to be brought to Christlikeness (Eph 4:13) through the consistent preaching of the holy Scriptures, so that it might offer acceptable worship to God. (Jn 4:23) This is not rocket science, it's not a hidden mystery buried somewhere between the lines, it is the consistent and glaring revelation of the entirety of the New Testament Scriptures.

Now I know we've made some bold statements, so it's entirely appropriate that we support those statements and evaluations with the appropriate holy Scriptures, rightly applied and in their proper context. So let's do that. We have implied that Peter's understanding of faith is consistently tied to obedience to Jesus Christ and the virtuous behaviors of those who receive that faith. So, while still speaking concerning this faith, Peter goes on to say the following:

3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

2Peter 1:3-4 (NASB)

To Peter, the faith that he had received, and acknowledges that we have received as well, is a faith that effectuates holiness of lifestyle and virtuous behaviors, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. Through His precious and magnificent promises of a regenerated spirit and a new heart, we may become partakers of the divine nature. Through regeneration and transformation we began to understand and appreciate, and actually begin to practice in our own lives, those very things that are consistent with the nature of Christ our Savior. This is what is meant by partaking of the divine nature.

It means the nature of the regenerated believer is brought into conformity to the nature of Christ, by the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is in no way implying that we become divine in our essence, nor do we share divinity, but we share in the precious *attributes* of the divine nature. And in doing this, **we escape the corruption that is in the world by lust.** The divine nature operating within us will enable us to resist the lustful things of the flesh and escape the corruption that is in the world around us. This is what we should be preaching and teaching and practicing in our churches on Sunday mornings, and if we are, then the Lord will save those who are appointed unto salvation. (Acts 13:48)

I have to add one more comment here on verse three concerning the statement that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness. This literally means that everything necessary for living the Christian life in a godly manner has been granted to us through our saving knowledge of Him who called us by His glory and excellence. The knowledge of Christ, and the will of God, provided to us in the holy Scriptures, and applied to our hearts and minds

through the agency of the Holy Spirit, provides everything we will ever need for salvation and sanctification in the course of our lifetime. The Scriptures are a complete manual for life and godliness, nothing is missing, we do not need additional books or writings. We do not need the additional counseling of men, the Scriptures are sufficient and complete.

This is the true nature, according to holy Scriptures, of that faith that we have received by the grace of God through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And Peter doesn't stop here, he goes on with a long list of virtuous attributes that define the nature of a genuine Christian and partaker of the divine nature through the gift of saving faith. And what are these characteristics, let's read them and see:

5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

Peter says, for this very reason. What reason? The same reason we've just discussed in the previous sentence whereby Peter acknowledges the magnificent promises of God of a new heart and a regenerated spirit, so he goes on to describe more of the attributes that are displayed within us as we partake of the divine nature.

This is an amazing list that appears to be progressive in nature. He says that in the application of our faith we supply moral excellence, and in that moral excellence knowledge, and knowledge leads to self control, and self-control when practiced diligently produces perseverance, and perseverance in these virtues produces godliness, and godliness demonstrates itself in brotherly kindness, and eventually brotherly love.

Peter says that if these qualities are ours, in other words, if we are daily demonstrating these virtues consistently in our lives right now, and if they are increasing continually as we mature, then our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ will not be unfruitful, and we will not be useless, either for service or for worship. But in contrast he goes on to say that if anyone lacks these qualities then that person is either blind or shortsighted, and they have apparently forgot the purification from their former sins and have fallen right back into them, which may well render them both fruitless and useless for service or worship, until such time as they confess their error and repent of their sinful behaviors.

Peter finishes this thought with an exhortation to be diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing us, because we can be certain of our calling, if indeed, we are practicing these things from the heart, diligently and faithfully, and if so, then we can be confident that an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to us.

Verses 12-15:

12 Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. 13 I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, 14 knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.

2 Peter 1:12-15 (NASB)

Now Peter adds a very interesting personal, and touching comment. He kind of says, I know that you guys already know all this, and I acknowledge that you're well established in it already, but I really wanted to just stir you up one more time by way of reminder, because the Lord Jesus has made it clear to me that my death is imminent. And knowing this I was also concerned that after my death you would still have a means by which you would be able to call these things to

mind, and so I have written you these two epistles, which you can still read and refer to long after my departure. After a lifetime of contending for the faith, Peter was well aware of the trials and temptations of Christian life. He was also very concerned about the coming wave of false teachers that he knew would rise up from within the church itself, and lead many astray on the wrong path, including some genuine believers who were young in the faith and didn't have sufficient knowledge to recognize these imposters. While their souls can't be lost, they can nevertheless, be led down many unpleasant paths that will cause them much anguish and suffering. Peter wanted to leave as much information behind him as possible to help identify ones such as these. As did Paul, and Jude, and John as well.

Conclusion:

To kind of sum this up, we began by discussing Peter's statement concerning a faith the same as ours. We discussed the fact that this term "faith" is used in all kinds of contexts to mean all kinds of things, so we can't just say we have faith and think we understand what someone means by that term. It's absolutely essential that we define it in tangible terms if we want the word to have any meaning. In the religious realm it can mean almost anything, but even in the realm of evangelicalism we find many and diverse beliefs and practices that call themselves Christian faith. So how do we know what really is biblical Christian faith? The Scriptures define it for us very well. We are given meticulous examples of what it looks like and how it operates, and Peter provides one of those for us right here in this epistle. Biblical Christian faith produces effects, which the Bible calls fruits, and these effects are expressed as attitudes, behaviors, priorities, and affections, all of which are in keeping with that divine nature exhibited by Christ. Genuine faith inevitably produces an ongoing process of transformation toward Christlikeness in every faithful believer.

However, so that I don't overwhelm you, this process isn't quick and easy. It doesn't simply happen by itself in the background while you sleep and work. And it isn't a nice linear progression, whereby you see a certain level of transformation and never have to deal with those things again. In real life, sanctification is an illusive critter, as quickly as you think you've got a grasp on it, it pops right out of your hand and you have to chase it down again. There will be periods in your life of apparent success, and there will probably be periods where you almost stop trying, but if you're indwelt by the Holy Spirit you won't be able to quit, and you'll always return to the battle, because regardless of the level of success, you can't be happy unless you're involved in the process, and pursuing that objective for which you were predestined by God from eternity past.

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Romans 8:29-30 (NASB)

To Him be the glory forever and ever.
Amen.

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02/03/10