

2 Peter

Empowering Grace

Peter, while in prison in Rome awaiting his martyrdom, writes this second letter to the churches in Asia Minor. As exiles in a pagan land, the early church is facing several challenges as there are false teachers who were exerting pressure on the churches to depart from the true knowledge of Christ. This challenge is not only a theological challenge but also a moral one, holding forth to some sort of sexual permissiveness as a legitimate Christian lifestyle. Does this sound familiar?

So, while Peter was addressing the first century churches in Asia Minor, he is also addressing the world we find ourselves in today as exiles of the dispersion.

While 1 Peter is written to Christians facing trials and persecution, 2 Peter is written to address false teaching among them. 1 Peter was written to give hope, 2 Peter is written to affirm true knowledge.

He starts by letting us know that God's Grace in Christ is the source of Godly living.

1. Greeting

2 Peter 1:1-2

Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

Peter starts out by identifying himself and giving his credentials as a servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ. As we mentioned last week, this establishes his authority as being one who was not only a witness to His life, death and resurrection; he is also called personally by Jesus to be His ambassador.

To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

He addresses his letter to those whom, although having come after them and were not witnesses to Jesus' life, have now believed and therefore have status, "equal standing" as being part of the body of Christ.

2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

In this second verse he establishes a theme that runs through the entire epistle, that of grace.

In Christian terms, grace can be defined as "God's favor toward the unworthy" or "God's benevolence on the undeserving." In His grace, God is willing to forgive us and bless us, even though we fall short of living righteously.

1. Part of the definition is Webster's is: "Unmerited divine assistance granted to humans for their regeneration or sanctification."
2. "Approval, or Favor"
3. "A charming or attractive trait or characteristic"

His grace is multiplied by the Holy Spirit to live in a way that represents what we have learned about Jesus and how to apply it to our lives.

2. God's power is exercised on our behalf.

2 Peter 1:3-4

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

God Himself has acted in His infinite power to accomplish salvation, something human ability could not accomplish on its own.

This happens through, not a head knowledge, but an intimate knowledge. My son Ryan knows just about everything about Tom Brady because he's been a fan since his Patriot days. He is very knowledgeable about Tom Brady, but he doesn't know Tom Brady. He's never met him and he doesn't know him personally.

Too many are focused on knowledge of the Scriptures and an intellectual knowledge of Jesus, but don't have a relationship with Him. Peter's contemporaries were Gnostics who were all about knowledge, but they divorced their brain from the flesh and lived in a way that was filled with sensuality as if one had nothing to do with the other.

They had an arrogant knowledge which emancipated them from the claims of morality. They looked down on "unenlightened" church leaders. They perverted the grace of God into license as they separated the things of the soul from the things of the flesh.

Peter calls us to a personal "***knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.***"

He has called us to "***His own glory and excellence***". The Greek for excellence is ***areté***, which is used by Greek writers to describe the sum of all desirable character qualities.

Any of you who have been around me for a while, know that I have an axiom:

"Perfection is a destination. Excellence is a journey, and the joy is in the journey."

He fulfills His promises in us. There are many prophetic words in the Bible that find their fulfillment in Christ and His work in our lives. Even though we were not His people and even though we live in exile, His promises apply to us so that we can have intimacy and be one with Him in His divine nature because of grace.

By talking about partaking of "***the divine nature***", his readers with their Greek background would have understood their transformation into the image of Christ. They would have understood that upon conversion they were delivered from the corruption of this world which is rooted in sinful desire because of original sin. Their focus shifted from the sinful things of the flesh, to the spiritual seeking to be more like Jesus.

3. Making every effort to live a godly life.

2 Peter 1:5-7

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

Because of God's grace in your life, it should result in an outward demonstration of our faith. The Grace of God demands, as it enables, diligence or effort in our lives. We are to bring into this relationship, alongside what God has done, every ounce of determination we can muster. This effort shows itself through:

- a) **Virtue.** In the Greek this is the same word, *areté*, that he used previously that is translated as excellence. In a word, our lives must reflect something of the attractive character of Christ. We must be Christlike. That likeness cannot be acquired except through a personal and continuous encounter with Him by faith.
- b) **Knowledge.** This knowledge I gained in the practical exercise of goodness and virtue which leads to a fuller and deeper knowledge of Christ. The more we act like Him, the more we get to know Him.
- c) **Self-Control.** This means controlling our passions instead of being controlled by them. For the Christian, self-control is submission to the control of the indwelling Christ. It means not giving in to our baser instincts or taking the path of least resistance.
- d) **Steadfastness or Endurance.** Self-control leads to endurance as time after time we persevere, and we don't give up. Day after day we choose to do the right thing and follow the example of Christ regardless of the circumstances.
Heb 12:1-2
"let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross," By following His example, we are enabled to see our apparent misfortunes in the calm light of eternity.
- e) **Godliness.** This steadfastness reflects our character, it shows our reverence toward God. The piety of our lives shows the world that we live not for ourselves but for God in ways that reflect His divine nature.
- f) **Brotherly Affection with love (agape).** Those who have become partakers of the Divine nature, who have been born again, must show their royal birth in royalty of behavior towards other children of the King, whatever their differences in culture, class, or dogmatic differences. This affection is made possible through agape love. This agape might be defined as a deliberate desire for the highest good of the one loved, which shows itself in sacrificial action for that person's good. Men will never believe that God is love unless they see it in the lives of His professed followers. **John 13:35 "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

4. Living an effective life for Christ.

2 Peter 1:8-11

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The true knowledge of Christ, as opposed to just a head knowledge produces these moral and spiritual qualities in the believer. Lack of spiritual growth is a sign of

spiritual death. It is like doing up a down escalator, if you stop moving, you are going backwards.

9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

When we take our eyes off of Jesus and start navel gazing, we become short sighted. This is like when Peter got out of the boat in the middle of the storm and started walking on water. As long as his eye were on Jesus, he was fine. The moment he took his eyes of Jesus and started focusing on the wind and the storm he started to sink.

10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

God knew before the beginning of time which of us would make a decision to follow Jesus. With that foreknowledge He put a plan in place for our salvation. That we are saved does not absolve us from affirming that salvation by having our lives be an ongoing reflection of our relationship with Him.

Rom 8:28-30

8 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

While our salvation and admittance into the Kingdom of God is assured by grace alone, the manner of our entrance will reflect the way that we lived our lives. This is not a grace + theology. Rather, as we continuously grow and allow our lives to be a reflection of that grace, we will build up treasures for ourselves in heaven.

Conclusion

God's grace should not be and excuse for us to take liberties in the flesh and presume on His mercy. His grace should be the motivation for us to strive to get closer to God and to have our lives be empowered by His grace and be a reflection of His grace.

Our faith is not a matter of head knowledge, but is a reflection of an ever deepening relationship and falling in love with Jesus.