



Sunday School Lesson for October 19, 2003.
Released on October 16, 2003.

Study II Peter 1:3-15. Grow in Faith
Questions and answers below.

TIME: A.D. 64
PLACE: unknown

2 Peter 1:3-15

3 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:
4 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.

5 And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge;

6 And to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness;

7 And to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.

8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.

13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance;

14 Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me.

15 Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.

No-Learners in the Church

Are there any no-learners in your church? The first-century church had some. A wise leader wrote, "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are

become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe" (Hebrews 5:12, 13).

We all know some people like that in our twenty-first-century churches. They are not nitwits. They are well-informed and capable farmers, mechanics, and professional people. Such folks are eager to learn ever more about their trades and professions, but have no similar desire to grow in Christianity. They are saved! What more can anyone want? So they sit through sermons without listening and through Bible lessons without learning.

The apostle Peter will not have such complacency. As we shall see in our text, he exhorts every Christian to become a better Christian. Paul likewise calls us to keep on improving "till we all come . . . unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Until we all become like Jesus Himself! What boundless room we all have for Christian growth!

Lesson Background

The text we consider this week is from "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1). It was originally sent "to them that have obtained like precious faith with us" (1:1). That is, it was addressed to Christians like us. Exactly who they were and to which churches they belonged, we cannot say. They were aware of some of the apostle Paul's writings (3:15). Either they had received letters from Paul or Paul's letters to some other churches had been shared with them. Apparently, however, they had not taken Paul's instructions to heart; some of Peter's readers were complacent, self-satisfied, and not eager to improve themselves and the church.

But was there ever a time when the church did not have self-satisfied members? Perhaps we can profit most from our text by considering today's lesson against the background of the church and Christians as we see them today. Then we can make today some of the improvements that Peter recommended two thousand years ago.

God's Gifts (2 Peter 1:3, 4)

Before speaking of what we need to do to grow in faith, Peter reminds us of what God already has done for us. Let us, then, first look at God's gifts that underlie and encourage the growth that He expects.

1. What has God's divine power enabled us to do (2 Peter 1:3)?

We have not come to share in God's blessings through our own efforts. Indeed, only His divine power has enabled us to enjoy everything that pertains to life and godliness.

Many people think that life is all about amassing wealth or enjoying various pleasures this world offers. In Christ, however, we have come to realize that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

True life is knowing the Lord. He offers us not only eternal life in heaven but also abundant life now. Jesus declared, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10; I Tim. 4:8).

The word "godliness" is found frequently in the New Testament and denotes a piety that seeks to please God. Scripture tells us how to live and act so that we can see His divine purposes fulfilled in us.

All this is made possible through the knowledge of One who has called us by His glory and goodness.

2. What can the church do to ensure its new members will receive knowledge "unto life and godliness"?

People must first hear the truth before they can accept it (Romans 10:14-17; Hebrews 4:2, 3). The church must not fail to provide quality teacher training to help this "hearing" take hold. This training can be done through on-site workshops, or by providing scholarships for members to travel to various seminars or Bible colleges. These trainees will need to learn a variety of teaching methods, since some of their students will learn best by hearing, others by seeing, and still others by doing. Preachers, for their part, must stay fresh—always reading, always learning.

3. What are some of the "precious promises" (II Pet. 1:4) we enjoy?

As God's people, we have been given "exceeding great and precious promises." Such promises include the forgiveness of sins, answered prayer, the presence of the Holy Spirit, God's guidance, and eternal life, to name a few. Through these precious promises we have become "partakers of the divine nature." As Christians, we participate in the things of God in a way that is impossible for the unconverted to comprehend or know (I Cor 2:14).

4. How are we made "partakers of the divine nature" (v. 4)?

One view understands this to mean we become partakers of the moral nature of God, sharing in His "views, thoughts, purposes, [and] principles of action" (Barnes, Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, Baker).

Outside of Christ, we are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). In Christ, though, we have been made alive (v. 5) and raised to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). We are, in fact, "a new creature" (II Cor. 5:17) through His divine, regenerating power.

As God's children, we have "escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (II Pet. 1:4). This does not mean we cannot be tempted to sin or succumb to the world's allurements. It does mean divine power is available to aid us in overcoming the fascination we have with the world and its evil desires. We have already been delivered from sin's power; one day we will be delivered from sin's very presence (Rev. 22:14,15).

Pursuers of Spiritual Growth (2 Peter 1:5-9)

5. What does the word "diligence" (v. 5) imply about Christian growth?

Even though we are partakers of God's nature, this is no reason for us to be slack in our efforts to live the Christian life. Instead, diligence is required of us. This word refers to earnestness, zeal, or effort. In other words, spiritual growth is not an effortless pursuit. It requires our very best energies and should not be viewed as optional but

as standard equipment for the dedicated disciple of Christ.

6. What can the church do to convince believers that they must put consistent effort into becoming mature spiritual Christians?

The church has to become interested in making disciples, not just in getting people to "make decisions" for Christ. Evangelism is part of the discipleship effort. Getting people to accept Christ is the first step. But many churches stop there. The church must stress maturity. It must hold up maturity as the norm, not the exception. Perhaps senior saints can be given opportunities to tell of their struggles and their victories. Or the church can sponsor special in-depth classes, spiritual retreats, and other programs that challenge believers to grow to new levels of maturity.

7. What are the seven qualities that are to be added to our faith (vs. 5-7)?

Faith is at the very foundation of our Christian commitment (Heb. 11:1). Our entire salvation is grounded in faith, from beginning to end (Rom. 1:16,17). Once we have made a faith decision to

come to Christ, we must build upon that faith. Hence, Peter enjoined his readers to add to their faith those qualities that would ensure spiritual growth.

The first quality to be added to faith is virtue. The particular Greek word used here indicates moral goodness or excellence. Sometimes the ancients used this word to describe courage.

Indeed, Christian faith is courageous:

To virtue must be added knowledge. "The word used here suggests practical knowledge or discernment. It refers to the ability to handle life successfully. It is the opposite of being 'so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly good'" (Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Victor).

Of course, this requires Christians to be students of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11), learning basic facts, principles, and concepts that will enable them to grow spiritually and discern God's will for their lives.

To knowledge the believer must add temperance. This word has the basic meaning of self-control or self-mastery. Without self-control, we become slaves of sin instead of servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18).

To temperance Christians must add patience to their faith. While "patience" is an adequate translation of the Greek word used here, it could also be rendered "endurance," "perseverance," or "steadfastness." "It means 'staying under' . . . [and] is frequently used in the New Testament to refer to constancy or steadfast endurance under adversity, without giving in or giving up" (Walvoord and Zuck).

To patience must be added godliness. This is the same word used previously (II Pet. 1:3) and may be understood as reverence or piety. The person with this quality worships God and is also in a good relationship with other human beings (Matt. 5:23,24).

The godly person will certainly express brotherly kindness toward others. The Greek word is *Philia* and literally means "brotherly love." True saints of God are known by their love for one another (John 13:34,35).

At the top of the ladder of Christian growth is the crowning virtue: charity. This is the Greek word *agape*, which is more commonly translated "love" in the New Testament. This is sacrificial love, such as was displayed on Calvary.

8. How is the believer who is not growing spiritually described (v. 8)?

The "these things" in verse 8 to which Peter referred are the seven qualities that need to be added to the growing Christian's faith. Not only must these be found within the believer's life, but they must also abound.. The word translated "abound" means to "increase in measure." It is not enough to exhibit these qualities now and then; instead, they must be increasing on a regular, daily basis.

The purpose of having these ever-increasing qualities added to our faith is so that we will not be barren or unfruitful. The word for "barren" could be translated "ineffective" or "useless." Certainly a follower of Christ would not want to be characterized in this manner. Christ wants His servants to be fruitful (John 15:1-8).

The word translated "knowledge" in II Peter 1:8 speaks of full or complete knowledge. This may be implying that effective, fruit-bearing believers have a deeper knowledge of what it means to serve Christ because they are growing in the faith.

9. Why is it important to remember that we have been cleansed from our past sins (v. 9)?

The believer who lacks these virtues (vs. 5-7) reveals that he is spiritually blind, unable to see very far. When we accept Christ, our spiritual eyes are opened (Acts 26:18). But if we fail to grow, we reveal that we are spiritually shortsighted, not becoming all God intended for us.

Sadly, the believer who is not bearing fruit has somehow lost sight of the fact that he has been cleansed of his old sins. Remembering that Christ saved us is an important motivation for spiritual growth. Reflecting upon how the Lord has rescued us from the clutches of the devil should inspire fruitfulness.

Our Reward (2 Peter 1:10, 11)

As we have just seen, the dangers of neglecting to grow in the Christian life are real and sobering. But Peter doesn't want merely to point out the negative. The positive aspects of Christian growth have magnificent eternal consequences!

10. How can believers make their "calling and election sure" (vs. 10,11)?

Again, Peter called upon his readers to give diligence in their service to Christ. Christian living is proactive, seeking to find avenues of Christian growth.

Diligent service and fruit bearing is evidence of our calling and election (Acts 2:39; Eph. 1:4,5; II Thess. 2:13).

Spiritual progress is evidence that our calling and election is sure. "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. The person who claims to be a child of God but whose character and conduct give no evidence of spiritual growth is deceiving himself" (Wiersbe).

Consequently, Peter told his readers that spiritual fruitfulness assured them that they would never fall, or stumble (John 10:28; Rom. 8:39; Jude 1:24). Focusing on Christian growth provides not only needed motivation but also the assurance that we belong to Christ.

Growing believers have the assurance not only of present salvation but of future redemption as well. In verse 11 the word "entrance" could be translated "welcome." This word was used of victors returning to their homes, where they would, be welcomed and honored. So it will be when we arrive in heaven. Concerning those persecuted for their faith, Christ said, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:12).

11. How can the church warn new or long-time Christians that they have a responsibility to "make [their] calling and election sure"? How can the church accomplish this without falling into the trap of teaching "salvation by works"?

The church has a great responsibility to teach the Scriptures carefully and completely in this regard since eternity is at stake! If your church offers a basic "what we believe" class, it should include the teaching that believers need to persevere in the faith and not abandon their relationship with Christ by reverting to their sinful lifestyles (Hebrews 10:26-31; 2 Peter 2:20-22; 3:17; Revelation 3:14-16). Both new and long-time Christians can be included in such classes.

The church must also stress that others will be rejected by God in the judgment because they tried to reach salvation through their own effort (Romans 4:1-8; James 2:14-26). We are saved by the power and grace of God (Ephesians 2:8,9). This class could benefit from comparing Christianity with other world religions, all of which teach some form of salvation by works.

**Peter's Plea
(2 Peter 1:12-15)**

Simon Peter never went to teacher's college (Acts 4:13), but he understood the importance of repetition in Christian education. He wants us to know Christian principles so well that we apply them automatically and come up with the right answers.

12. In what way did Peter not want to be negligent (v. 12)?

As an apostle of Christ, Simon Peter did not want to be negligent regarding his responsibility to teach his fellow Christians. Nor did he want to imply that these believers were unaware of the truths he was communicating in this letter. Nevertheless, he knew that people have a tendency to forget. There is always a need for Christian truth to be kept in remembrance.

There are, of course, many ways in which we can keep the teachings of Christ alive in our memories. Obviously, continued teaching and review of scriptural truths will keep these things before us. So that believers would not forget His great sacrifice, Christ ordained a memorial the night before His death. At the Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples, "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

13. What was the "tabernacle" (v. 13) Peter referred to?

Now Peter wanted his readers to have a permanent record of his encouraging words to them. His mention of "this tabernacle" (II Pet. 1:13) referred to his body. A tabernacle was a tent, a temporary abode, and so are our physical bodies. One day,

however, we will receive new, resurrected bodies (I Cor. 15:42-58; II Cor. 5:1-4; Phil. 3:20-21).

14. What did Peter know about his approaching death (vs. 13,14)?

Peter was aware of the fact that he would soon have to leave this world. Of course, all of us know that our time is limited on earth (Jas. 4:14).

Peter, however, had been told by Christ Himself that he would die a martyr's death. After Peter denied Christ (John 18:15-27), he was later reinstated when the risen Lord met with him and several other disciples at the Sea of Galilee (21:15-19). At that time, Christ informed Simon Peter that his death would "glorify God" (v. 19).

Knowing that his time was short, Peter wanted to be sure that after his "decease" (exodus in the Greek of II Peter 1:15), a permanent record of his teachings would remain. This we have in his two epistles.

15. Peter was eager that the Christians be assured and convinced of the things he wrote about. He wanted to be sure they clung to them even after his death. How can churches or individual Christians develop a zeal and a faith that last beyond the influence of certain leaders?

Some churches grow and thrive under the leadership of a dynamic preacher. But when that preacher retires or passes away, the church seems to dwindle. Many of those who were active in ministry are no longer. Young people who were excited about the church are drawn away little by little to other interests.

Some mega-churches are now using multiple preachers, trying to ensure that one preacher is not the only focal point of the church. Have the students suggest other ways to downplay the significance of individual leaders and exalt the lordship of Christ in the thinking of the members. Sunday school classes, small groups, and ministry teams surely will play a part.

CONCLUSION

God does not want us to remain spiritual babies. He wants us to grow in the faith and exercise our spiritual muscles. When we look at the early church of which Peter was an important part, we see it was a picture of vitality and effectiveness. Are our churches as effective in our witness today?

In this week's lesson we have seen that productive growth comes through God's power as we appropriate the promises of His Word.

PRAYER

Father in Heaven, thank You for holding before us the ideal toward which we grow: "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Thank You for the unflinching guidance of Your Word; thank You for minds that can learn and plan; thank You for strength to do. In gratitude we promise our best efforts to learn Your will and do it. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

You're either growing in Christ or withering away-there is no standing still.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In our lesson next week we will see how God can be trusted to keep His promise and that we are to be prepared for all that He has said will happen at the end of time. God is faithful. Study 2 Peter 3.

We will pause the Sunday school lessons for a three week vacation beginning November 2, - November 16, 2003. Your Sunday school lessons will resume via e-mail on Thursday, November 20, 2003 (Lesson 12 "Remain Loyal" Printed Text: 2 John 4-9; 3 John 3-12). Please keep us, as well as this ministry in your prayers.

May the Lord continue to bless you!

Sincerely,
Willie Ferrell
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