

## BEING USEFUL

### 2 Peter 1:1-11

So many Christians never grow much past their salvation experience and are being robbed of the blessings that God intended for His children. Speaking of blessings, we often hear a popular quote that says something to the effect, “You are blessed so you can be a blessing to others.” I think that a more important truth is found in this statement: “Be a blessing to others and you will be blessed.” This first statement is somewhat passive and the second encourages us to take initiative. The apostle Simon Peter wrote to his fellow Christians urging them to go on beyond spiritual birth and to experience the joys and spiritual maturity that were purchased for them when they were saved.

#### Greetings – 1:1-2

<sup>1</sup> 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: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 2 Peter 1:1-2 (NASB95)

This second letter written by Peter apparently was sent to the same group of Christians who had gotten the first letter. In chapter three (verse one) he mentioned that this was a second letter. The first letter specifically mentioned that the target readers were the pilgrims (Christians) of the dispersion. The most likely dispersion was the one that had occurred during the strong persecution following the stoning of Stephen in Jerusalem. Of course, all these people had a Jewish or Hebrew background since the spread of the gospel had not gotten beyond Judea at that time.

Some commentators think that some Gentile background believers were associated with the various local church groups to whom this second letter was sent. Notice that in this second letter Peter made a distinction between “them” and “us.” The KJV has “to them that have obtained like precious faith with us.” There is speculation that the “them” referred to the Gentile background Christians and the “us” referred to the Hebrew background Christians. However, the only distinction that Peter had made in the first letter that came anywhere close to such a distinction was with reference to those who had personally interacted with Christ before His ascension (us) and those who had not (them).

The dates of the two letters are unknown. Guesses range anywhere from as early as the year 44 and as late as the year 68. The places where Peter was when he wrote these letters are also uncertain. Even though he wrote in 5:13 of the first letter that he was in Babylon, some speculate that this was a code name for Rome or even Jerusalem as some try to assign the “Babylon” of Revelation 18 to be either Rome or Jerusalem. Regarding Peter’s location, there is little Scripture basis for that assumption. It would not be difficult to believe that Peter would be in such an area since Babylon in Assyria had a rather large Jewish population that had ties back to the exile times. It is more probable that Peter actually was in Rome when he wrote the second letter since he had commented that “shortly I must put off this tabernacle” which was a reference to his impending death.

What about this “precious faith” that they had “obtained?” First of all, the word “obtained” literally means “received by allotment.” This terminology is good confirmation that the faith we have that has been given to us is something that God has allotted to us. This agrees with what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8 that “by grace we have been saved through faith and that (faith was) not of ourselves – it is the gift of God.” This also agrees with what Paul wrote in Romans 12:3 that “God has dealt (allotted) to every man the measure of faith.” The second thing we see is that this faith is precious or valuable. Just because it was a gift and is not something that we could earn it is not to be wasted by neglect and lack of exercise. We cannot appreciate nor benefit from this “value” if the gift is not put to use in the everyday course of our lives.

An even more important question that we need to ask is “faith in what?” About half the

translations that I checked have “by (through) the righteousness of God” and the other half use “in the righteousness of God” which is a more literal rendering of that part of verse one. We just discussed that this faith came to us by or through a gift of God as an allotment to us. While we can make a legitimate argument that this faith also came through (or as a result of) God’s righteousness, that is not the literal meaning of what Peter wrote. There is a LOT of difference in what these two alternatives mean. The more literal rendering gives us an understanding of “in what” or “in whom” we are to be trusting.

What does it actually mean to put our trust **in** the “righteousness of God?” The very essence of what most of us mean when we think about a person being “saved” is that the person has been “justified” or declared to be “righteous” by God. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21 we are to become the “righteousness of God” in Christ. Our faith is **IN** the fact that God has saved us as a result of believing (exercising the measure of faith that we have) that “what God has done for us in Christ” was necessary and sufficient to satisfy the just penalty for sin and that we have been deemed to be justified and righteous in God’s sight. The fact that we can trust what God has declared (His word) hinges ultimately on our trust in Who we know Him to be as revealed in Christ Jesus.

In verse two we read a statement that seems to border on the idea of Gnosticism that Grace and Peace will be increased (multiplied) as we gain more knowledge of God and the Lord Jesus. The key distinction that makes this different from Gnosticism is that the word translated in most versions as “knowledge” could also be rendered as “acknowledge.” If we make this substitution, then we see that the greater our acceptance and buy-in (acknowledgment) of what we have learned (know) about God the Father and the Lordship of Christ, then the more assurance (peace) we can experience from the all-sufficient grace (provision) of God.

#### God’s Completed Provision – 1:3-4

<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. 2 Peter 1:3-4 (NASB95)

It helps us to realize that we are dealing with God Who is all powerful as He demonstrated in the creation and as He demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus from death. His power is not of earthly origin but is divine and by that immeasurable power He has provided everything that we need for life and godliness (or a godlike life) and has granted it to us.

The word “provision” indicates the existence of something. It is sort of like saying that the bank has money – that is the provision. The granting of that “something” is like having money in the bank deposited into your account. There is one additional thing to consider and that is that the money that has been provided and granted has to be supplied to us so that we can benefit from it. The supply of “what we need” happens when we make a withdrawal from the account. This idea is what Paul meant in Philippians 4:19 “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Notice the differences in the verb tenses in Peter’s statement (has granted – past perfect tense, passive voice) and Paul’s statement (shall supply – future tense, active voice).

Peter was saying that the granting of God’s provision is an already completed act and Paul was telling us that it is available (now and in the future) to meet our needs as we, in an act of faith, make use of what God has provided and granted to us. The completed act by which God provided all things pertaining to life and godliness was that God gave us His Son and in Him is everything that is needed. Peter then addressed the “granting to us” aspect of this process. That granting is through or by the full, complete, and true acknowledgment of the truth that we know of God Who has been revealed to us in the Scriptures and in the Person of Jesus Christ. This is not just having “information” but also involves the choice of embracing that information and making it a part of who we are.

The “Him” in verse three is a reference to God or to Christ (Who is God) and He is further identified as the One who called us. Maclaren’s comment on this is helpful.

Some translations say ‘Him that has called us **to** glory and virtue,’ and others say ‘Him that hath called us **by** his own glory and virtue.’ Do you see the difference? In one case the language expresses the things in imitation of the Divine nature to which God summons you and me when He calls us. . . . the deeper thought still is the things in that Divine nature and activity itself which constitute His great summons and invitation of men to His side; and these are the two, whatever they might be, which the Apostle here describes in that rather peculiar and unusual language for Scripture, ‘Who has called us by His own glory and His own virtue.’

In other word, those attributes which initially draw us to God are the glory and virtue that we see in Christ Who is the Express Image of the Father.

We might ask “isn’t taking on the Divine nature also important?” The answer is an absolute “yes” and that is addressed in verse four where to see that we are to become “partakers” of the Divine nature. In a sense, every human being “has” or possesses a degree of the Divine nature in that man was “made in the image of God.” We could say that there is a kinship with God already present in every human. It is this kinship or likeness that makes it possible for us to partake of the Divine nature. The step beyond the kinship obtained in the creation comes about by the granting of “precious and magnificent promises” from God. The top two promises from God that were fulfilled are the “Gift of God Own Son” and the subsequent “giving of the Holy Spirit” to indwell those who receive these gifts. It is by these two gifts that we become partakers of the Divine nature. This is the meaning of the central truth of Christianity – the Divine becomes a partaker in humanity and humanity becomes a partaker in the Divine. In other words, God is incarnate in us by the Holy Spirit and we are in Christ.

The next question we should be concerned about is the character of this Divine nature in which we are partaking. Even a casual reading of the Word of God provides us with a realization that the essential attributes of God beyond His eternal essence (God Is) are summed up in the statements “God is Holy” and “God is Love.” Maclaren observed that “The central Divinity in the Divine, if I may so say, is the amalgam of holiness and love. That is God; the rest is what belongs to God. God has power; God is love.”

Satan’s temptation in the Garden of Eden was the lie that man could become like God in knowledge by disobeying God. The truth of the matter is that we become like God in character (holiness or purity, loving-kindness or mercy) by obedience to Him and His word and thus become eligible to participate in His knowledge and power. Some groups of that day (the Gnostics) made claims of having special knowledge that allowed them to progress spiritually. There are such groups today that make the same error. We are given all the knowledge we need in Jesus Christ to be transformed and grow in the character of God and “be partakers of the divine nature” of being holy and demonstrating love.

The other choice that we have is to continue in the way of the natural world and experience degradation and corruption which are the characteristics of death. There is no neutrality. We are either growing or degrading. Human nature without God is destined to exhibit the character of death. Many claim to have divine life in them – that is that they are Christians. The evidence of the presence of that divine life is the putting away or casting out of the evil desires (lusts) that find their origin in the old life. This is an activity that requires us to take initiative to see the outcome that God desires for us as His children. Even strong Christians who are well grounded must be diligent in this matter. Consider that Paul encouraged Timothy (who was a pastor in the Church at Ephesus) to flee youthful lusts. We need to get over being passive in the process of our being transformed into the image of Christ.

### The Character of a Fruitful Disciple – 1:5-9

<sup>5</sup> Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your*

perseverance, godliness,<sup>7</sup> and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. 2 Peter 1:5-9 (NASB95)

Even though our faith is key in our Christian experience, for by it we enter into our new life in Christ, it is not the only virtue that God has provided for us. If we do not take some initiative (diligence or eagerness) for growth then we will be as the person that buys a ticket to the amusement park and then doesn't take the initiative to go to the other areas to enjoy them. Peter says that we should give “all diligence” to the opportunities at hand. Faith is the starting point and it is by faith that we participate in all the rest of God’s promises. We are to add into that faith (that God has given us) a host of worthwhile characteristics. The word picture that Peter has given us in the word “add” is akin to assembling a chorus of various voice parts that work harmoniously together.

We might use a term such as “reliability” to capture the same meaning as virtue or moral excellence. Peter was saying that it is important that God, as well as people, can count on us. That is a Godlike quality. Above all, we know that we can count on God. The next thing we need to add is knowledge. I believe that every Christian has access to revelation knowledge that comes to us from God. This is a knowing beyond understanding. It is a knowing that is in alignment with the word of God. It is our responsibility to seek after such knowledge and to be sensitive to it as God reveals it to us. It is a matter of competency in being a Christian. Jesus (when He was 12 years old) told Mary that He had to be “about His Father's business.” We would not think very highly of a person that was in business and did not know anything about what he was selling or a physician that didn’t know anything about medicine. We would think that they were incompetent.

Beyond that, we are to exercise self-control in all that we do. Being well balanced is important for a healthy (both physical and spiritual) life. Without self-control we can let the good keep us away from the better and the better keep us away from the best. We might get sidetracked in life if we forget to focus on and to continue to press toward the goal. I guess, in that way, self-control and perseverance (patience) work together.

Godliness is both an awareness of and reverence for God and it is taking on the character and nature of God, incorporating it in our lives from the inside out. God, by the Holy Spirit, indwells us and as we surrender more and more of ourselves to Him, His life will be more evident in us. Flowing out of reverence for God and having His life in us, we will find that element of mercy that is characteristic of God working out in our lives toward other people. The final and ultimate character that we can attain to is to be able to walk in Godlike love which loves regardless of the worthiness of the object being loved and loves regardless of the cost.

Not only is it important that we have these qualities it is also important that we are diligent to make sure that they are increasing in our lives. There is work to be done and fruit to be produced as we “acknowledge” the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives. Failure to do this shows up as idleness or passivity in our Christian lives and an absence of positive or beneficial results. Peter compared such failure to being either blind or short-sighted and not appreciating the benefits of our salvation in that we have been delivered and purified from the sinful life that controlled us before we were saved.

#### Assurance of Full and Final Salvation – 1:10-11

<sup>10</sup> 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; <sup>11</sup> for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. 2 Peter 1:10-11 (NASB95)

The apparent concern in verse ten is that we have and do not doubt the assurance of our salvation. Since that is the focus of this verse, then the “falling” or “stumbling” mentioned at the end of this verse would be related to doubts about the certainty of our salvation. The

“stumbling” is not about losing our salvation but about having doubts come in about that salvation. The way to avoid such doubts is to be eager and earnest about putting into practice the various virtues and Godly characteristics that we have added to the faith that God, in His grace, has given to us. Those who find themselves vulnerable to such doubts are likely to be those who are either passive or simply have neglected to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ in their everyday lives.

Notice that in the text of verse ten in Peter’s letter he did not use the word “salvation” but, instead, used the phrase “calling and election.” In the NAS version we find “His calling and choosing you.” In other versions this is rendered “your calling and election.” In Young’s Literal Translation we find “your calling and choice.” Many of the scholars who are engaged in “translating Scriptures” and “writing commentaries” have Calvinist backgrounds or they are supportive of his teachings. There should not be any argument that it is God who issues the invitation or the call to a lost world. In some strongly Calvinistic commentaries, a statement is made that the “call” is issued only to the “elected.” That would mean that the sequence is that God, in His sovereignty, first chooses those to whom the invitation is issued and that constitutes how the “call” is made.

We are familiar with the statement from Scripture that tells us “Many are called, few are chosen.” This was the concluding statement that Christ made following the parable about those who were invited to the wedding feast of the wealthy man’s son. Many of the initial invitees had conflicts or excuses and turned down the invitation. He then sent his servants out into the byways and invited strangers to come to the wedding celebration.

In this parable, who did the inviting? Obviously, it was the wealthy father of the groom. Who were the ones who either accepted or rejected the invitation? Again, it is obviously those who choose to attend or not attend the wedding. Could we say that “many are invited but few choose to accept or respond to the invitation?”

Peter’s words in these two verses give us the keynote of the letter. It is Christ-centered thinking, leading to God-directed living, which reassures us of our calling by God, and enables us to maintain an unbroken relationship with Him. That spurs us toward the ultimate goal of being an active participant in Christ’s kingdom.

These “things” are what success is all about in the Christian life. These will assure that our lives will bear fruit and be pleasing to God. Not growing in grace is like the person that gets into the amusement park and then forgot why he came. It is as if he is totally unaware of what God has for him. It is important that we validate the genuineness of our faith by growth, maturity, and bearing fruit.

We do need to be reminded of why we were saved. We need to remind each other and to remind ourselves lest we become sidetracked in our Christian walk.