

“The Arithmetic of Faith” (2 Peter 1:3–11)

Have you ever audited a class? If so, you most likely were interested in the subject matter and wanted to learn, but you did not want to deal with any of the homework or exams. In other words, you were seeking information without application. Similarly, many Christians audit sermons, classes, and small groups. They sit under all kinds of Bible teaching and accumulate great knowledge, but they don't apply their knowledge to life. As a church we are very concerned about this reality. Our vision of *transferring truth to the next generation* is accomplished not merely by learning the word, but by living the life. This is critical. In 2 Peter 1:3–11, Peter provides three facets of faith.

1. Faith is a provision (1:3–4). In these first two verses, Peter states that it is possible to live a holy life in a polluted world because of Christ's gifts and promises. He begins with these words: “**Seeing¹ that His [Jesus'] divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness,² through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these [Christ's own glory and excellence] He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped³ the corruption that is in the world by lust.**” Peter begins in 1:3 with words of hope. The moment you and I trusted Jesus Christ as our Savior, we were given *everything* pertaining to life and godliness (cf. Eph 1:3). This means that you aren't lacking anything to pull off the Christian life! Spiritually speaking, you are “fully armed”—locked and loaded. Not because you are something special, but rather through the knowledge of Christ.⁴ When you believed in Jesus Christ, God granted you “precious and magnificent promises.” The context of 2 Peter demonstrates that these promises refer to Jesus' Second Coming and the New Heavens and Earth.

The above realities remind us that we shouldn't rely on our own resources since it's all about God's power. We should also be careful not to grow by a works mentality. Peter declares twice that Christ has “granted” to us what we need. This is why it is so important to recognize our identity in Christ. If you are still looking for a study to work through this year, spend some time identifying what the New Testament says about who you are as a Christian.

What does it mean to “become partakers of the divine nature?” In recent years, Shirley MacLaine and others have popularized the New Age concept that we human beings are gods ourselves. It would be a gross misunderstanding of Peter's words to think he means we are somehow absorbed into such a oneness with God that we ourselves actually become God. It's true that we participate in the divine nature. But we do this, not in the New Age sense, but in the New Testament sense! The word translated “partakers” (*koinonos*) is from the word *koinonia*, which means “fellowship,” or a sharing of something in common. Believers share wonderful fellowship with God, an intimate bond of personal relationship where His Spirit dwells in us. We never “become God,” but we are granted the privilege of being “in Christ” and the Holy Spirit gives us power to become more godly, more holy, and less like a sinful world around us.⁵

[After focusing in on divine sovereignty, Peter moves to human responsibility. Or in light of God's gracious provision, comes an exhortation.]

2. Faith is a process (1:5–7). On account of what God has done, there is something we must do. We are not called to “let go and let God do everything,” but “trust God and get going.” Peter begins this section with the phrase: “**Now for this very reason also...**” In other words, on account of Christ's gifts and promises, you and I are to “**apply[ing]⁶ all diligence, in your faith.**” The phrase “applying all diligence” may be better rendered “make every effort to add” (NET). Faith may be conceived of as an empty suitcase capable of receiving additional supplies until it is filled up to overflowing. Faith must have true substance and rich content. It must not be left empty and alone. We should diligently supply all of its requirements.

How can the believer be certain that he is growing spiritually? Peter gave three evidences of true spiritual growth. In 1:5–7, Peter lists seven qualities of the mature Christian life. **“Supply⁷ moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.”**

- **Moral excellence.**⁸ This speaks of uncommon character worthy of praise, excellence of character, exceptional civic virtue.⁹ Are you a man or woman of character?
- **Knowledge.**¹⁰ Wisdom and discernment to live a godly life.
- **Self-control.**¹¹ The term rendered “self-control” (*egkrateian*) was a word used to describe a runner crouched at the start of a race. A runner has to hold himself perfectly still in order not to “jump the gun.” That ability to stay still and motionless is the control you need when you face temptation. Are you able to control your temper? How about your tongue? Are there any addictions or habits in your life that you can’t seem to control? Self-control includes the restraint of behaviors that are addictive or compulsive, such as drinking, eating, shopping, gaming, etc. Self-control includes the avoidance of behaviors that are immoral such as abusive anger, lust, doing porn, doing drugs, etc.
- **Perseverance.**¹² The ability to endure suffering or evil without giving up your faith. In the 1950s there were television commercials demonstrating the durability of Timex watches. In one, John Cameron Swayze attached a Timex watch to a boat propeller, and after running the boat for several hours, he stopped the boat, pulled out the watch and said, “Timex, it takes a licking and keeps on ticking.” It was effective marketing because by the end of the 1950s two out of three watches sold in America were Timexes.
- **Godliness.**¹³ The Greek word for godliness describes a manner of life that is directed toward God.¹⁴ It is being continually aware of God’s presence. It is to be consciously connected with God throughout the day, mindful of His presence and prayerful. A group of first graders were given an assignment in their Sunday School class to draw a picture of what they thought God looked like. One child drew a beautiful rainbow, and another drew a picture of a shining light. One little guy drew a picture that looked a lot like Superman. But one little girl explained to her teacher, “I don’t know what God looks like, so I just drew a picture of my daddy—he reminds me of God.” If someone examined your life, would they say you reminded them of God? That’s what Godliness is about.
- **Brotherly kindness.**¹⁵ *Philadelphia* denotes the warmth of affection that should characterize the fellowship of believers. I know from my own childhood and from watching my own children, it often seems artists show our love to our brothers and sisters, even when we do really love them very much. Often this seems to be just as true in the Christian life. We really have to work at loving some people. Perhaps we do not get along or agree with them. Perhaps they have hurt us in the past. There are lots of reasons why may be hard to show real love for the Christian family, but learning to do this is a vital part of Christian growth.
- **Love.**¹⁶ This is the essential characteristic that also summarizes the entire list. In this context, the word *agape* refers to an unconditional and sacrificial love for those people in your life.

The great question raised by these verses is not, “What can you do?” but “What are you?” God is basically interested in what we are, only then in what we do.

[Faith is a provision that is provided by Christ. Faith is also a process that results in our obedience to Christ. Lastly...]

3. Faith is a product (1:8–11). The decision whether to add to your faith is significant. The positive effects of adding to one's faith are presented in 1:8. The negative consequences of failing to add to one's faith are presented in 1:9. Peter provides a strong exhortation and prospective reward.

- **Fruitfulness (1:8).** Peter writes, **“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.”**¹⁷ Peter doesn't want the above seven qualities to be merely possessed; he wants the qualities to be steadily increasing and abounding. If you “live the life,” you will be useful and fruitful, NOT useless and unfruitful. There are a number of words for knowledge in Greek. The word that is used in 1:8 (*epignosis*) can include a relational knowledge. So, I think Peter is talking about our relationship with Christ. The kind of productivity Peter has in mind has to do with growth in our relationship with Jesus. Peter does not seem to call into question whether or not his readers have a relationship with Jesus. He assumes they do. The issue is whether or not they're growing in the relationship as indicated by abounding in the qualities listed in 1:5–7.
- **Vision (1:9).** Peter writes, **“For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.”** It is possible to be blind to what is around us in the *present*. It is possible to be short-sighted as to what is ahead in the *future*.¹⁸ Peter is probably thinking of believers who no longer look ahead to the rapture. Instead, their vision is severely limited to the here and now. On a spiritual level, a person can be both blind and shortsighted. Metaphors need not be physically compatible to be clear and comprehensible. Finally, it is possible to be forgetful of what is in the *past*. It is important to note though that this person has been “cleansed” from his former sins. The blind and shortsighted believer is disregarding and neglecting his past experience of God's forgiveness.

Security (1:10-11). **“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; ¹¹ for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior¹⁹ Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”** We are to continually strive to grow in our faith and in the godly qualities Peter spells out in 1:5–7. As we do so, we confirm, or establish, that which God began and which He is committed to establish in and through us. To make our calling and election sure is to make it stable. It is to set our lives on a course that cannot, and will not, be changed or moved away from the faith. It is to become so solid and stable that we will not be moved, especially by those who come to us with another gospel:

We verify our calling and election by means of the spiritual qualities of 1:5–7. The issue is not entrance, but the richness of that entrance. The metaphor of entry into the kingdom may well go back to one of the honors paid to a victor in the Olympic Games. His home city, in her joy and pride in his success, would welcome him back, not through a part of the usual gate, but through a part of the wall specifically broken down to afford him entrance.²⁰

The Bible says, “If the Lord delights in a man's way he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand” (Ps 37:23–24) Once you are truly a child of God, you cannot lose your salvation because it isn't up to you. God is holding you up. If I put a ten foot long 2x4 board on the floor, I wouldn't have any trouble walking the length of it without losing my balance. But if you put that same board 100 feet up in the air, I would be too fearful to try to walk its length. It's the same board with the exact same width. What's the difference? My confidence is increased by the presence of the floor to catch me if I fall, so I don't fear falling. That kind of confidence is exactly the kind of security

we can have in Christ. Assurance of your salvation gives you the ability to maintain balance as you walk through life. We can know that even though we may stumble, that He won't let us fall down completely.

When a Christian develops the character qualities of 1:5-7, he is producing valid evidence, for others to observe, that God is indeed called and chosen him.²¹ The word can mean "to certify, to offer valid confirmation."

Peter buttresses his exhortation to pursue holiness by summing up the benefits in two contrasting promises. On the one hand, the pursuit of holiness gives us a stability, a steadfastness which keeps us from stumbling. Since Peter is writing to Christians here, I do not believe he is referring to a "fatal fall" which results in the loss of one's salvation. I believe he is speaking of the kind of stumbling which results in being useless and unfruitful, but not complete destruction.

The word "abundantly" () can be translated "richly."

What can be ruined or lost is our reputation as representatives of Christ. That's what's at stake. If we are diligent to grow in Christ, we won't lose our reputation. We won't fall so badly that our testimony is ruined.

The word "supplied" (*epichoregeo*) in 1:11 is the same as the word "add" in 1:5, and is the translation of a Greek word that means "to bear the expenses of a chorus." When the Greek theatrical groups presented their dramas, somebody had to underwrite the expenses, which were very great. The word came to mean "to make lavish provision." If we make lavish provision to grow spiritually (1:5), then God will make lavish provision for us when we enter heaven! The use of the same word in Verses 5 and 11 points to an important parallel: When we add works to our faith on earth, God adds abundance to our entrance in heaven.

A rich welcome. That's what a new baby receives from his parents. It's what a soldier receives from his family when he comes home from the battlefield. A rich will come as when a championship team receives in its hometown after winning a championship.

Addition on earth = abundance in heaven.

Scripture References

2 Peter 1:3–11

1 Peter 2:9–10

James 1:21–27

James 2:14–26

Philippians 2:12–16

Galatians 5:22–23

2 Timothy 4:6–8

Study Questions

1. Do I genuinely believe that God's divine power has granted me everything that I need for life and godliness (1:3)? At what particular moments in my life have I felt the most powerless? What do I attribute these feelings to? How can I deepen my dependency on God's power in my life?
2. Which qualities in 1:5–7 have I added to my Christian faith? Which qualities do I still need to cultivate in my life? Who is a good model of the qualities that I need to improve in? Will I ask this person to help me grow in these qualities in 2009?
3. Am I "living the life" or am I useless and unfruitful (1:8)? By what measure can I discern whether I am growing in my faith? What are my spiritual goals for 2009? How will these goals help me achieve Christ-like character qualities?
4. In the course of my Christian life, how have I forgotten (i.e., neglected) the purification from my former sins (1:9)? What can I do to ensure that this never happens again? How should the awareness of God's forgiveness affect my marriage, family, and work and church relationships?
5. Am I motivated to have an abundant kingdom entrance (1:11)? Does it seem that I often lack the zeal to make my life count for eternity? What can I do to increase my focus on my appearance before Christ? Read Romans 14:10–12; 1 Corinthians 3:10–15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; and 1 John 2:28.

Notes

¹ Although the NASB links 2 Pet 1:3 with 1:1–2, it is unlikely that 1:3 belongs with the introduction. More likely, 1:3 begins a new sentence and a new section (see NET).

² Peter repeatedly emphasizes the need for godliness because of the false teachers' neglect of personal ethics and morality (cf. 2 Pet 1:3, 6, 7; 2:9; 3:11).

³ The word *apopheugo* ("escaped") appears only in 2 Peter in the NT (cf. 1:4; 2:18, 20).

⁴ In John 17:3 Jesus says, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

⁵ David Faust, *Faith Under Fire* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1997), 111.

⁶ This word is only used here in the NT. BDAG s.v. *pareisphero*: "apply, bring to bear."

⁷ Peter uses the verb form of the word *epichoregeo* ("supply") in 2 Pet 1:10, 15, and 3:14.

⁸ See Phil 4:8; 1 Pet 2:9; and 2 Pet 1:3.

⁹ BDAG s.v. *arete* 1.

¹⁰ E.g., 1 Pet 3:7; 2 Pet 3:18.

¹¹ See also Acts 24:25 and Gal 5:23.

¹² E.g., 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:4; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 3:10; Titus 2:2; Heb 10:36; Jas 1:3f; Rev 2:2f

¹³ The word *eusebeia* ("godliness") is used numerous times in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 2:2; 3:16; 4:7, 8:3, 5, 61; 2 Tim 3:5; Titus:1:1). The only other NT occurrences are Acts 3:12; 2 Pet 1:3, 6, 7; 3:11.

¹⁴ BDAG s.v. *eusebia*.

¹⁵ See Rom 12:10; 1 Thess 4:9; Heb 13:1; 1 Pet 1:22 for other NT uses of *philadelphia* ("brotherly love").

¹⁶ E.g., 1 Pet 4:8 [2x]; 5:14.

¹⁷ See the NET rendering: "For if these things are really yours and are continually increasing, they will keep you from becoming ineffective and unproductive in your pursuit of knowing our Lord Jesus Christ more intimately" (my emphasis).

¹⁸ The Greek word translated "shortsighted" is *muopazo*, from which we derive our term for nearsightedness "myopia."

¹⁹ The phrase "Lord and Savior" is a rare title used often in this book (cf. 2 Pet 1:11; 2:20; 3:2, 18).

²⁰ Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 75.

²¹ This is very similar to James' justification by works before men (Jas 2:14–26).