

November 24 Lesson 13 (NIV)

FAITH THAT ESCAPES CORRUPTION

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 90
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Peter 1

2 PETER 1:1–15

¹ Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,
To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:

² Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

¹² So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³ I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴ because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

KEY VERSE

He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. —2 Peter 1:4

RESPONDING TO GOD'S GRACE

Unit 3: Faith Leads to Holy Living

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Making Every Effort
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Greeting (2 PETER 1:1, 2)
 - A. Through God's Righteousness (v. 1)
 - B. Through Knowledge of God (v. 2)
- II. Godliness (2 PETER 1:3–11)
 - A. Glory (vv. 3, 4)
 - B. Morality (vv. 5–9)
 - The Sound of Music*
 - Blind Spot*
 - C. Calling (vv. 10, 11)
- III. Remembering (2 PETER 1:12–15)
 - A. To Establish Truth (v. 12)
 - B. Because Time Is Short (vv. 13–15)

Conclusion

- A. Christian Efforts
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Aramaic *Air-uh-may-ik*.

Cephas *See-fus*.

heresies *hair-uh-seez*.

Nero *Nee-row*.

Plato *Play-tow*.

Silas *Sigh-luss*.

Introduction

A. Making Every Effort

Students can be divided into four categories according to ability and effort. First are the highly capable students who work hard and excel beyond the course requirements. They get great benefit from the class. Second are less capable students who work hard even to meet the minimum requirements. They too get huge benefit from the class. Third, there are highly gifted students who do not work hard. They may pass the course (or not) but gain little benefit from it. Fourth, there are students with low academic ability who do not expend much effort. They tend to fail the course and receive little or no benefit.

Which type of student is the greatest joy to a teacher? Many instructors prefer the second category, the student who works hard to overcome academic deficiencies. The least favorite student is the third type, the student with great potential who squanders learning opportunities through laziness or neglect. During today's lesson, perhaps you will see a need to change your student-type!

B. Lesson Context

Peter's second letter consists of only three chapters (61 total verses), yet it presents several intriguing connections to other books of the New Testament. Many have noted the overlap of material between 2 Peter and Jude. Both letters express concern that false teachers would try to lead Christians astray (compare 2 Peter 1:20; 2:2–4, 10, 12–15, 18–22; 3:3–5, 17 with Jude 3–16). Such teachers claimed authority and insight from God that they did not have. The warning from the apostle Peter is stated in terms of “destructive heresies” (2 Peter 2:1).

Another cross-connection is found in 2 Peter 1:16–18, which refers to the transfiguration of Jesus recorded in the Gospels (compare Matthew 17:1–5). That pivotal and spectacular event revealed the true nature of Jesus and his glory to his inner circle of disciples of Peter, James, and John. Peter continued to tell of this event for some 30 years, bringing credibility to his preaching and teaching (Acts 2:14–36; 8:25; 1 Peter 2:23–25; etc.).

An obvious connection between 1 and 2 Peter is not so clear however. The style of writing in 2 Peter is much rougher than the elegant Greek of 1 Peter. This difference may be explained in 1 Peter 5:12, which indicates that Peter had the help of Silas in writing the first letter. There is no record that Silas, perhaps a more educated man, helped write 2 Peter. Without a writing partner, it makes sense that Peter's solo work on 2 Peter resulted in a different style than that of 1 Peter.

Peter wrote his second letter in the context of the persecution of Christians in the city of Rome. He wrote under duress, believing his own death to be near (see commentary on 2 Peter 1:13–15, below). The grim reality of persecution in Rome under Emperor Nero (reigned AD 54–68) served to focus Peter's thoughts in the direction we see in today's lesson text.

I. Greeting

(2 PETER 1:1, 2)

A. Through God's Righteousness (v. 1)

1a. Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

Simon Peter identifies himself with both his Hebrew and Greek names. His given Hebrew name can also be spelled “Simeon” (see Genesis 29:33; 49:5). If names in two languages were not enough, Jesus called Simon “Cephas,” the Aramaic version of Greek “Peter” (John 1:42); both names mean “rock” (Matthew 16:18).

Peter further identifies himself in terms of two roles. The word *servant* (absent from 1 Peter 1:1) implies that one has a master (compare 2 Peter 2:19). Such a master is the servant's "lord." In calling himself a servant of *Jesus Christ*, Peter identifies his Lord.

Peter's use of the designation *apostle* reminds his readers that he has been given authority by Christ himself (see Matthew 10:2; 28:16–20; Galatians 2:8; 1 Peter 1:1). This title reveals that the person who is so designated is sent by or on behalf of someone else. To accept a role as Jesus' apostle means Peter believes that his mission and authority come from his Lord Jesus, not from Peter's own aspirations.

Simon Peter referred to himself only as Peter in his first letter (see 1 Peter 1:1). The lengthening of his name may suggest that he is asserting his authority more strenuously than before. This impulse is probably linked to the false teachers that have him concerned for his audience (see the Lesson Context). Peter is fighting for and exercising his apostolic voice.

1b. To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:

Those to whom Peter writes possess *a faith as precious as his own*. By use of the plural *ours*, he is including other firsthand witnesses of Jesus' ministry, especially the other apostles (compare 2 Peter 3:2). Such faith comes as a gift because of *the righteousness of our God*, which has made a way for all people to come to saving faith in Jesus.

Peter presents a high view of the deity of Christ, the apostle's remembered and living Lord (compare John 14:7–11). Most scholars believe that by the phrase *God and Savior Jesus Christ*, Peter refers not to Father and Son, but to the Son only. In so doing, Peter emphasizes Jesus' deity instead of his humanity.

B. Through Knowledge of God (v. 2)

2. Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Peter's desire that *grace* (a Greek greeting) and *peace* (a Hebrew greeting) *be yours in abundance* in the lives of his readers echoes his salutation in 1 Peter 1:2 (see Lesson Context of lesson 12). This speaks to having peace with God, not mere earthly peace. Although Peter was primarily an apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:9), he was the one chosen to reveal God's will for including Gentiles in salvation (Acts 10:1–11:18). Because of God's grace, everyone can experience peace with him.

The fact that such peace comes *through the knowledge of God and of Jesus* (also 2 Peter 2:20; 3:18) involves much more than "head knowledge." Peter will make this abundantly clear as this letter unfolds. What should be clear at this point is that by equating knowledge of Jesus with knowledge of God, Peter again affirms that Jesus is God (see 2 Peter 1:1b, above).

Referring to Jesus as *our Lord* groups Peter's audience with the apostles once again. Not only do they share the faith (again, see 2 Peter 1:1b); they also share in their roles as servants of the Lord. No one can follow the Lord without being subject to the Lord (contrast 2:1–3).

II. Godliness

(2 PETER 1:3–11)

A. Glory (vv. 3, 4)

3. His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

God interacts with believers through *his divine power*, and the results are gifts we need. Specifically, God's working in our lives provides life defined by godliness. His *glory and goodness* call us when we recognize that only Jesus can lead us to true life.

All of this depends on *our knowledge of him*, which is not so much a propositional or "book knowledge" as it is a personal relationship (see commentary on 2 Peter 1:2, 8). As we know God better, we live the *godly life* more completely. We will never match God's perfect standards, but we still progress toward excellence in our lifestyle. This kind of excellence is characterized by *goodness*. Behind this translation is a Greek word that older versions of the Bible render as "virtue."

The concept of virtue is well known to the Greek philosophers. Those great thinkers argue about what should be the primary characteristics of moral and ethical behavior. Before Peter's day, Plato proposed the cardinal virtues of discernment, courage, moderation, and justice. To the philosophers, virtue yields the best life. But the Greeks do not look to their gods as examples of virtuous goodness; those (fictitious) deities are often seen to be petty, dishonest, and capricious.

Peter will discuss specific virtues later, based not on philosophical musings and human wisdom but on the character of God and revelation of Jesus (see commentary on 2 Peter 1:5–8). Christian virtues and moral characteristics are defined by God and known as godliness.

4a. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature,

Related to God's working with divine power are certain *promises* for believers that result in being granted the privilege of participating *in the divine nature*. This is a striking way of talking about the gift and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Sharing in godly behavior shows the hand of God in our transformed lives.

4b. having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

To be granted the privilege just discussed is based on the fact that we see here. Worldly *desires* are destructive, driving us away from God and his people. Peter speaks of *corruption* not as the breakdown of the body but as the depravity of the soul. Our self-inflicted moral wounds begin to heal as we experience the Holy Spirit in our hearts and yield to the Spirit's influence in our lives.

B. Morality (vv. 5–9)

5a. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness;

Godly habits do not happen without real effort. Peter warns against a lazy attitude in pursuit of godly traits, knowing that making *every effort* toward godliness is crucial to one's relationship with God. We don't know God in any identifiable way if our lives do not reflect our commitment to him.

All godly habits flow from *faith*, based on our committed relationship to God. Peter presents seven characteristics to look for in terms of a connected chain. He starts with *goodness*, which we noted can be translated "virtue," reflecting moral excellence. This is the opposite of sinfulness. Christians should be morally excellent; everyone we meet should be able to recognize virtue and goodness in our lives.

5b. and to goodness, knowledge;

Second, virtuous *goodness* should lead to *knowledge*, clear understanding of the parameters of the Christian life. Knowing God and knowing about God will result in knowing how to behave in a godly manner (compare Proverbs 2:1–10). This is self-knowledge based on God-knowledge.

6a. and to knowledge, self-control;

Third, our *knowledge* of God and his expectations for us should produce *self-control*. Such self-control should be applied to all facets of life.

6b. and to self-control, perseverance;

Fourth, *self-control* leads to *perseverance*, which is steady endurance. For Peter's audience in an environment of persecution, perseverance is necessary. God fulfills promises in his timing, not ours. Sometimes we can only wait patiently on him (Isaiah 40:31).

6c. and to perseverance, godliness;

Fifth, we should be refining our *godliness*, our patterns of devotion and respect for the Lord. This cannot be done passively, just as none of the other Christian traits discussed so far can be obtained through inaction. Human hearts are inclined to evil (Genesis 6:5; Psalm 14:1–3; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 7:18–20); without the Holy Spirit's work and our own persistence, we will cultivate evil instead of godliness.

7. and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

We group the sixth and seventh characteristics together because *mutual affection* is so closely related to *love*. Love that results in action with and for fellow Christians is to be a hallmark of believers (John 13:34, 35; Romans 13:8; 1 John 4:19–21; etc.). This primary characteristic of the church defines how we are to relate to one another (Romans 12:10). This should flow naturally from patient endurance and godliness. Loving others often requires great patience and requires many other godly traits to be exercised in a holy way. Unselfish love is motivated by a concern for others that has greater weight than concern for oneself. What Peter began with faith (see 2 Peter 1:5), he ends with love (compare 1 Corinthians 13:13).

8. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Diligent attention to these faith-based characteristics will result in spiritual fruit (compare Galatians 5:22–25). Growing in Christ is based on our *knowledge* of him (see commentary on 2 Peter 1:3, 5b). As we know him more fully, it is reflected in our lives. As we develop these characteristics of godliness, we know him better.

9. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Does the neglect of the godly characteristics that flow from faith *result from* or *result in* a blindness to what God has done for a person? Perhaps it's both, in a mutually reinforcing and vicious cycle (compare Matthew 15:14; 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4; 1 John 2:9–11). This cycle must be broken or, better, not allowed to start in the first place. The beginning point is always to keep in mind that we have been *cleansed from* our *past sins*, and they no longer condemn us.

C. Calling (vv. 10, 11)

10. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble,

To be called is to be invited; to be elected is to be chosen. These are not separate concepts but different aspects of the same thing. God both chooses and calls us to be part of his people. (On the

relationship between these terms and the concepts of human freewill and God's foreknowledge, see commentary on 1 Thessalonians 1:4 in lesson 11.) We *confirm* our status by making the practice of godly habits a priority. We are not earning our salvation but living it as God expects. The practice of godliness becomes a beloved lifestyle, not a burden.

11. and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The risen Christ promised the church in Smyrna that the one who is faithful until death will be given a crown of life (Revelation 2:10). Peter offers a similar promise to the ones who strive for godliness. This reminds us of Jesus' teaching about the *kingdom* of God, which Peter heard often (Matthew 6:33; 19:16–30; Mark 4:10–20; Luke 8:1; etc.).

Jesus warned the unbelieving Jews of his day that they would be barred from the kingdom of God because of their failure to produce fruit that God desired (Matthew 21:43). They were blind to his will and would suffer the consequences (Mark 4:11, 12; see commentary on 2 Peter 1:9).

III. Remembering (2 PETER 1:12–15)

A. To Establish Truth (v. 12)

12. So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.

Peter commits himself to helping his audience remember and practice these important components of Christian living (compare Psalm 119:52–56; Ezekiel 20:43; 1 Corinthians 11:23–29). This is not a new endeavor for the apostle. His readers already *know* how they should live to be *firmly established in the truth*. Peter's concern is that they not grow tired in the midst of persecution or fall for compromises offered by false teachers who would demolish the foundation Peter has built with them (2 Peter 2:1–3).

B. Because Time Is Short (vv. 13–15)

13, 14. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

Peter is feeling his mortality. Choosing to refer to his life as a *tent* recalls the temporary structure that housed God's presence in the desert wanderings (Exodus 29:43, 44; 33:9, 10; 1 Kings 8:10–12, 27–30; 1 Corinthians 6:19). Christians look forward to the new, resurrection bodies that we will be given after our temporary, earthly bodies die.

The brevity of Peter's remaining time has been revealed to him by *Jesus* himself, although Peter does not explain how (compare John 21:18, 19). He believes his last days are best served by refreshing believers' memories concerning the important lifestyle matters just presented. In this way, they will be prepared for the return of Jesus or their own deaths, perhaps as a result of the murderous Roman persecution.

15. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

The Christian life is not about seeking new commands or innovative doctrine. Quite the opposite: the Christian life is about remembering and practicing the old, that which has already

been given (see 1 John 2:7, 8; 2 John 5, 6). Nothing pleases Peter more than for his readers to do so.

Conclusion

A. Christian Efforts

Christians cultivate godly characteristics and habits as modeled by Christ. This is essential in following Jesus as Lord. Our values and attitudes flow from faith in Christ. This is the Christian life as Peter presents it to his readers.

We do not live without guidance in how to do this. We have Jesus' example and the Holy Spirit to guide us. God has shown us what he values. Are you making every effort to confirm your calling, to live your faith virtuously?

B. Prayer

Lord, guide us as we seek to live out our faith. May we not be useless, unfruitful, or blind. We pray in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The condition of our faith
defines our lives.¹
