

Lakeville Christian Fellowship

**“To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.....”
II Peter 1:1**

Sunday July 27, 2008
Morning Worship at Williams Camp
Lakeville, Massachusetts
www.lcfbaptist.org

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Reading: II Peter 1-2:1

Partakers of the Divine Nature

v.1. “To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.....” The first notable point of reference in this epistle is that like the whole of Scripture it is written to God’s people. It is addressed to those specifically who have a genuine shared faith in Jesus Christ and at least a basic understanding of who God is and how He has chosen to work in eternity and in them personally. Peter is a teacher of God’s people who will not even write a salutation without a teaching on salvation. His soteriology,

or, his view of who is saved and how they have received salvation, comes through in his opening lines. Consider First Peter which opens this way: *“To the pilgrims of the Dispersion....elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (I Pet.1.1-5).”*

This apostle can hardly say hello to a fellow Christian without affirming his theology, apart from delivering the whole gospel of Christ, and without crafting a creed that states the fundamentals of the Christian faith. First, he addresses those who are elect. They are elected not by one another. They did not elect themselves. But rather, they have been elected by God. They were not elected recently by God, but rather somewhere in eternity past, or as Paul proclaims in his salutation to the Ephesians *“before the foundation of the world.”* He goes on to infer that his letters will not be merely for those who proclaim themselves saved by one act of profession, or by one emotional outburst in their past, but rather he appeals to those who believe that though they are saved by the Son for all eternity they are sanctified by the indwelling Spirit of the same God, and they will be around to collect on the promises made by that Great God. They are not those who are saved for their own convenience, but rather for continued obedience to God which is the very manifestation of the sanctification which is the very manifestation of the salvation of which he speaks. Everything in God’s purposes is effectual, i.e., it accomplishes something. Salvation is not static. It is dynamic, and at least one prophet declared: *“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it (Is.55.11).”*

In other words, Peter is not writing to those who used to believe they are saved, or to those who think they are saved. He is writing specifically to those who’s salvation is conspicuous, manifested by their continued

diligence toward a progressive sanctification which is none other than striving for greater obedience to God with every passing day. Suffice it to say that the apostle Peter does not take a minimalistic approach to salvation where it is sufficient and desirable to speak only of the fact of salvation as enough knowledge for any Christian to be concerned with as though it is God's will that we remain the babes in Christ that we once were. But rather he expects that a truly living thing is a forever growing thing, and that its growth is visible and laudable and glorifying to God who is the Author of our souls and the Shepherd of our lives.

So, here in his second epistle, he writes to those of like faith (not neglecting to state the preciousness of that faith), which he emphatically declares is a faith that is given as the gift of God for purposes of glorifying that same God. In an age where the church seems slightly, if not greatly, repelled by declarations of a specific theology, without regard for the truth or falsehood of that theology, an appreciation of such statements is lost or ignored. But not so with our beloved apostle. Not so with the gracious recipients of his letters. The apostle is zealous to remind them with a skillful economy of words of the greatness of our Lord, of the precious gift of faith, of the privilege of salvation, of the responsibility of continued growth in the Spirit, and of the zealous repentance from our old sins that is the sign and seal of authentic discipleship.

v.3. “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us....” Peter continues with his declaration of the sovereignty of God. God, he states, who by the love in His own merciful heart has saved the elect, now empowers the elect to walk in godliness. And again any idea of a minimalistic approach to teaching, i.e., teaching the bare minimum of theological content, is an idea that is foreign to the great apostle who declares that every good and perfect gift of God is increased as our knowledge about our God increases. Those things that pertain to life are more precious when through a greater knowledge of our God He becomes more precious. Those things that pertain to godly virtue are more virtuous when we come to a deeper understanding of the glorious purpose of our God and of His gift of godly virtue. And so he may continue by

saying in verse four:

v.4. “by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” Note the comparison: partakers of the divine nature by receiving the promises of salvation in Christ - And - by escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust. Now, several heresies have been derived by this choice of words by the Apostle Peter. In fact there are whole denominations and movements within the church today that are based upon an errant understanding of this passage.

Indeed, we who are saved by the word of God and indwelt by the Spirit of God have partaken of the divine nature of God. What we ought not to receive from this passage is that we are now or ever will be divine. We are not little gods as some have supposed, and here I may speak of contemporary Charismatics. We are not evolving into gods as Mormonism professes. What we have now is access. Through the word of God, the gifts of the Spirit, and the fellowship of the saints, is a precious access out of the corruptions of the world and into the obedience of Christ. All we need to do to make an application of this teaching is to see ourselves as we are, as all Christians are, people in conflict between two masters, God, and our own wicked and rebellious hearts.

Now, I will never be one to teach that we ought to be informed of the meaning of Scripture by the experiences we have or by mere observation in the natural, but rather our experiences ought to be informed by the word. So, looking to yourself cannot bring finality to your understanding as to how to define your new nature. So, I will ask that you look at the life of the Apostle Peter as he has been revealed in Scripture. In his youth he was a man who was zealous without knowledge, knowledge of God, and knowledge of himself. He declared with bravado many things that he would do only later to shrink in the performance of those same things. Even after the infilling at Pentecost we have an apostle who compromised upon certain fundamental doctrines. Even after seeing the vision from God of the great sheet in Acts ten we find a man who would not eat with Gentiles and who received rebuke from none other than the Apostle Paul

for his error.

Yet here, in these epistles, we find an aged apostle who has a much more refined zeal, and who has been trusted by God to be the great teacher that he is, the humble elder, and a ready martyr. Peter is not telling us that our nature has essentially changed with our conversion from human nature to divine. Nor does he believe that when we are translated into our glorified bodies that we would become as God. No. He is saying that we have the image of God perfected in us and unlike those who do not know God we now have the ability to reach out and partake of those things prepared by God for the sons of God. As my Pastor Ken used to say “We will one day take on the perfect humanity of Christ.” We will become the flawless creatures of our God, not His fellow gods.

Calvin explains the verse with these words: *“By the word nature is not here essence but quality. The Manicheans formerly dreamt that we are a part of God, and that after having run the race of life we shall at length revert to our original. There are also at this day fanatics who imagine that we thus pass over into the nature of God, so that his swallow up our nature....But such a delirium as this never entered the minds of the holy Apostles; they only intended to say that when divested of all the vices of the flesh, we shall be partakers of divine and blessed immortality and glory, so as to be as it were one with God as far as our capacities will allow.”* Manichaeism was a third century heresy of the Persian Mani who also taught that asceticism and celibacy were the road to salvation, and so Calvin rightly distances himself from such teachings.

So, to what extent are we partakers of the divine nature? There is certainly a continuing conflict within us so long as we live, a continued battle to resist temptation to sin, so how is it that we may be called partakers? We may say that we are partakers precisely because our atonement of sin has made the way of escape from the corruption of sin, or as Peter says: *‘the corruption that is in the world through lust.’* The Greek word used here is the word φθορά (phthora). Its meanings are several and varied, but it seems in all cases to refer to a final physical corruption or decay. It may refer to something that is short-lived and transient. Our lexicon refers also to *“the effect upon themselves of the*

work of false and immoral teachers” and then refers to II Peter 2:12 for an example, which says: *“But these [false teachers] like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption.”* So, there are those who profess to have escaped corruption and have not. And there are those who are unaware that they have escaped corruption although they have.

So, we are given a new nature that is no longer susceptible to this decay and final corruption. Now this corruption spoken of becomes clearer to us when we recognize that it is not at all the same thing as pollution. In II Peter 2.20 he speaks of a person who is clean becoming again entangled in the *pollutions* of the world. Such a thing is distinct from corruption. Once we have put on incorruptibility we may not again inherit corruption. However, we are free to entangle ourselves with worldly pollutions. In order to illustrate I will turn to some Texan theology. Dr. McGee gives us this distinction. *“If you are going to escape the corruption of the world, you will have to have a new nature. You will need to be a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. However, although you have the nature of God through being born again, that doesn’t mean that you have lost your old nature. There is a continuing conflict in the life of a believer between his new nature and his old nature. The best illustration of this in Scripture is that which our Lord gave us when He told the parable of the Prodigal Son. Notice that the son could go to the far country because he still had an old nature. He could spend his money in riotous living, and he could even get down in the pigpen. But, you see, he was a partaker of the nature of his father, and his father didn’t live in a pigpen. His father lived up there in a wonderful mansion. His father believed in godliness and cleanliness, and there was nourishing food on his table. Now, that boy wouldn’t have been his son if eventually he hadn’t said, ‘I will arise and go to my father...’ He had to say it. You couldn’t find a pig in the pigpen that would say that. Not one of those pigs went with him to the father’s house....However, we will see in 2 Pet 2.22 that a pig can get washed and cleaned up. Although he may become a tidy little fellow, even join a church, and become a deacon or a minister in the pulpit, he is still a pig and will eventually return to that pigpen. But the son is a partaker of the*

nature of his father, and he will eventually return to his father's house."

Dr. McGee is obviously referring to the verse from this epistle which says of those who return to their old sins and stay there: *"But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire (II Pet.2.22)."* Sadly, my friends, much of contemporary Christianity is mired in barnyard morals. And, just as sadly, it is because they have believed that salvation ends with profession and does not proceed with the self-mastery that comes only from continued growth in the knowledge of Christian truths we call doctrine. Christianity today has a ghetto mentality, relegating the masses to be content with a mere fragment of understanding. Though some may even be genuinely saved and not subject to corruption, they have been taught that to remain among the moral pollutants of their past sins is an acceptable state. So many second generation Christians are mired in out of wedlock relationships and illegitimacy that is not distinct from their counterparts who's parents knew nothing of Christ, His gifts, or His commands.

Not so with the Apostle Peter who teaches us a moral progression that comes with the diligence of intestinal fortitude and zeal for knowledge of the deeper things of God that any true son or daughter ought to be hungering for. He writes:

vs.5-8. "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is a moral disaster that the second generations Christians, i.e., children brought up by redeemed parents, cannot find the moral courage to stand against the cultural pollutions of our day. Where is the love of purity, of chastity, of sexual restraint? Where indeed is the essential stigmatization of immoral lifestyle choices? Why is co-habitation and illegitimacy rampant among the adult children of Christian parents? It is because we have decided as the church that "evangelism" trumps every other Christian calling and

every other Christian virtue. Evangelism has become an excuse for immorality. Evangelism has been redefined to excuse immorality and enable those entangled in gross sin to remain unchallenged. We add perseverance not to godliness but to doctrinal slothfulness. Tolerance of sin is the new love. We no longer add perseverance to self-control. We add perseverance to our tolerance of blatant and obvious sin. We no longer add virtue to our faith, but we exalt outreach as the only virtue giving all diligence to increasing the numbers of hearers who will come together to hear a morally anemic message that is neither truthful nor fruitful.

It seems to me the prophetic word from this apostle has become the sign of this age. And among those who call themselves Christian many remain happily *barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Let us never neglect the true gospel for the gospel of acceptance or convenience. And let genuine believers be a light to a dark world with our own lives and the witness of our children after us. In a world where Christian morality has gone quite out of style, and any show of moral restraint is not highly valued, let us never shrink from such things, that when He comes He may yet find faith in the earth. Let us engage in true biblical evangelism that goes beyond a calling into the pews and all the way to glory. Let us challenge our own children and every new believer to know the moral demands of Christ and to wear them humbly, and defiantly when necessary.

divine nature