

Partakers of the Divine Nature

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[0 : 00] This week we are starting a study through 2 Peter.

! Simeon, Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, may grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

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, 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.

Peter wrote his first letter to comfort and instruct believers who were facing the external threat of persecution. In this letter, Peter addresses the even more deadly threat of false teachers that is arising within the church.

And these false teachers were like many others who have denied Christ. They've twisted the scriptures, including some of Paul's writings. They followed instead cleverly devised myths of destructive heresies.

[1 : 34] They've mocked the second coming of Christ and the coming judgment. They practiced immorality. They've despised authority. They were arrogant and vain, and they sought material gain from serving God.

So do any of these characteristics sound like the false teachers that we might face today? It's amazing how similar it is, isn't it? And like Mike said, we will see a lot of similarities from what Peter wrote to what we see in our current time.

And 2 Peter illustrates Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 7, verses 15 through 20. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 7, 15 through 20. He said,

Peter's letter from Rome. And to be aware of the danger of false prophets, we also need to realize that we have everything we need to recognize the false prophets and to avoid being harmed by them. And our scripture passage tonight will remind us of that.

Peter probably wrote this letter from Rome not too long before his martyrdom, sometime between AD 64 and 67. Elements within the letter lead many scholars to conclude that Peter wrote during a time of persecution by Rome, most likely during the persecution by Nero, who died in AD 68, while Peter himself was in a Roman prison awaiting imminent execution.

[3 : 49] So like Philippians that we're looking at on Sunday morning, this is also a letter that originated from prison. The difference, of course, is that Peter wrote this one instead of Paul.

Paul. We're going to break tonight's passage into four sections, starting with just the first phrase of verse 1. And in that phrase, we get introduced to the greeter.

The greeter is the first thing that we see. And the letter opens with these words. It says, Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.

From the beginning of the letter, Peter leaves no doubt about who wrote the letter. And we see him refer to himself as Simeon Peter. Simeon is a Hebrew spelling of Simon.

Of course, the name Peter comes from Petros, which means stone. And that was the name that was given to Peter by Christ when Peter came to Christ. His original name was Simon, and that speaks of the old nature of Peter.

[4 : 50] And the name Simon was used much less further on in his life after salvation. In fact, after Pentecost, there are only three instances in Scripture where Peter is referred to as Simon.

Notice how Peter designated himself. He said he is a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ. The term servant actually is better translated as slave.

And that demonstrates that Peter was under the authority of Jesus Christ, that he submitted to his lordship, and that he had no inherent authority of his own. It's also the case, though, that the term suggests honor.

Peter was honored because he was a servant of Jesus. And in the Old Testament, prominent men who served God were also called his servants. Examples are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, and David.

And in the New Testament, Paul referred to himself with the same term. So did James and Jude. So you can see then that the term not only suggests humility, but it also suggests honor in serving Jesus.

[5 : 56] And Paul elevates this word by using it in its Hebrew sense to describe a servant who willingly commits himself to serve a master that he loves and respects. He also called himself an apostle.

And the term apostle in some context may simply refer to missionaries or messengers because it literally means someone who is sent. But neither of these meanings really fits here.

Peter was speaking more technically of those whom Jesus Christ specifically called and appointed to serve as apostles. Peter was not merely sharing his opinion in his letter. He wrote as a commissioned slave of Jesus and his appointed servant.

So the apostles were specifically called by Christ and they had seen the risen Lord Jesus.

Remember, they established and governed the whole church under Jesus and they had authority to speak and write the words of God that were equal in authority to the Old Testament scriptures.

Paul was called to be an apostle later when Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road. So the greeting balances both humility and authority. And it clearly shows that this is the Peter who was the most outspoken of the 12 disciples of Jesus.

[7 : 09] Think about the great change that came to Peter after the ascension of Christ. Peter became more stable and he was a good and courageous leader of the early church.

In Pastor Mike's Acts study on Wednesday nights, it hadn't been too long since we just looked at Peter's first sermon right after Pentecost. So remember that Peter was the same apostle who fearfully denied Jesus three times after Jesus' arrest.

But after his ascension, Peter boldly proclaimed the gospel of Jesus despite being in prison for it.

So in the second section of the lesson, then we learn about the greeted.

So you had the greeter started out. Now we have the greeted. And the greeted are the intended recipients of this letter. Peter identifies the recipients in the last half of verse 1.

Peter wrote the letter to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Second Peter doesn't name its recipients.

[8 : 12] But because this was the second letter Peter had written them, they likely are the same people or at least some of the same people to whom first Peter was addressed. And these were believers who lived in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

These were provinces located in Asia Minor, which is modern Turkey. And so here, Peter identifies them not by location, but by their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

And that's a key thing to remember here is that this letter was written to believers. And we need to remember that as we go through all the other verses. The word translated obtained here at the end of verse 1 is a key word.

And the verb means to gain by divine will or to be given by an allotment. And that's a similar word to how the Bible describes the practice of casting lots to learn God's will.

Clearly, it refers to something that's not obtained by human effort or based on the worthiness of the recipient, but it's issued by God for his own sovereign purpose. Peter's readers receive faith because God graciously willed to give it to them.

[9 : 23] That's a key thing to remember as well. Salvation is always gained by grace. It's never gained by merit. And when Peter talks about a faith, it could mean the objective faith, as in the doctrines of the Christian faith, or it could denote subjective belief.

It's best understood in this context, though, without the definite article as the subjective faith. And that's the Christian's power to believe the gospel for salvation. So even though belief in the gospel is commanded of all, so that everybody is responsible for their obedience or disobedience, God must supernaturally grant sinners the ability and power to believe unto salvation.

So Peter began his first epistle writing about divine choice and election in salvation. Here he refers to the human response of faith. So we see God's sovereignty and man's responsibility working together to form the essential elements of salvation.

And we just talked about how Peter was uniquely called to be an apostle of God in the most formal sense. And we know that the original twelve called by Jesus, with the exception of Judas, fit this description.

And later, of course, Paul became the final apostle. But here in the greeting, be sure to notice something. Peter says that his letter's recipients have received a faith of equal standing with his.

[10:45] So how can the believers and we believers today have a faith of equal standing with one of the apostles? Well, anybody who has faith in Jesus has the same access to God as any other believer.

So that access was obtained when they were given the gift of righteousness. And the righteousness that believers are given is the righteousness of Christ himself. The word of equal standing means equally valuable or of equal privilege.

So when you see that equal standing there, the word that it references does talk about something of equal value or of equal privilege. And it designated something that was equal in rank, position, honor, price, or value.

Every believer has received faith as a personal gift. And that faith is in the same nature the precious gift of God, which brings equal spiritual privileges and salvation to all who receive it.

Among the faithful, God sees no distinctions among Christians. And think about what Paul wrote.

He said, So when was the last time you pondered the truth that we as believers today have the same access to God as one of the original apostles did?

[12:08] That is something to really think about. And it's something that we should never take for granted. But we should always be willing to take advantage of that as well.

We've touched on it already, but let's spend a bit more time talking about how we obtain that equal access to God. Peter says we've obtained this access by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Righteousness here doesn't proceed from the Father alone. It proceeds from the Father, but it reaches every believer through the Son, Jesus Christ. And the Greek construction there places just one article before the phrase God and Savior, which makes both terms refer to the same person.

So Peter's identifying Jesus not just as Savior, but also as God. And of course, he's the author and agent of salvation. And the apostle made the same relation clear in his Pentecost sermon that we studied a few weeks ago with Mike.

Remember that he took the Old Testament truth of God and applied it to Jesus. The righteousness of Christ is pure because Christ never sinned. And Christ could not have saved us if he'd been guilty of sin.

[13:22] So our salvation can come from the righteousness of Christ. And his righteousness is given to us for our salvation. Listen to how Charles Spurgeon described the work of Jesus as our Savior.

He said, Jesus Christ is our Savior because he became a substitute for guilty man. He, having taken upon himself the form of manhood by union with our nature, stood in the room, place, and stead of sinners.

When the whole tempest of divine wrath was about to spend itself on man, he endured it all for his elect. When the great whip of the law fell, he bared his own shoulders to the lash.

When the cry was heard, Awake, O sword! It was against Christ the shepherd, against the man who was the fellow to the eternal God. And because he thus suffered in the place instead of man, he received power from on high to become the Savior of man and to bring many sons into glory because he had been made perfect through suffering.

It's interesting we got to this scripture tonight. Mike and I didn't plan it. But this fits really well with what Mike is talking about on Sunday mornings in Philippians 2, 5 through 11.

[14:35] So for more on how and why Jesus took the form of a man, come back on Sunday morning when Mike continues that study in Philippians. So we've seen the greeter and the greeted.

In the next section of the lesson, we see the actual greeting. So greeting is what fills in your next blank. And we see that greeting in verse 2. Verse 2 says, May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

The greeting of grace and peace is distinctly Christian. Grace is the traditional Jewish greeting and peace or shalom is the traditional greeting that the Jews use.

I think I said grace is the traditional Jewish greeting. Grace is actually the traditional Greek greeting and peace or shalom is the traditional Jewish greeting. And that really shows that diverse groups join together when they become Christians.

And the greeting of grace and peace also has theological significance. Grace is God's free, unmerited favor towards sinners. And he grants that to those who believe the gospel when he gives us complete forgiveness forever through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15:52] And then peace with God and from him in all life circumstances is the effect of that grace. And that flows out of the forgiveness that God has given to all of the elect.

So read verse 2 again. How does Peter say that grace and peace will be multiplied to us? Well, all this grace and peace comes in through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

It's not available to those who do not know and wholeheartedly embrace the gospel. Knowledge there is a strengthened form to the basic Greek word for knowledge. And it conveys the idea of a full, rich, and thorough knowledge.

And it involves a degree of intimate understanding of a specific subject. So the substance of salvation is this kind of rational, objective knowledge of God through his word.

And the knowledge that brings salvation derives not from feelings, intuition, emotion, or personal experience, but only from the revealed truth based on the gospel preached in and from the word.

[17:01] Salvation requires a genuine knowledge of the person and work of Jesus Christ. It involves not merely knowing the truth about him, but actually knowing him through the truth of his word.

So do you see the difference there between knowing about him and actually knowing him? That's a key distinction. And knowing the Lord in salvation is the starting point.

The rest of the believer's life is a pursuit of greater knowledge of the glory of the Lord and of his grace. So the more we know of God, the more grounds and reasons we shall have for enjoying grace and peace.

And the more we know of God and Jesus our Lord, the more our enjoyment of grace and peace will be multiplied. The last thing we'll see from the passage tonight is detailed in verses 3 and 4.

In those verses, we see the grant. So again, we see the grant in verses 3 and 4. From the beginning of verse 3, we will see that God has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

[18:05] So listen to verses 3 and 4 again. They say, 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, 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.

Carefully look at those verses. Does Peter say that God has granted us some things that pertain to life and godliness? He makes it pretty clear there, doesn't he?

He's granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness. In spite of God's revelation of his tremendous generosity, Christians often think that somehow God was miserly in dispensing his grace.

Some people may think that he has given them enabling grace for justification, but not enough for sanctification. Or some believers may have been taught that they've received enough grace for justification and sanctification, but not enough for glorification.

And they may fear then that they can lose their salvation. And even if they believe there's enough grace for final glorifications, many may feel that there's still not enough for them to handle the day-to-day problems that we have in life when we go through trials in this life.

[19:33] But there's really no reason for any believer to doubt the sufficiency of God's grace or to look elsewhere for spiritual resources. And we see that from these verses.

And others besides Peter have emphasized this same principle. Listen to what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 9, verses 8-11. Paul said, And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

It's interesting just in that verse how many times Paul referred to all. Then continuing in verse 9, he says, As it is written, He is distributed freely. He is given to the poor.

His righteousness endures forever. He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will provide thanksgiving to God. Jesus himself also talked about the resources we have.

[20 : 42] He compared salvation to a wedding feast. He used that analogy because in first century Jewish culture, the wedding feast epitomized a lavish celebration. And in the same way, when God redeemed his own, he lavishly dispensed through the indwelling Holy Spirit all the grace and spiritual resources that the believers will ever need.

We can be confident that we have everything we need because the source is his divine power, not something that we do. Determining whether Peter is referring to God's power or Christ's power here is difficult, but it really doesn't matter because we know that Jesus is God.

So either way, either fits here. And just as his power saves us in the first place, his power also energizes us to live holy lives from then on.

The order is first life and then godliness. And the gospel is the power of God to save from the penalty of sin and from sin's power. When Peter referred to life, eternal life is intended.

Believers have eternal life even now, and yet we await the day when such life will be fully consummated. And godliness is linked to life because life is not gained without the godliness.

[21 : 59] And eternal life is more than the experience of bliss. It also involves transformation so that believers are morally perfected and made like God. So believers should live in a godly way even now, though perfection and godliness won't be ours until the day that Christ returns or that we go to him.

Peter goes on to explain where this grant of life and godliness comes from. He says, it comes through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence. And the word translated knowledge here is the same word for knowledge that we also saw in verse 2.

And again, that refers to a knowledge that is deep and genuine. So Peter is referring to more than a superficial knowledge of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Personal saving knowledge of the Lord is the beginning point for believers, and we grow in that knowledge as we continue to get to know him.

Peter also talks about his glory and excellence, and in scripture, glory always belongs to God alone. When sinners see the glory of Christ, they are witnessing his deity.

And when God draws sinners to himself, they also see his excellence as a man. And that refers to his morally virtuous life and his perfect humanity that he lived on our behalf.

[23 : 22] So the focus here is on conversion because Peter referred to God's calling. Sometimes we tend to think of calling as an invitation that can be accepted or rejected.

But Peter had something deeper in mind. God's call is effective, it's awakening, and it's creating faith. Because he's called us to his own glory and excellence, believers are called to live in harmony with God's own moral character.

So here's another question for you. Do you find it a bit daunting that God expects us as believers to live in accordance with Christ's own moral character? Fortunately for us, Peter explains in verse 4 that God also gives us the tools we need to live in accordance with God's character.

And referring back to Jesus' own glory and excellence, verse 4 says that by his glory and excellence, 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.

The verb translated has granted there means to bestow or to endow. And it carries with it the idea of the worth of the gift. And the word translated as promises is used only in 2 Peter 1.4 and then later on in chapter 3.

[24 : 45] And it implies an emphatic public announcement. And the promises are appropriately described as very great and precious. So God just didn't quietly make these promises to us.

What Peter is trying to tell us here is that God has made a public announcement of all the promises that he has made to believers in him. And of course we know he has because it's written down in his word.

So listen to what Charles Spurgeon had to say about these very great and precious promises. He said, great and precious are two words that do not often come together.

Many things are great that are not precious such as great rocks which are of little value. On the other hand many things are precious that are not great such as diamonds or other jewels which cannot be very great if they are very precious.

But here we have the promises that are so great that they are not less than infinite and so precious that they are not less than the divine. They do indeed exceed all things with which they can be compared.

[25 : 50] None ever promised as God has done. Kings have promised even to the half of their kingdoms but what of it? God promised to give his own son and even his own self to his people and he did it.

Princes draw a line somewhere but the Lord sets no bounds to the gifts that he ordains for his chosen. So what are these very great and precious promises?

Well these promises include all the divine promises for God's own children contained in the Old and New Testament and some of the things are spiritual life, resurrection life, the Holy Spirit, abundant grace, joy, strength, guidance, help, instruction, wisdom, heaven, and eternal rewards.

We lack the time tonight to look at the many cross references for each of these promises but I included that quote in the handout so that you can see all the scripture references that back it up so that could be your homework assignment if you want to do that.

But look back at the list of promises. Just a few of those are guidance, help, instruction, and wisdom. And remember we said that God has publicly announced these promises to us.

[27 : 08] So here's another quote from Charles Spurgeon that helps us understand what this means for our daily lives. He said, Search the scriptures and you shall meet with a passage that will be so applicable to you as to appear even to have been written after your trouble had occurred.

So exactly will it apply that you will be compelled to marvel at the wonderful tenderness and suitableness of it. As if the armorer had measured you from head to foot so exactly shall the armor of the promise be fit to you.

Have you ever felt like that when you picked up a passage and read it? So it's important to remember that God gave us these promises for a purpose and that purpose has two sides to it. One side is something positive that we gain. The other side is something negative that we escape. The positive thing that we gain is to become partakers of the divine nature and the negative that we escape is the corruption in the world.

Look at the end of verse 4 again. He said, Through them, which of course is the very great and precious promises, you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

[28 : 25] When Peter uses the term that's translated as may become, he's using it in the sense of being allowed to become. There's no doubt that we will become that, but he's saying that God has allowed us to become partakers in the divine nature.

And because of what God has done for us, that's why we are allowed to become partakers in the divine nature. And being partakers in the divine nature is a present certainty.

The verb builds on everything that Peter has written so far because he said that in salvation, saints are called effectually by God through the true knowledge of the glory and excellence of Christ and they receive everything related to life and godliness as well as priceless spiritual promises.

And because of all that, believers then become here and now possessors of God's own eternal life.

And so, to become a partaker means to be a partner, a sharer, or a participant in something.

The word is very similar to the word for fellowship or close mutual relationship. So, we're partners of a type of nature and the word nature means the natural condition.

[29 : 38] So, an individual human by birth obviously has a human nature. The gift of God makes it possible for a believer to be a partaker of the divine nature.

Peter doesn't mean that we're absorbed into deity but that believers who already possess a human nature will share in divine nature as well. Just think about it from this standpoint.

Even now, believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and are like God to some extent. Believers begin to know God and to be changed by Him at their conversion and will continue to become more and more like God as we grow in our knowledge of Him.

But now, let's talk about the negative that believers escape. The promises of God serve the purpose of enabling us to escape the corruption in the world. To escape there implies breaking away completely and turning our backs on something.

Also, the tense of the word escape denotes the decisiveness of that action. Currently, of course, the world is corrupt due to sinful desire and the idea of strong desire, lust, or passion is implied here in what Peter wrote.

[30 : 50] The basic meaning of the word is that the world is dissolving by means of internal decay. The promises of God, though, enable each believer to be a participant in the divine nature of God and escape the corruption of this world.

Does it make sense based on what we see today that the world is collapsing because of internal decay? If that was the case when Peter wrote this letter, it's even more the case today, isn't it? You can see from this verse that Peter operated with an already but not yet view because believers already have escaped the world's corruption because they belong to God, but the full realization of the liberation will only be theirs on the day of resurrection.

Then, of course, at glorification, believers will be completely redeemed so that they possess eternal life and perfect holiness in a new heaven and new earth where no sin or corruption will ever exist. At the very beginning of the lesson tonight, we discussed how Peter wrote his second inspired letter to address the threat of false teachers, but you'll notice that these first four verses have focused on the promises and blessings that believers have received and will receive because God has saved us.

[32 : 09] He hasn't talked about the false teachers yet. Ancient false teachers and more recent ones have often emphasized the importance of personally obtaining transcendent knowledge.

Peter, though, stressed to his readers the need to recognize that only by being spiritually born anew can anybody attain true divine knowledge, live righteously as God's children, and share in God's nature.

The false prophets of Peter's day believed that transcendent knowledge elevated people above any need for morality. Peter countered that notion by asserting that genuine knowledge of God through Christ gives believers all that they need to live godly lives.

As we've heard Tom Holland say many times, the best way to recognize a counterfeit is to be totally familiar with what the genuine article looks like. And that's what Peter is doing here at the first part of his letter.

He's reminding us what the genuine article of salvation and what God's teaching looks like so that when we see false teaching we can recognize that. So by knowing God's word we'll be prepared to recognize the false teachings that come along.

[33 : 19] As Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3 verses 16 and 17, all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

With that, let's go ahead and close in prayer. Father, we thank you for the reminder that we will have to face false teachers in this life and we thank you again that even these words written so many years ago ring more true today than perhaps they did even when Peter wrote them.

Help us also remember though that you have given us everything we need to recognize those false teachers and that we are already guaranteed an escape from those false teachers. So let us be even more bold then to help other people escape from those false teachings as well.

Be with us as we continue to go through the rest of this week and bring us back safely on Sunday. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.