

Well, after 10 weeks of walking through the apostle Peter’s first letter to the churches in Asia Minor who were going through horrific suffering and persecution for their faith in Christ – we will today step into Peter’s second letter to the same churches in Asia Minor, who were still experiencing the pain and struggle of persecution. This second letter was written about 5 years after the first letter - and at this point Peter would have been in his seventies. He wrote this letter in Rome while imprisoned for his faith in Jesus – as he awaited his execution. Tradition tells us that not too long after Peter wrote this letter he was crucified upside down outside the city of Rome, alongside a road known as the Ostian Way.

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. 2 Peter 1:1-2

In the introduction of his letter, the apostle Peter tells us four things. First, he tells us that he is the author of the letter. Second, Peter tells us how he viewed his place in the body of Christ. He describes himself as both as a “*servant*” and as an “*apostle of Jesus Christ*”. The conjunction of these two puts Peter into one of the most unique and special groups in all of history. Peter was one of twelve men who were called into a special relationship with Jesus and he was also given a special commission that put him into a high and holy position within the body of Christ. Yet Peter humbly saw himself as not only an apostle, but as a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, a mere slave or servant. Peter’s viewpoint gives perspective to any position that God gives us within the body of Christ. It doesn’t make any difference how exalted our position and responsibility might be; *ultimately we are all servants*. That is how we should see ourselves in whatever capacity our Lord puts us in. As Jesus himself humbly said: “*The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

Peter also tells in his introduction of this letter, that he addressed this letter to those who “*have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.*” By “*ours*” Peter means the *equal standing before God that everyone shares* when they come to faith in Jesus Christ. Peter uses the word “*faith*” here in the sense that we use it when we ask someone, “Of what kind of faith are you?” That is, “What is your basis of belief?” Peter is writing these things because false teachers were influencing the churches while the churches were going through persecution. He puts this at the beginning of his letter to remind the church that a Christian is someone who believed what Jesus’ apostles believed. There are many people today who call themselves Christians, and they are very gracious and loving people, but they do not believe what Jesus’ apostles believed. Their faith is not grounded on apostolic teaching. and therefore they are not Christians. A Christian is someone who believes what Jesus’ apostles believed, no matter where they were, or what they were, or what kind of culture or background or education or traditions they had. Peter wants us to know that a Christian is someone who believes what Jesus’ apostles believed. He will tell us why that’s so important later on.

In his introduction Peter also tells us God’s purpose and desire for the people to whom his letter was written: “*May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*” In these words Peter is not talking merely about our knowledge about God. He is talking about our knowledge of God in *how we know Him in a personal relationship with him*. The term that he uses indicates that beyond question. Peter uses this concept of “*knowledge*” seven times in this letter to describe the kind of supernatural relationship that Christians are to have with God through Jesus Christ. Peter points that out when he declares: “*May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*” In other words, our supernatural relationship with God through Jesus Christ is the foundation, the catalyst, the source by which we experience the grace of God and the peace of God in our lives. How do we lay hold of the grace of God and experience peace of God? It comes through the knowledge of God we can know in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

While these words would have been of great encouragement for those who were experiencing the pain and struggle and suffering of persecution for their faith in Jesus – Peter’s intent would have been more than just encouragement. We see this when we take a deeper look at what Peter meant when he first said: *“May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord”* – and then, in the next verse, Peter says: *“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”* (2 Peter 1:3). In other words, Peter is telling us that the grace of God, that gives us the peace of God, is the divine power of God that is given to us when we have a supernatural personal relationship with Jesus. More simply put, the grace of God is the power of God we receive when we come to faith in Jesus.

Now most of us don’t think of God’s grace as a *“power”* as much as we think of grace as an attitude of God towards us. So we say God’s grace is *“God giving us what we do not deserve.”* Well that is true, but the grace of God is much more than that. The grace of God is also a divine empowerment of God that works within us – *which we do not deserve.* We see that in Ephesians 2:8-9. When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we do so by the empowerment of God’s grace. Paul says: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* In 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 Paul also confesses everything he is and he does for God is by the power of God’s grace: *“I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”*

Scripture gives us evidence of the power of God’s grace. In Philippians 2:12–13 Paul speaks of the power of God’s grace as helping us live for God as we follow Jesus when he says: *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”* Jesus himself spoke of the power of God’s grace in the face of our constant desperate need for God’s power in John 15:4-5: *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”* In our text for this morning Peter tells the churches in Asia Minor and the churches in Port Alberni how we can lay hold of the power of God’s grace that will give us God’s peace - in the midst of a fallen world that has rejected God. God’s grace in Jesus Christ is the source of godly living in the corrupt world we live in.

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. 2 Peter 1:3-4

In these words Peter describes the process by which the divine power of God’s grace is lived out in our fallen world when we have a supernatural personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He tell us four things about that process. First of all, Peter says it is that the divine power of God that has accomplished all this. In one sense everyone in the world wants to tap into that power because we all have been created in the image of God, which means deep within in all of us lies the desire to be like God. But because we live in a fallen sinful world our intuitive desire to godlike is corrupt and the source of all of all problems.

The second thing Peter tells us is that the divine power of God’s grace has to do with life and godliness. The divine power of God’s grace affects *every area of life* - not only life in the sense of the observable, the visible, the mundane but also unobservable and invisible realm of our spiritual lives. This means there is no realm of our lives where the power of God’s grace irrelevant – whether it be physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual. The power of God’s grace is at work in all of the corners, in the midst of all of the issues and struggles and situations and circumstances we go through in life.

The third thing Peter tells us is that the divine power of God's grace comes "*through the knowledge of him who called us.*" Here is the term again that Peter used to speak of the source of God's grace through the supernatural *knowledge* we can know in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This is how we communicate the relational knowledge that Jesus is the "*the way, and the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6).

The fourth thing Peter tells us is that the divine power of God's grace has something to do with our destiny: "*Through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.*" The word "*glory*" here means worth or value. In both the Old and New Testaments the term "*glory*" basically means "weight, heaviness," giving a sense of extreme great importance. Peter says the One who called us - called us to something of great importance of extreme worth and value. He also tells us we are called to God's "*excellence.*" That is the term Peter uses here means "mastery of life." The One who called us not only has extreme importance in worth and value, but also is the master of life – He is the Creator, the Sovereign God, the King who rules and reigns over all. That is the destiny that He is moving us toward!

It's most likely that while Peter was writing these words about being called to a destiny in Christ, he was reflecting on his call to come into a supernatural personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Peter's brother Andrew went down to the Jordan River where John the Baptist preached and John pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Andrew went home and said, "Peter, we have found the Messiah!" Then Jesus called Peter into a relationship with him, and for next three and a half years they traveled throughout Palestine. Peter saw, in a very personal way, the power of God's grace displayed before his very eyes. Jesus send Peter out on the Sea of Galilee and taught him how to handle storms. Jesus is the master of stormy situations in our lives. Jesus fed them when they were hungry, and he broke bread when there was no bread to be had. He taught them that he is the One who knows intimately about their need. And throughout those years, those 12 men who had been called into a supernatural personal relationship with Jesus Christ ultimately learned what their destiny was.

Jesus commissioned these men not only to know him, but also to write down the great and wondrous promises in God's Word. Those Scriptures were then passed on to us, and on the basis of those promises we can know Jesus Christ on the same basis that the apostles knew him. Imagine being one of Jesus' apostles. Imagine being in a supernatural personal relationship with Jesus Christ like the apostles had. They could live with him and walk with him and see him in action. But what Peter is telling us here is that we do have that supernatural personal relationship with Jesus Christ. By the divine power of God's grace we have the same relationship, the same divine power, the same capacity to live out our lives for God as the apostles, when we surrender our hearts to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior – all in accordance with those who wrote the Word of God under the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit.

"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." We do come to know the power of God's grace in "*the precious and great promises*" of God through the Word of God that has been passed down from the apostles to us. But it is not enough merely to possess this Word of God. Peter goes on to say that *the Word of God must possess us.* We must become "*partakers of the divine nature*" of the Word of God in order to "*escape from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*" The term "*sinful desire*" means to preoccupied with sensual things. Now, sensual things, in themselves, are not wrong, but to be preoccupied with them is wrong – and we are living in a culture that is infected with the constant preoccupation of sensual things. We must just not the Word of Word – the Word of God must possess us. Peter then tell us how we can do that.

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 2 Peter 1:5-7

Where there is true spiritual life in Christ, there will be growth by the power of God's grace. The born-again faith we have in Jesus is not the end of our destiny; it's the very beginning. God gives us all the grace we need to live godly lives, but we are to exercise and be diligent in our faith before God provides. We are to *"work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."* Peter lists seven grace-empowered characteristics of the godly life, but we must not think of them seven stages of development. The word translated *"supplement"* really means *"to supply generously."* In other words, we develop one quality as we exercise another quality. These graces relate to each other the way the branch relates to the trunk and the twigs to the branch.

"Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love." 2 Peter 1:5-7

I'm not so sure it would be helpful for me to take time to define each one these words. Most of us know what virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love means. The point Peter is trying to make here is not so much about defining words - as it is to telling us we need to start exercising our faith - by getting to work, by working out our salvation with fear and trembling - by working out each and every one of these seven characteristics of God's graces into our lives - so that God can get to work in us by the power of His grace - both to will and work for His and our good pleasure. Peter is not saying here that we need to try harder. That is not what Peter is saying. What he is saying that he is assuming that the life of God through a supernatural personal relationship with Jesus Christ by indwelling Holy Spirit is already within you. Now act on that. Let the life of God you have been given through the crucified and risen Jesus Christ express itself. Knock off the constant preoccupation with sensual things the world. Let Word of God possess you. Let God be God in you. Peter then speaks of three evidences of spiritual growth gained through the power of God's grace.

1) Fruitfulness. *"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"* (2 Peter 1:8). Christian character is not only an end to itself, but also a means to an end. The more we become like Jesus, the more the Holy Spirit can use us in witness and service. Peter tells us that a Christian who is not growing is *"ineffective and unfruitful."* Their knowledge of Jesus Christ is producing nothing of the Kingdom of God in their life. Fruitfulness is not about skills or abilities or personalities - it is about becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. Those who are fruitful have the kind of character and conduct that God can trust with His blessing. They are fruitful because - by the power of God's grace - they are faithful in cultivating the character qualities of virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love.

2) Vision. *"For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins"* (2 Peter 1:9). Nutritionists tell us that diet can certainly affect vision and this is especially true in the spiritual realm. In John 3:3 Jesus said: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* But God's Word also tells us that after our eyes are opened, it is important that we increase our vision and see all that God wants us to see. The phrase *"nearsighted."* is the translation of a word that means *"cannot see afar off."* The picture here is he of somebody closing or squinting his eyes, unable to see at a distance. It is easy for those in the church to become nearsighted and sometimes even blind. Because we are easily influenced by the independent, entitlement-minded, right's oriented, prosperity-saturated culture we live in - we often do become so nearsighted that we mistake the Kingdom of Self to be the Kingdom of God. Some churches are so focused on their own wants that they fail to see the desperate spiritual needs of their neighbors and those in their community. In John 4:35 Jesus said: *"I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest."* May we pray that *"the eyes of our hearts might be enlightened, that we may know what is the hope to which God has called us"* - by cultivating gratitude in our hearts and sharpening our spiritual vision. There are way too many people walking around with their eyes closed to Jesus!

3) Security. *“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 1:10-11). If we walk around with our eyes closed, we will stumble. But if we are growing in the power of God’s grace – we will walk with confidence because we know we are secure in Christ. It is not our *profession* of faith that guarantees that we are saved; it is our *progression* in the faith that gives us that assurance. Those who claim to be Christians - but whose character and conduct give no evidence of spiritual growth - are deceiving themselves. Peter points out that *“calling”* and *“election”* go together. The same God who *elects* (chooses) His people also ordains the means to *call* them. The two must go together, as Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians: 2:13-14: *“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Peter also tells us election is no excuse for spiritual immaturity or lack of effort in the Christian life. Some say election means, “What’s going to be is going to be. We can’t do anything.” But Peter tells us to *“be all the more diligent.”* This means “make every effort.” While it is true that God must work in us before we can do His will, it is also true that we must *be willing* for God to work and cooperate with Him. Divine election must never be an excuse for human laziness. The Christian who is sure of his or her election and calling will *“never fall”* but will prove by a consistent life that he or she a true follower of Jesus. Though they will not always be on the mountaintop, they will always be climbing higher. *“For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* The grace of God is the power of God we receive when we come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. 2 Peter 1:12-15

At this point Peter stops and takes a moment to remind and encourage those to whom he was writing. He first reminds them to think about what he just told them. His first sentence also reveals his concern that his flock was being led astray from the truths of the Word of God by the voices of the false teachers who sought to lure them away from their commitment to Christ. But Peter had told them they had become partakers of the divine power of God’s grace, and they were now channels of that divine power which enabled them to overcome their circumstances. Having been born again, they were embarked on a path which led to spiritual maturity, a path that demanded both truth and time. As they matured in Christ, their lives would become fruitful, visionary and secure. At the times when they needed to evaluate where they were spiritually, Peter encouraged them to look to their spiritual calling and election. They should not take their new life in Christ for granted but should use the Word of God as a mirror held up to their lives for the purpose of evaluating their walk in Christ. He closes this section by telling them that he knew that his life was drawing to an end. As a faithful pastor, Peter was preparing ways to ensure the gospel would be heard and known in the next generation following his death.

Our response to the grace of God in our own lives should be lived out in our love for others. And a true understanding of God’s grace will cause us to aspire to godliness not selfishness. In view of the depth of our depravity, when our destination was eternal death, our response to God’s grace can be no less than absolute and total commitment to the one who has given us a new life. The heart meaning of God's grace culminates in the form of Jesus Christ. Here God came as a man and lived among us and then in one single act of violent grace, Jesus sacrificed His life so that we might have his life. The picture of a dying Christ pleading for mercy and forgiveness for His murderers reveals to us the true depth of God's grace. In the midst of our deepest struggles, when all seems lost in despair, Jesus is there pleading our case. The power of the cross has no equal; the power of God’s grace is Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior!

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

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