

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)*

Confirm Your Calling And Election

January 27th, 2019

2 Peter 1:1-15

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning church! I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to 2 Peter 1:1; that's on page 1018 in your pew Bibles. Last week we finished looking at 1 Peter and so it makes sense for us to follow that up by looking at 2 Peter. These letters were written, obviously, by the same person – the Apostle Peter. The fact that Peter says in this letter in 3:1 that he had previously written these folks another letter suggests to many scholars that 2 Peter was written to the same people as 1 Peter. Some of the things Peter says in this letter seem to indicate that he was writing very near to the time of his death – a fragment of church tradition even suggests that 2 Peter served as the COVER LETTER for the Gospel of Mark which we believe Peter dictated to his secretary John Mark in the weeks and maybe even days before he was executed by the Emperor Nero. So in a sense, this is Peter's dying effort to remind his people about the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

The emphasis in this letter is a little bit different than the emphasis we encountered in 1 Peter. In 1 Peter the Apostle is trying to prepare his people for the inevitable experience of persecution. In 1 Peter the threat is OUTSIDE and the emphasis is on courage, faithfulness and endurance. Here in 2 Peter the threat is coming from the INSIDE. The issue here is that a number of people within this congregation – or within the church in this region – have gone completely off the rails theologically speaking. They are believing and teaching a FALSE and DEFICIENT version of

Christianity. Based on what Peter says in this letter it seems that they were denying the return of the Lord and the prospect of final judgment and they were commending an attitude that scholars often refer to as antinomianism. Antinomianism simply means “no law – ism”. These were people who basically said that the important thing is to believe in Jesus – but after that, you can pretty much do as you please. They appear to have believed that holiness was impossible and that any call to holiness was basically just so much brow beating and petty legalism. After all we are saved by grace – therefore, what does it really matter how we live? Scholars suggest that these were likely immature people making improper application of some of the things they had MISUNDERSTOOD from the writings of the Apostle Paul. Paul did talk a lot in his letters about grace and he did sometimes say that the law was powerless – meaning powerless to save us. But of course that doesn’t mean that the law is USELESS. The law continues to point us in the direction of love for God and love one another and Peter is eager to help his people understand that so as to immunize them from this dangerous heresy.

That’s what this letter is about – and just as with 1 Peter – I suspect we will immediately sense the relevance of this Epistle to the challenges of our present day.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1:

1 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:

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

3 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. 5 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. 8 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. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 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.

12 Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. 13 I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, 14 since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. 15 And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. (2 Peter 1:1–15 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

The structure of this passage is very straight forward. Peter is not a complicated man – and this is

not a complicated passage. Like a good parent – and like a good pastor, Peter tells them what is true and then he tells them what to do and we’ve seen this pattern many times before. Apostles generally begin with what scholars refer to as “indicative truths”. They talk about Gospel realities. They point to the finished work of Christ. And then they build on that by telling people how they ought to respond. They provide practical IMPERATIVES. An imperative is a command. That’s exactly how this section is laid out. Thomas Schreiner for example says:

“The indicative of God’s gift precedes and undergirds the imperative that calls for human exertion.”¹

Exactly.

Peter tells them what’s true and then Peter tells them what to do. And then also, because he’s a wise pastor, he makes sure to tell them why this matters. If you are going to ask people to do stuff, you better tell them what’s on the line and so that’s exactly how this passage is set out and we won’t try and make complicated what Peter makes simple. We’ll follow along with his very straight forward outline. We’ll talk about what’s true, what we should do and why it matters.

First of all then, let’s talk about what’s true.

This Is What’s True:

Peter tells us that in verses 3-4; he 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, 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. (2 Peter 1:3–4 ESV)

So here’s what’s true: God has GIVEN YOU EVERYTHING YOU NEED for life and godliness.

That’s what’s true.

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 142.

Now notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't say that God has given you EVERYTHING YOU WANT or EVERYTHING YOU CLAIM IN FAITH. There is no Prosperity Gospel here and there is no Charismatic Gospel either. There is just the Gospel. He says that all the promises of God – his precious and very great promises – have been given to you now through faith in Jesus Christ. If you are IN CHRIST then you have access to all the promises of God – and of course the very best of those promises was given way back in Ezekiel 36. There the Lord said:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:25–27 ESV)

I will CLEANSE you from your sins and I will EMPOWER YOU with my Spirit so as to cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Now – you might say, but pastor that was a promise made originally to the Jewish people. Well of course it was – but the mystery of the Gospel is how the Gentiles too have now been included in all of those promises made by God and realized through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter says that in the introduction to the letter. Look at verse 1 – who's he writing to?

To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1 ESV)

Peter is writing to a bunch of Gentiles living in modern day Turkey and he says that YOU have obtained a faith EQUAL TO OURS – equal to mine as a Jewish person. So yes that promise was made to Jews, but NOW because of Christ it is available to ALL PEOPLE everywhere who put faith in Jesus. It doesn't matter who you are and it doesn't matter where you come from. If you believe in Jesus Christ; if you trust in him for your salvation you will be forgiven. You will be filled with the Holy Spirit and you will be helped by God to walk in the way of his commandments.

That is the promise – and that is the power – and that is what you have been given now through faith in Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God!

If you're in Christ then you have everything you need for life and godliness.

That's the foundational premise of this entire epistle. That's the BIG INDICATIVE that leads now to main imperative that follows.

That's what's true – brothers and sisters, so here is what you ought to do.

Here Is What You Ought To Do:

Look now at verses 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. (2 Peter 1:5–7 ESV)

Make Every Effort To Supplement Your Faith With:

Peter tells them to make every effort to supplement – the Greek word simply means “add” – so he says make every effort to ADD to your BELIEFS certain appropriate Christian BEHAVIOURS.

Now - of course - it all starts with FAITH – no one is arguing that. By faith we take hold of GRACE and without GRACE we can't DO anything of value in the Christian life. It is ALL ultimately of grace. That's TRUE – but here now is what you've got to do. You've got to MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ADD ON TO this GRACE FOUNDATION that faith has laid. That's what Peter says and now he lists 8 behaviours that Christians ought to be pursuing in the grace that God supplies.

Here are the 8 areas; we'll go through them fairly briefly.

i. Virtue (excellence or attractiveness)

Number one, he tells them to add to their faith VIRTUE – some of your translations will have that as “excellence”; it is the Greek word *arete* and it literally means “manliness” but it has the

sense here of attractive moral character – specifically the attractive moral character of Jesus – the perfect man. Commentator Michael Green says here that Peter is calling upon people to:

“reflect something of the attractive character of Christ. For he was the man *par excellence*, the proper man.”²

You might even say that he was “the best a man can get” with due apologies to Gillette.

Are you seeing that? The BEHAVIOR of Jesus IS ATTRACTIVE. That is so important for us to remember because the DOCTRINE of Jesus is often NOT ATTRACTIVE – not to the unsaved person.

To the unsaved person Christian doctrine is offensive. We believe terrible things, like that God is HOLY. Horrible things, like that people are SINFUL. Therefore we believe that Jesus had to do for us what we could never do for ourselves and he had to pay for what we have done in his body on the cross. Christianity says that people are DEAD and HELPLESS before a Holy God – they have to RESCUED by an intervening Christ. That is TERRIBLY offensive to most of your friends and loved ones. And you can’t dress it up and you mustn’t dumb it down – so there is no really no way to avoid the essential scandal and offense of the Christian message.

BUT – and here is the piece we forget:

While Christian BELIEFS are offensive – Christian BEHAVIOURS are incredibly attractive. So we have to put some honey round the medicine if we want our friends and neighbours to drink it down. Don’t just SPEAK HARD TRUTHS – live ATTRACTIVE LIVES, that’s what Peter is saying here and it is a message that we need to hear again in this generation.

Peter is telling these folks to MAKE EVERY EFFORT to ADD to their OFFENSIVE FAITH some VERY ATTRACTIVE BEHAVIOURS – I think that is absolutely brilliant counsel.

Secondly, he says, to virtue we must make every effort to ADD KNOWLEDGE.

²Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 87.

ii. Knowledge

Here again we are reminded that it is never one at the expense of the other. Peter doesn't say: believe the basics and then master the behavior while neglecting the rest of Christian doctrine. No! He says to your basic, foundational faith in Jesus ADD attractive behavior AND disciplined study of the whole SCOPE of Christian doctrine. Move on from the milk to the meat. It is never one or the other – not in the Bible! It is always and necessarily a case of BOTH/AND.

Thirdly Peter talks about self control.

iii. Self control

Self control here simply means not being dominated by your intrinsic desires. We all have intrinsic desires. Some of them are good and some of them are bad. Some lead in the direction of life and some lead in the direction of death. But a mature Christian knows which ones to KILL and which ones to GROW – which ones to LISTEN TO and which ones TO IGNORE. That is the essence of self-control.

And according to Peter, through faith in Christ – you already HAVE everything you NEED to add self-control to your Christian life.

You have a new heart, you have the Holy Spirit, you have access to God through prayer, you have promises of additional grace and blessing and you have the support of the Christian community. Apparently – Peter believes – that this is ALL YOU NEED to develop self-control.

And I will be so bold as to say that I believe he's right. Now I'm not saying that there is never a time for therapy and never a time for medical supplements like Nicorette or the patch or whatever – but what I am saying is that very often we default to therapy and prescriptions because we've never actually APPLIED ourselves to the ordinary means.

Remember, Peter just said that you have to MAKE EVERY EFFORT – have you? Before you went to therapy, before you got your patch – did you MAKE EVERY EFFORT to apply yourself to the ordinary means – to the forms of grace that God has given you access to through faith in

Christ? Did you go to God in prayer? Fervently? Frequently? Earnestly? On your own? And with some others? Did you beseech the Holy Spirit to intercede on your behalf? Did you seek additional grace and blessing? Did you lean into the support of your brothers and sisters in Christ? Or did you lean away? Did you run away and run toward chemical and psychological supports first?

Now I think that medical and psychological support may be things that God gives you in your pursuit of self control but I don't think he will bless those things if you go to them as a way of BY-PASSING the ordinary means of grace.

Fourthly Peter says to self control add steadfastness.

iv. Steadfastness

We need to move a little faster here. Basically, steadfastness means “resilience” – Peter talked about this a lot in his first letter probably because he remembered Jesus saying:

the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Mark 13:13 ESV)

Steadfastness matters – A LOT so you want to work at ADDING that to your character as a Christian.

Fifthly Peter says to steadfastness ADD godliness.

v. Godliness

The word Peter uses here means godliness, piety or reverence. It means to be aware of God in every aspect of life.

Sixthly, he says to godliness add brotherly affection.

vi. Brotherly affection

The church is supposed to feel like a family – how are you contributing to that aspiration? Are you treating people in here as if they were brothers and sisters? Aunties and uncles? Nieces and nephews?

You need to do that. You need to MAKE EVERY EFFORT to do that because authentic Christianity is about beliefs, its about behavior AND its about BELONGING. All of that has to go together.

Lastly, he says you've got to add to brotherly affection LOVE.

vii. Love

Now, you might be wondering what the difference is between brotherly affection and love. The first word is the Greek word *philadelphia* which most of us recognize and the second word is *agape* which was a word that became particularly precious and meaningful among the early Christians. It came to mean roughly “Jesus love” – “sacrificial love”, “need meeting love”, “other preferring love”, “love that goes first”, “love that seeks out”, “love that gives”, “love that dies even so that others might live” – that’s what I mean by Jesus love.

just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. (John 13:34 ESV)

That’s what we’re talking about right there.

Make every effort to ADD that to your faith in Jesus.

By the grace and with the help that God supplies of course – but with some old fashion honest effort too. Work HARD to add all that to your Christian faith.

And then because he’s a good pastor Peter tells them why it matters.

This Is Why It Matters:

Here we are looking at verses 9-11.

He says:

For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 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. (2 Peter 1:9–11 ESV)

Verse 10 here tells us why this matters – verse 10 is the logical and theological centre of this entire section – but many commentators would argue that it is also the pastoral centre of the entire letter.

Meaning verse 10 tells us why Peter has said everything he has said thus far – AND it tells us why Peter wrote this epistle in the first place.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones for example said:

“It is true to say that the tenth verse is really the key verse of the whole Epistle, that the object of the entire letter is to enable us to make our calling and election sure.”³

So let’s pause and make sure we really understand what Peter is saying here. What does it mean to “confirm our calling and election”?

Well let’s state first of all what it doesn’t mean. Peter isn’t saying that we can make ourselves MORE SAVED by ADDING all the things he has just talked about. He isn’t saying that we have to ADD EFFORT to GRACE in order to be saved.

That would be a horrible misunderstanding of what Peter is saying here and Peter wanted to be very clear that he WASN’T SAYING that. He made that clear in the introduction. Look again at verse 1:

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 (2 Peter 1:1 ESV)

³ D.M. Lloyd Jones, *Expository Sermons On 2 Peter* (Edinburgh: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1999), 32.

OBTAINED – is a past tense verb. It is an AORIST in Greek meaning that it is a COMPLETED FACT. You already HAVE a faith EQUAL TO MINE by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Your salvation is about what Jesus has already done – it is not about things that you will or will not do.

So Peter is not a heretic. He is not teaching works righteousness. That's now what he's saying. That isn't what he means by "confirming" our call and election.

Ok, so what does he mean?

The Greek says to make sure or certain; to make firm or stable.

So think of it like this. This church is like a tiny little shoot growing up out of the good soil of the Gospel. The birth of that shoot was an absolute miracle of grace. God did it! He prepared the soil, he sowed the seed and he gave it purchase in their formerly dead and rebellious hearts.

That was a miracle – that was grace – no two ways about it.

But now that tiny little shoot finds itself subject to some very nasty weather. There is hail in the forecast and some strong and destructive winds have already begun to blow. So Peter is telling them to ADD to this miracle of faith some very reasonable and prudent supports. Make every effort to HAMMER IN SOME STAKES he says – to make your salvation firm, stable and resilient – and do it all of course, in the grace and strength that God supplies.

Doing that will ensure your usefulness, it will contribute to your sense of assurance and it will richly provide for your entrance into eternity.

That's why this matters.

What is on the line here is your ministry, your assurance and your reward.

If you don't take appropriate actions – you will be like a blind guide for the blind. You will be blown off track yourself and you will no doubt take others with you. And you will have reason to doubt your own salvation. People who stumble and fall repeatedly have reason eventually to

wonder whether they were ever truly planted in the first place. You don't want that. And you don't want to be like that naked guy, the Apostle Paul described in 1 Corinthians 3. The fellow who was saved but who never did anything of eternal value and who therefore entered the Kingdom of God like a naked man escaping from a fire.

You don't want to be that guy.

So make every EFFORT – BE ALL THE MORE DILIGENT to confirm your calling and election.

That's what Peter is saying in this passage.

That's how Peter is spending his last few hours on planet earth.

He is sending out counsel and reminders through the bars of his prison window.

He is making EVERY EFFORT – he says that in verse 15 - so that after his departure his dear beloved children may still be found walking with the Lord.

That is good pastoring – that's good parenting – and this is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God, let's pray together.