

Dear Friends,

I dearly love the chapter and verse structure of our English Bible, but sometimes the chapter divisions ignore the theme. In fact, in at least one case, it actually ignores a whole sentence, changing to the next chapter mid-sentence. However, in the case of 2 Peter, the chapters divide precisely in conjunction with Peter's thematic "Movements." Because of the common views of Chapter 2 (Who is saved and who is not saved of the people named in the chapter), Peter's stated purpose in this chapter, false teachers and the confusion and schism they cause, I have neglected to write or preach as much as I should have from this rich and encouraging letter. In this work, beginning with this week's Gleanings, I hope to "Walk" through the letter and develop the three thematic principles of a fruitful, God-honoring faith as I believe Peter was directed by the Holy Spirit to write this letter.

My mother was a teacher before she and Dad were married. They both strongly taught their children to value education and gain as much as we possibly could. My brother earned his Master's Degree in his early twenties. I didn't complete my Master's Degree till I was in my late fifties. Peter's foundation for a fruitful faith in the first chapter builds on the foundation of a lifechanging profound knowledge of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot grow a fruitful spiritual life in spiritual ignorance. Nor can we live a spiritually fruitful life merely on good intentions. Jeremiah underscored the Lord's emphasis on spiritual knowledge centuries before Jesus came and His followers were inspired to write our New Testament Scriptures.

And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. (Jeremiah 3:15 KJV)

We can't work our way through most New Testament letters without fresh reminders of this truth. In fact, in 2 Peter, Peter "Bookends" his letter with this truth. Read our text for this week's Gleanings, and then read the last verse of the letter.

So what do we learn--what knowledge do we gain--from this letter? Peter guides us from the supremacy of Scripture, God's "more sure word of prophecy," through the inevitable reality of deceitful, unprincipled, false teachers, to scoffers who deny the promise of His coming, concluding with the sure truth that, despite the scoffers, mockers, and unbelievers who are ever present, the Lord shall return in victorious glory to claim His children and take them to their eternity with Him in glory. Folks, we need this truth today. Whatever we may have held onto with pride, it shall fail or collapse, from private passions to world renown movements. But through all the fickle changes of this world, we can securely hold to "God's unchanging hand," rightly confident that He shall come in His time and His way. In the end (In the simple theme of the last Book of the New Testament, Revelation), Jesus wins! Praise God, He shall conquer all adversaries and claim His victory and secure His beloved children with the loss of none, not one.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Fruitful Faith in Three Movements

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:1-4 KJV 1900)

Commentaries generally hold that Peter wrote this letter to the same people as his first letter. Perhaps, but Peter's identification of his intended readers in this letter ignores geographic regions. His one qualifier is "...**them that have obtained like precious faith.**" Peter wrote this letter to already-saved people wherever they lived. His stated purpose in writing is to teach them the core necessity of growing knowledge of God and of Jesus. Peter "Bookends" this letter with opening and closing reference to the need for growth in living grace and spiritual knowledge.

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18 KJV)

Before delving into the letter, let's get an overview of the structure of Peter's teaching in it.

- In Chapter One, Peter teaches his readers, including us, the priority of a fruitful, godly life, "...**add to your faith...**" He builds that lifelong process on the centrality of Scripture as the basis for knowing how to live that fruitful life. He emphasizes Scripture over personal experience or opinion, even his own experience with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.
- In Chapter Two, Peter warns us of the ever-present hindrance to a fruitful, God glorifying life because of false teachers. (2 Peter 2:1-2 KJV) Bible students and commentaries often ignore these two verses and try to morph the chapter into a litany of the unsaved.
- Peter closes the letter in Chapter Three with a reminder of the certainty of the Lord's final return and our eternity with Him in glory.

...to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. The prevailing opinion in contemporary Christian culture views faith as a personal attainment. Advocates of this idea might interpret “obtained” in this lesson as something gained by personal choice or effort. Contextually, Peter’s introduction emphasizes what God has done for us, not what we have done for God. Consider the following, I believe, right interpretation of this term.

“In translating this term, we should avoid the idea that faith is acquired through a person’s own effort or that it is given as a reward for what a person has done. Faith itself, or the power to trust in Jesus Christ, is a gift from God.” (A Handbook on the Second Letter from Peter, Daniel C. Arichea, Howard A. Hatton, United Bible Societies, 1993, Logos edition)

If a benevolent person gives you something free of any consideration from you, you “Obtained” it no less than if you had worked for it. When Paul described the outline of our eternal salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9 KJV), his “...**that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,**” the Greek pronoun gender affirms the point made above. Neither the grace nor the faith (And thus the resultant salvation) is “of yourselves.” The changed pronoun gender in “that” attributes the whole list, both grace and faith, to God’s gift. The frequent claim, “God provides the grace, and you provide the faith,” for salvation will not stand. The greater context of Ephesians 2 affirms that the saving that Paul taught relates to the salvation process for all the children of God, not the individual personal salvation experience of one child. Paul’s repeated use of “**together with**” emphasizes this point. Regardless of the human writer of Scripture, the Holy Spirit ensured harmony throughout the inspired text of Scripture.

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. In his first “Movement” of his letter, Peter emphasizes what we do with that given “**precious faith.**” Will we order our life to make it fruitful, or will we neglect it and live an unfruitful spiritual life? Before we get to the specific building blocks of a fruitful faith (Verses 5-9), Peter teaches us the foundational truth necessary for us to attain that fruitful and blessed life. Ignorance or neglect of the knowledge of Scripture destroy’s a believer’s ability ever to grow a fruitful, God-glorifying and godly service-to-others life. The “Grace and peace” fertile soil for that fruitful faith must be richly conditioned with “**the knowledge**” of God the Father and the Lord Jesus. That final sentence of Second Peter flushes out the full spiritual reality of “**Grace and peace.**” We must grow in both grace and spiritual knowledge to find that blessing. Do not think of “Grace” as a mystical idea that relates only to God and how He saved us. As a guiding principle of how we live, grace most directly describes—and governs—how we are to treat other believers. When we grow in grace, we cultivate the same kind of “Graciousness” toward others that God showed us when He saved us— and that He shows us daily. A person might theoretically grow in knowledge but neglect grace, but such a

state of mind and conduct often leads to excessive pride and self-focus which is antithetical to Biblical faith and godliness. In Peter's teaching, it produces spiritual blindness and lack of spiritual fruit. We never arrive at this dual objective fully, the point Peter made by teaching us to "grow" in both.

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue. Peter expands the foundation on which our spiritual growth in grace and knowledge stand. Whether we ponder our eternal state and blessings in Jesus or our present discipleship in Him, both blessings come from the Lord. Peter adds that our present blessings in Jesus exist in direct proportion to our **"knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."** While Scripture teaches that the Lord gives a measure of knowledge about Him and spiritual things in the new birth, it also teaches that any divinely given knowledge we may have always agrees with what the Lord directed and gave us in Scripture. We sadly often hear a believer say, "The Lord revealed to me that..." But what follows directly contradicts what we read in Scripture. If you call that contradiction to their attention, they often unapologetically state their belief that their private "Revelation" supersedes even Scripture. If faced with the contradiction between the two, they rely on their private "Revelation" over Scripture, a contradiction to everything we read in Scripture, especially Peter's own contrast between his personal experience on the Mount of Transfiguration and our **"more sure word of prophecy,"** Scripture, later in this chapter. Supposed knowledge that contradicts Scripture may be a "Revelation," but the Lord didn't "Reveal" it. Someone else "Revealed" it.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises. having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. The Lord has given us these **"exceeding great and precious promises"** of blessing in our present life based on all that He has done for us and in us, coupled with our own pursuit of godliness and knowledge from Him in His Book. These promises are not given to an exclusive elite group of His children. They belong to every child of grace, and their enjoyment relies on our growing in **"...grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."**

...that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature. To what did Peter refer in this thought? Not to our personal attainments in godliness or faith, but rather to the Lord's **"exceeding great and precious promises."** Scripture faithfully teaches that our present blessings relate to—and result from—our walking in obedience, in fellowship with the Lord in our daily conduct. But that walk is not to be regarded as something we autonomously choose and achieve. While Scripture teaches that our eternal salvation is wholly—and only—by the work and loving grace of God, it equally teaches that our present blessings in the gospel result from a noble partnership between the Lord and us.

We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (2 Corinthians 6:1 KJV)

Our present walk in the way of faith is not all about us choosing absent the Lord's influence in our life. It is equally not "100%" attributable to the divine work alone. The Holy Spirit directed Paul to link both the Lord and His children together as "workers together" in the faith way of life. And the results of that cooperative work are always according to Scripture. His knowledge teaches us to choose to walk the faith way, never in the unfruitful conduct that receives "the grace of God" in vain.

When we choose the faith way, the Biblical way which includes both grace living toward others, and the peaceful way based on our growing knowledge of God and Jesus in Biblical study, we partake of the privileges and blessings of our divine nature which the Lord gave us in the new birth.

...**having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.** We live in a broken, fallen, corrupt world that is openly hostile to our God and to the lifestyle which He has commanded His children to pursue. Scripture describes this world and its corruption as being insidiously deceitful. Satan is the ultimate deceiver. He seldom waves the Lord's righteous judgment in our faces to allure us to compromise our faith. What does he do? He will dangle a worldly theme or pursuit before our eyes and depict it as something which is good, something that might even enhance our faith. But, in the end, it becomes a snare that traps us in his tangled web and compromises our blessings and fruitfulness in the faith of Jesus. We can't escape this corruption by following such allurements. We only find a safe escape from it through grace-living and a growing knowledge of God and of Jesus which we attain only by using the Lord's "Textbook." Scripture never sends us to pursue other writings, philosophies, or ideas for our spiritual growth and maturity.

...**through lust.** All the evil that is in the world cannot harm you so long as you faithfully pursue the way of faith by growing in both grace (Graciousness) toward others and in knowledge attained only through a devoted study and practice of Scripture. Satan's snare succeeds when he can so deceive us that we think his way and ideas or "Causes" are good, and we can make great spiritual gain by pursuing them. If he succeeds, his effectiveness tickles our lust for something which he convinces us is good. Whether it is good or not, as believers in Jesus, Scripture and Jesus' example teach us to keep our energy and life focused on Him and His kingdom. If anything is truly good for the Lord's kingdom, we'll find it clearly taught and exemplified in Scripture. Therefore,

whatever we do or think, we should always seek Scripture, “Book, chapter, and verse,” to instruct our pursuit of it. (Proverbs 14:12, also Proverbs 16:25 KJV)

Elder Joe Holder