

## **BE EQUIPPED**

2 Peter 1:3-8, 16-21

If Christians never grow much past their salvation experience, then they 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 another 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. 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 targeted 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.

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 first letter focused on encouragement of the saints to securely keep their faith and hope during times of trials and persecution. In this second letter the emphasis was on being a faithful witness of what a Christian life should exemplify in a world that was lost in corruption that was characteristics of Babylon. While our salvation preserves and protects us spiritually, it also blesses us in the relationships we have with God, with others and with our own self as we step out in faithfully following Christ.

### Their Salvation – 1:3-8

<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. <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. 2 Peter 1:3-8 (NASB95)

When we realize that we are related to God Who is all powerful as He demonstrated in the creation and as He demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus from death, then we are both encouraged and motivated. 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.

What does it mean that God has called us by His own glory and excellence? This can mean that people (even those who are enslaved by sin) are able to see in the special nature of Jesus (glory) and in His moral excellence (virtue as seen in His sinless life) hope for themselves if they put their trust in Him. Because of this, they are drawn to Him for deliverance and salvation. 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.

It is also by or through His glory and virtue that He provides the promises upon which our hope is based and by standing on (putting our faith in) these promises we are transformed into the image of Christ (that is, we take on His divine nature). The alternative is to be trapped in the corruption that results from following uncontrolled natural desires (the lusts of the flesh) that are part of the world’s way of living. 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’s 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 based on 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.

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 who buys a ticket to the amusement park and then doesn’t take the initiative to go into the various areas to enjoy them. Peter said 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 picture that Peter has given us in the word “supply” (or “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 or supply 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 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.

### Jesus’s Identity – 1:16-18

<sup>16</sup>For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. <sup>17</sup>For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”— <sup>18</sup>and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 2 Peter 1:16-18 (NASB95)

How can we apply what Peter said regarding his teaching and message to these Christians to the way we witness to others? How many times have we heard someone say, “all this Bible stuff is just a fairy tale that has no substance?” What would cause someone to make such a statement? To answer this question, we might think about the times when the “public” has a chance to see the church and its impact on the community. What are the occasions where the church is featured in the local newspaper or on the local TV news or sometimes in the national news? Without giving it a lot of thought, the times that might come to mind are Christmas, Easter, Halloween, and Thanksgiving.

What are the things that make the news or get incorporated in the reporting by the media at Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving and Halloween? If we were from another planet and observed what was going on we would see, buying, giving and receiving gifts; arguments over Merry Christmas versus Happy Holidays; trees with decorations and flashing lights, Santa Claus and reindeer, evergreen branches and holly berries and yule logs; travel to be with family; good food; providing food and gifts to the needy; and controversy over something called a manger

scene. There would be secular celebrations of spring and pagan rituals leading up to the time when the Resurrection of Christ happened. The secular activities overshadow most of what is done to emphasize the spiritual significance of what actually happened. Without even going into the Halloween and Thanksgiving emphases, we know there is significant involvement by the church and Christians with haunted houses, trunk-or-treating, football and black Friday. Do you think that the message of the church is diluted if not completely hidden by all the things with which we get involved? Which of these activities would we find the church and individual Christians involved?

We know the difference in the seasonal fairy tales and the truth of the gospel message, but to a nonbeliever the story of Jesus being God Incarnate sounds like a cleverly devised fairy tale.

What was Peter's remedy to counteract this kind of skepticism? It was simply that he was there and he experienced it and was relating "what he had witnessed and knew." Peter saw Jesus walk on water, heal the sick, and raise the dead. Peter was there on the Mount of Transfiguration and heard the voice of God, the Father. Peter was there when the vision and message about clean versus unclean animals confirmed what God had been doing with the family Cornelius, the Roman centurion. He was not simply sharing an account of what someone else had told him. It is difficult to refute the account of someone who has been there and done that.

So, let's go back to the question regarding how we can apply the teaching that Peter has shared with us? Without over simplifying it, "we need to be relating what God has done in our lives through our trust in the Lord Jesus as we witness to others." If our testimony is only what we find in an evangelism pamphlet, then we are more likely to get the skepticism that Peter said that we need to avoid.

What can be more central and foundational to the gospel message other than the truth that Jesus is the Son of God? This was confirmed to reliable witnesses on two occasions and both involved a voice speaking from heaven. Peter also was a witness of the life events that involved teaching, miracles, and many other things that were in accurate fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

Scripture – 1:19-21

Inspired Scripture – Written by God – 1:19-21

<sup>19</sup> *So we have the prophetic word made more sure*, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. <sup>20</sup> But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, <sup>21</sup> for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. 2 Peter 1:19-21 (NASB95)

We could ask "what would need to happen to make the prophetic words that we read in Old Testament Scriptures more sure?" The first thing that we likely think about is that those prophecies have been and are being fulfilled. At the time Peter wrote these two letters, he had personally experienced and witnessed fulfilled prophecies in the life, work, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. All of those to whom he was writing were Christians and had experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit into their lives which was also prophesied. We could certainly agree that witnessing or experiencing the fulfillment of various Old Testament prophecies would give us great assurance regarding the validity of the entire body of prophecy.

Since we have such evidence of the validity of the OT prophecies, we do well to pay attention to and appreciate it as did David who wrote in Psalms 119:105 "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" or as Peter writes "shining in a dark place." This "lamp" is said to be what we have up until a point in which something significant changes.

Prior to our conversion which resulted in the new birth and the indwelling presence of Christ by the Holy Spirit, the OT Scripture was the only light that was available to us. Now that we are in Christ and Christ is in (or has arisen in) our hearts, we should be able to see much more clearly. It would be like the difference in having to use an oil lamp in the middle of the night as compared to being able to see things after the sun has come up.

The statement that Peter made regarding “private interpretation” of prophecies has been seen by some to apply to those who read the prophecies and some contend that Peter meant that the prophets themselves were not recording their personal private opinions. In the first case, we certainly do need the help of the Holy Spirit in understanding the full implications of Scriptural prophecies. In the second case regarding the prophets, who could argue against the idea that for a prophetic message to be valid and one that would be sure to be fulfilled that the Spirit of God would have to be the primary source?

Summary: Living with truth should, first of all, influence all our relationships with others. We need to know the foundational basis for the truth we have and be able to stand firm in our belief. Finally, we need to make sure that “whatever we think is truth” aligns with the absolute truth of God’s word.