

## STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST PETER

### GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES!

Read 2 Peter 1:1-4

#### **Introduction.**

What does it take to become a mature Christian? Does it just happen over time or is there something you can do to accelerate growth? In this study and the next (1:1-11) Peter unfolds both God's grace and a growth plan for Christians -- and, incidentally, a discipleship approach for teachers and leaders to use in developing Christians to their full potential.

#### **The Sender**

*“Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ...” (v1a)*

The Apostle here called himself Simon Peter. We remember that Simon was his given name at birth; Peter was the special name given to him by Jesus, to call this man to “rock-like” thinking and behaviour.

Some have said that Peter didn't write this letter because the subject and style is somewhat different than 1 Peter. Yet the purpose of the two letters is quite different. 1 Peter was written to encourage Christians under the threat of violent persecution; 2 Peter was written to warn those same believers of the danger of false teachers and harmful influences.

#### **Bondservant and Apostle**

The order of these titles is important. Peter considered himself first a bondservant, and then an apostle. His standing as a bondservant was more important to him than his status as an apostle.

#### **Like Precious Faith**

*“To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (v1b)*

Peter wrote to those who had the same salvation he had experienced, which he called “a like precious faith.” This faith was obtained, and not by the efforts of man but by the righteousness of our God.

We can see several important truths in this sentence.

The first is rather amazing. Peter is saying that his readers have a faith that is every much as privileged as his own. "Like precious" translates the Greek adjective “isotimos”, which means "equal in honour or value" and simply "equal, like, of the same kind or value." You and I have received the same kind of faith as Apostle Peter himself.

Second, this faith is received from God -- *“who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ ...”* It is a gift. Echoes of this truth can be found in Acts 13:48; 17:31; Romans 12:3; 8:28-30; Hebrews 12:2; and Jude 3. Since God gives faith, no one can say, "I don't have much faith." They just need to use what God has already apportioned to them. Jesus pointed out that only a mustard-seed-sized faith is necessary to accomplish the impossible (Matthew 17:20).

Third, we have received faith due to God's righteousness. "Righteousness" is the common Greek noun “dikaionē”, here the "quality or state of juridical correctness with focus on redemptive action, righteousness." God's uprightness has brought freedom to his undeserving people. Hallelujah!

Fourth, Peter seems to be equating Jesus with God – "... our God and Saviour Jesus Christ..." We shouldn't find this strange. The New Testament writers are utterly convinced that Jesus is divine (John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:12; Titus 2:13; Philippians 2:6; Hebrews 1:8; 1 John 5:20).

Fifth, Peter points to Jesus as our "Saviour." Sometimes, we toss off the word "saved" so often that we don't really think about what it means. It's just Christian jargon to us. "Saviour" means "rescuer" – someone who saves our life when we don't have a chance to rescue ourselves.

### **The Greeting**

*"Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (v2)*

Peter indicated that grace and peace — those two most precious of gifts — are ours in the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. As we know God, we gain these essential foundations for salvation and living. "Grace" would be the characteristic Greek greeting while shalom, "peace," would be the characteristic Hebrew greeting.

But notice that Peter ties the blessings of grace and peace to knowledge, that will cause these blessings to be multiplied. The Hebrew word "yāda", which underlies Peter's use of the word "knowledge," has a wide range of meaning, but "knowledge" in the Hebrew sense suggests a familiarity or relationship with a thing or situation or person that is known, arising from personal encounter or experience. Thus, to know a woman could mean to have intimate sexual relations with her. To know God meant an intimate relationship, but always based on responding to God's revelation of himself.

### **Everything We Need**

*"... 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..." (v3)*

However, not only grace and peace — but also all things that pertain to life and godliness are ours through the knowledge of Him. Knowing God is the key to all things that pertain to life and godliness.

We are willing to try almost anything except the knowledge of Him. We will trust in the schemes and plans of men instead of the knowledge of Him. We will try knowing ourselves instead of the knowledge of Him. We need to come to the same place the Apostle Paul did, when he said that I may know Him (Philippians 3:10). The ancient Greek word "knowledge" doesn't refer to a casual acquaintance. It means an exact, complete, and thorough knowledge.

We come to knowledge of Him as we learn of Him through His Word, through prayer, and through the community of God's people. It is true that we need God alone, but God does not meet us only in our solitude but also in the community of His people. This knowledge of God comes to those who are *called*. It is knowledge, but it is not mere intellectual understanding or intuition. It is the knowledge that comes by experience — the experience God's people have of God Himself.

### **Called By God's Own Glory**

Paul spoke about the "high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). Peter explains that we have been called by God's own glory and excellence (virtue). God's glory, of course, is first exhibited in the Old Testament. God appears in a burning bush on ground so holy that Moses is told to take off his sandals. God appears in his glory in the tabernacle and on Mount Sinai. Though Moses sees only God's backside, he is changed by it. His face glows so that he covers his face with a veil until the glow wears off (Exodus 34:33-35; 2 Corinthians 3:13).

In Jesus, God's glory is present in the flesh.

*"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14).*

But God's glory on earth is just a fraction of what it is in heaven (John 17:5). The point of this passage is that we are called "by" the standard and holiness of God's shekinah glory -- the power and overwhelming weight of his Presence. We are called by that degree of glory, and it is meant to change us as we behold God. Don't flinch in the glory of his Presence (2 Corinthians 3:18).

### **The Power of Promises in our Lives.**

*"... 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." (v4)*

This explains the value of the glory and virtue of God that calls us. By these He gave us exceedingly great and precious promises. This means that the promises of God are based upon His glory and virtue, and therefore perfectly reliable because God can never compromise His glory and virtue. Psalm 138:2 reminds us that God honors His word even above His name. We never have to doubt any promise of God. Instead, we should let God be true but every man a liar (Romans 3:4).

We've all heard that excuse, "Well, no one's perfect." But God is perfect, and we are called to his perfection. We are called to "participate in the divine nature," not to "cop out" and say it is impossible.

Through his own glory and excellence, he has given us promises -- very great and very valuable promises. Two things define God's promises -- (1) they are exceedingly, extraordinarily great and (2) they are of great and exceptional value. Sometimes, by reason of familiarity, we forget how great and precious God's promises are.

But are the promises that Peter is referring to (1) promises of something yet to come or (2) fulfilled promises -- promises that God has made in the past and which find their fulfillment through Jesus Christ? I think the answer is, "Both."

Those promises that have been fulfilled in Christ are certainly great and very precious:

- That the Son of David, the Messiah should come (2 Samuel 7:12; Acts 13:22-23).
- That he would bear all our sins in his body on the cross (Isaiah 53; 1 Peter 3).

But the promises which Christ makes to us about the present are precious and very great, too:

- That we shall receive the Holy Spirit.
- That we have been adopted and now have the relationship to God as sons and daughters.
- That God hears our prayers and answers them.
- That in his name we will do the miracles that Jesus did and even greater.
- That he will never leave us or forsake us
- That Jesus loves us in spite of our failures and sins.

The promises Christ makes about the future are equally precious and great:

- That God will meet every need we have according to the extent of his riches.

- That we will go to heaven when we die.
- That we will escape the punishment we deserve for our sins.
- That Christ will return and take us to himself.
- That our bodies -- whether living or dead at Christ's return -- will be raised and changed.
- That we will rule and reign with Christ in the new heavens and new earth.

I've just highlighted a few promises from the hundreds and hundreds contained in the Bible. But you can see how our lives are shaped by them -- or rather, by believing them.

### ***Partakers of the Divine Nature***

This explains the value of these great and precious promises. Through these promises, we are partakers of the divine nature. Peter's idea is similar to Paul's idea of our glorious status as adopted sons and daughters of God (Galatians 4:5-7). This is a remarkably generous and loving of God. He could rescue us from hell without even inviting us to be partakers of divine nature. It shows how deeply God loves us and wants to share His life — indeed, even the divine nature — with His people.

### ***Escaping the World's Corruption***

What does corruption mean? "Corruption" is the Greek noun "phthora". The basic meaning is the "breakdown of organic matter, dissolution, deterioration, corruption." Here and in 2:19 it refers to "inward depravity, depravity."

What causes this inward moral deterioration? Evil desires. "Lust" (NRSV, KJV) and "evil desires" (NIV) translate the Greek noun "epithumia", "a desire for something forbidden or simply inordinate, craving, lust." Have you struggled with overwhelming desires for something that ends up drawing you away from God and your relationship with him?

We sometimes try to justify our actions and desires by saying, "There's nothing really wrong with this." But it's not just desire for evil things that can be destructive. When our desire for good things becomes so great in our lives that it eclipses our relationship with God and our desire for God, then it sows that corruption in our lives. These strong desires can nibble away at our relationship with God bit by bit, like water eventually dissolves limestone and carries it away.

The first commandment is "*You shall have no other gods before me*" (Exodus 20:3). The greatest commandment is, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*" (Matthew 22:27-38).

