



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for November 22, 2009
Released on Wednesday, November 18, 2009**

"A Faithful People"

Lesson Text: 2 Peter 1:3-15

Background Scripture: 2 Peter 1:3-15

Devotional Reading: Luke 19:12-26

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Tell some key points that Peter makes about growth and faithfulness.
2. Explain the connection between godly living and faith.
3. Make a plan for Christian growth in one area.

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.

Introduction

All of us eventually quit growing vertically (although we seem to retain a propensity for horizontal growth). This is a simple fact of life, and it is largely determined by our genetic makeup. It is tragic, though, that some Christians cease to grow in spiritual stature. An early growth spurt may give them modest spiritual height. But then, for some reason, they remain stagnated at that level. They reach the point of not having new spiritual thoughts or insights for many years. The great truths of the faith become commonplace and stale for them.

Other Christians, however, seize the opportunities for lifelong growth that the faith affords. They become spiritual giants, continuing to add to their growth until death takes them. Peter was one of these. He seemed to have been a giant already when he preached the first gospel message on the Day of Pentecost, shortly after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2:14–36). We do not know how old Peter was at that time, but our best guess is that he was in his mid-30s.

By the time Peter wrote the second letter that bears his name, over three decades had passed. Peter was surely near age 70. He had no regrets, and his primary concerns were to remain faithfully obedient, to keep growing in Christ, and to pass those challenges along to others.

Whatever our physical age today, we do not have to settle for stunted spiritual growth. The spiritual life is such that it can be renewed and refreshed. Growth can begin again, even after a long period of inactivity.

Lesson Background

The book of 2 Peter includes some interesting features. First, it is written in a style of Greek very different from 1 Peter (although this may not be apparent to readers of English translations). Peter notes that his first letter was written with the help of Silvanus (1 Peter 5:12), whom we may know better as Silas. Silas, a companion also of Paul, seems to have been an educated Jew from a privileged background, for we know he was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:25, 38). We speculate that his help with 1 Peter provided the polish to that letter.

Peter's second letter, however, seems to have been written quickly, under great duress, and with no help from anyone like Silas. Peter himself wrote down the words rather than passing them over to someone else to edit. The style of 2 Peter is terse and direct, with few literary niceties.

A second thing to notice is the remarkable eyewitness recollection of Jesus' transfiguration found in 2 Peter 1:16–18. Here we find the same basic elements included in the Gospel accounts, but without the part about Peter's clumsy suggestion to build three "tabernacles" or shrines for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus (Matthew 17:4). It is not too surprising that this embarrassing detail had faded to the background for Peter!

A third prominent feature of 2 Peter is its frank discussion of what has been called "the delay of the second coming" (see 2 Peter 3:3, 4). The earliest church apparently expected Jesus to return very shortly. Peter, writing from the perspective of more than three decades after he first met Jesus, has come to grips with the distinct possibility that the second coming may not happen during his own lifetime. This will be discussed more fully in next week's lesson.

We should treasure these words of Peter, for they are the unrivaled message of a veteran believer at the end of his ministry. He brought to the table his experiences about the Lord Jesus as few in his generation could do—and certainly no one can do today. May we listen to him carefully.

Provision for Faithfulness (2 Peter 1:3-4)

1. By what means do we obtain "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (v. 3)?

Verse 3 tells us that it is through knowing God that we obtain "all things that pertain unto life and godliness." God expects all Christians to grow and mature in all godliness. He has equipped us to do this task. We cannot do this in our own power; we have to rely on God's anointed power for this. He has provided "all things" that support holiness. He has "given" these things to us. They are a gift of grace.

It is interesting that Peter links together life and godliness. The world tends to think of godliness as a dreary, lifeless affair. Nothing could be further from the truth. We were created by God, and true life comes only as we walk with Him and become more like Him.

Peter wrote that we grow in godliness by means of our knowledge of Him. This includes, of course, the truths about Him that we learn in Scripture. Again, what is even more important is that it speaks of the knowledge that comes through a close personal relationship.

God has called us to share in Christ's glory and goodness. We reflect Christ's glory already, albeit very imperfectly. But someday Jesus' followers will enter into His shining presence and fully partake of His goodness (2 Cor. 3:18).

2. What is the result of the great promise we have been given (v. 4)?

Although not well known, this verse identifies one of the greatest of God's gifts to believers: the Holy Spirit. Peter describes our relationship with God's Spirit as being *partakers of the divine nature*. As Paul put it, the Holy Spirit is God's "earnest" or down payment toward our full redemption at the end of life (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

Some Christians are very cautious in this area of doctrine. While we don't want our discussion of this to become too convoluted, we should not miss the tremendous significance of what Peter is saying. As believers, we receive the promise and the experience that we are directly plugged into God at the spiritual level. He is not distant from us or foreign to us. This indeed is an *exceeding great and precious* promise.

For Peter, the practical aspect of the gift of the Holy Spirit is that it allows us to escape the *corruption* and *lust* of the *world*. This describes the longing for ungodly things, preoccupation with pursuits other than God. If we have claimed the promises and gifts that come through faith, our primary focus will be on God and on doing His will. All other things pale in significance to this glorious relationship. It is this strong faith that allows Peter and his church to remain faithful through the horrible persecution by Rome.

Growth in Faithfulness (2 Peter 1:5-9)

3. How do you live life as a partaker of God's divine nature, as Peter understands that concept? How can you do better?

Too often it seems that Christians focus on their weaknesses instead of on God's strength. Sometimes when a Christian gives in to temptation quickly, he or she justifies the behavior by stating that "this is just the way I am."

But the fact of Scripture is that we are *more* because of the Holy Spirit, whom God has given us. When we allow the Holy Spirit to convict us and guide us, we can walk in a godly way. This requires taking time to study God's Word. That's how we discern the principles of godly living. It also means listening to counsel or rebuke from a brother or sister in Christ, as this may be God's way of directing us.

Taking time to think before speaking or to consider consequences before acting are paths to a more godly life. An worthwhile adage is "If in doubt, don't." That doubt about doing something may very well be the Holy Spirit's pricking one's conscience at a time of temptation.

4. What forms the foundation of our Christian character? (vs. 5-8)

Peter lists the following as evidence of our Christian character: faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Notice that Peter writes these characteristics as building blocks. Thus, before one can have virtue, that person must have faith. Before one can have patience, he or she must have temperance. Faith is the starting point of Christian character. Without it, we cannot please God (Heb. 11:6). Faith itself is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8); so even here, His grace is evident. He provides the foundation for our growth (the word "your" in 2 Peter 1:5 indicates the believers already possess faith). We are to exercise this gift and, in the strong hope it gives, add further fruit of our new life in Him.

These characteristics listed by Peter are by no means exhaustive. There is no doubting the distinctive quality of this Christian version. It is not clear how strictly Peter was trying to construct a ladder of virtues here, with the qualities developing in a certain order, but there is certainly some connection between each trait and the one that follows.

Living the godly life should imitate the great, merciful nature of God himself. The life of godliness will be evident in our *kindness* and care for our brothers and sisters within the church as well as acts of loving *charity* for those outside the body of Christ.

All of these steps work together (v. 8). When we begin to see loving-kindness and acts of mercy flow naturally and effortlessly in our lives, we have begun truly to live the mature, spiritual life that Peter wants for all of his readers. This is the level of faith that Peter knows to be necessary to survive the onslaught of persecution and testing that comes to each believer. This is just as true today as it was in the first century.

5. What is the person like who is not growing in godly character? (v. 9)

The gifts of God that Peter has described come to the faithful. Now Peter comments on the other side of the coin, the faithless. These are the *blind*, who have no capacity to see *afar off*.

This is an interesting illustration, for faith is the requirement for trust in that which cannot be seen (see Hebrews 11:1). Here Peter is talking about those shortsighted members of his church who fail to see the goal, the ultimate prize of faith (see Philippians 3:14). These folks have forgotten that their *sins* have been *purged* by the blood of Christ, and that salvation has been given to them, even eternal life (see Jude 21).

Triumph in Faithfulness (2 Peter 1:10-11)

6. What did Peter mean when he said to "make your calling and election sure" (v. 10)?

When Peter makes this statement, he was saying that we, as regenerated people, should be giving evidence of the change in our lives. This is the only time Peter refers to Christians as "brethren" in his epistles. He was not trying to attack them in his warning. In fact, Peter was reminding them of how they should be acting in the first place. If they were living by the qualities that he had listed ("these things"), they would not fall, or fall away. The truly regenerated person will show fruit and persevere until the end.

7. What great hope of the believer is mentioned in verse 11?

Peter sought to stir up his readers to diligence by reminding them of the rich blessings awaiting the faithful. He painted a picture of the glorious home coming God's faithful people will one day have when they experience the full manifestation of His kingdom, in which they will occupy an honored place. Like a loving father, Christ will secure with full honors our entrance into glory. Again, Peter was not saying that we earn our way into the kingdom but that growth is the mark of a changed heart (cf. Jas. 2:17-20).

Instruction in Faithfulness (2 Peter 1:12-15)

8. What was Peter determined not to be negligent about (v. 12)?

Peter knows that the great truths of the faith that he has been rehearsing are not new; his readers already *know them*. This does not make them less important, however. We are strengthened when truth is repeated. This is why we repeat pledges frequently. This is why we have favorite verses of Scripture that we quote again and again. This is why we have confessions of faith that may be repeated in unison by a congregation.

Peter has just reminded the readers that persecution becomes more tolerable when we remember that our ultimate destination is Heaven. He is careful to tell them, however, that faith must be based on the known, not speculation about the future. We have a sufficiency in the *present truth* that God has provided, the truth that we already have of our salvation, which was won through the cross and empty tomb of Christ.

9. What imagery did Peter use to describe his earthly life? (vs. 13,14)

As long as he drew breath, it was the right thing for Peter to remind his readers of the truth. He kept hammering at this point because of the false teachers at work (a major theme in 2 Peter and Jude). To emphasize the stakes involved, he used the image of a tabernacle, a temporary structure, to describe his life. Eternal realities are what matter most, and Peter would spend what little time he had left on earth to point out the way of eternal life.

Peter writes with full awareness that his life on earth is nearly finished, for this has been revealed to him by the risen *Christ* (compare John 21:18, 19).

Peter's desire was not just to restate facts. He wanted to stir up the believers, to get them to see the importance of living according to the truth.

10. What was Peter's desire for those who remained after his death? (v. 15)

Peter understands his influence as a great example to the believers (compare 1 Peter 5:1-4). As a concerned parent, Peter wanted to make sure his brethren remembered they needed to live the Christian life.

Peter would practice the very diligence he called on his readers to exercise. His life was centered on Christ and His truth. The headstrong fisherman had become the steadfast champion of Christ and His people. His desire was that those who remained after he was gone would be steadfast as well.

The New Testament does not always paint a flattering picture of Peter (example: Galatians 2:11-14). There is a sense in the Gospels that Peter's denials of Jesus after His arrest constitute a betrayal that is somewhat of a parallel to the act of Judas. The parallelism ends, however, as Judas commits suicide and Peter is restored to ministry by the Lord in the threefold question about his love (John 21:15-17).

Following that, Peter never lost his faith in Christ and passion for service to Him. These Peter maintained until his death, for he, as Paul, was truly "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20).

11. What are you doing to put others in remembrance of the things taught in the Bible? How can you do better?

An unfortunate thing that happens in the church sometimes is in thinking of our faith as a private matter. Thus we do not talk about how God is using us.

But personal testimonies by those who have lived the principles outlined in today's text can be a valuable way to help those who are younger (or younger in the faith). It is vital for those of us who are older to take time to be with younger people, either in a class or one-on-one settings; that's the way that the process of putting others "in remembrance" begins. Another thing we can do is keep a spiritual diary or journal to leave to those who follow behind us in the faith. This can help them appreciate more fully their spiritual heritage.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** In Christ we possess everything we need to live godly lives in this world (2 Peter 1:3-4).
- 2.** Faith in Christ demands that we also grow in godly virtues (vs. 5-7).
- 3.** Continued, fruitful ministry depends on continuing spiritual growth (vs. 8-9).
- 4.** Bearing spiritual fruit gives us assurance of our salvation (vs. 10,11).
- 5.** It is not enough to learn the truth; we must constantly be reminded of it (vs. 12,13).
- 6.** We have a duty to prepare the next generation of believers to follow the Lord (vs. 14,15).

CONCLUSION

Growing Old vs. Being Old

Products and services to delay or mask the effects of aging are a multibillion dollar industry. One of the most amazing of these is the Botox® phenomenon. This technique involves injecting small quantities of a powerful, paralyzing poison to decrease wrinkles and other aging signs. This and other things have caused some to say that "age 60 is the new 40."

Even if some of the effects of aging can be postponed or hidden, the march of the years ultimately cannot be stopped. We all grow older every day. One of the most startling things in life is the realization that other people think you are old.

We have all met people who seem to be elderly when they are still quite young, however. Their souls have fossilized long before their bodies have begun to decline. We have little control over the aging of our bodies, but we do have control over the decline of our souls. Peter promised that the Lord would provide "times of refreshing" if we put our faith in him (Acts 3:19). Even when we are ancient in body, our relationship with God can be "new every morning" (Lamentations 3:23), for He is ever faithful. He is both the "Ancient of days" (Daniel 7:9) and the immortal "King eternal" (1 Timothy 1:17). In Him the obedient Christian's future is secure.

PRAYER

Merciful God, we are humbled when we consider the enduring faithfulness of Your servant Peter. What an example he both was and is! He loved Your Son Jesus until the end. May our lives too have the evidence of Peter's faithfulness. We pray this in the name of the pioneer of our faith, Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

May our faith never give in, up, or out.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In the last lesson of this fall quarter, we see how we as Christian believers are a faithful people—a people full of hope. This divine hope keeps us moving forward each day. Study 2 Peter 3:1-13.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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