

West Valley Church
Michael W. O'Neill
06/21/20

On This Rock

Part Ten

2 Peter 1:3-21

We celebrate Father's Day (and Mother's Day) because we honor the role that parents play in our lives; they brought us into the world and (hopefully!) they helped us grow up to be responsible. But *we* also had to participate in that growth, didn't we? We had to learn and put it into practice. Imagine if either the parents or the child decided they would stop participating in that process; the child would not mature the way he or she is supposed to, and you'd have an immature adult child.

That is a little like the picture that Peter is painting in the rest of chapter one of his second letter.

We're continuing in our series called "On This Rock, Peter and the Church" and learning some incredibly timely things that have helped us to cope with this pandemic and to know how to pray for and defend people of color.

If you were with us last week, you remember that Peter wrote this letter to Christians who were being persecuted and who were being tempted astray by some false teachers. In his greetings he emphasized the change that Christ makes in our lives, and that knowledge of Christ involves a growing relationship expressed in practical ways in our lives. Now he's going to emphasize how that relationship works and the difference it can and ought to make in our lives.

If you have your Bibles, you might want to open them to 2 Peter 1. So let's get started by seeing first...

1. Power for the Christian. (vs. 3-4)

Let me read verses three and four for us:

"His (referring to Jesus Christ) 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. 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." (2 Peter 1:3-4, niv)

Remember that we said last week that all of the promises of God are ours in Christ. The verb for "he has given" indicates a completed action with an ongoing effect. In other words, all the power we need to live into God's promises and live Christ-like lives has *already* been given to us; it is just a matter of our growing in it more and more. When he says,

“everything we need,” he’s saying that it is available for every circumstance in our lives so that we would live life and godliness at all times.

Now the false teachers that were leading Christians astray were making claims that they had special knowledge of Christ, and yet their lives were *totally* immoral. So Peter is saying that *true* knowledge of Christ results in godly morals and behaviors in the life of the Christian.

By Christ’s glory and goodness, Jesus makes salvation available to us and then supplies us with everything we need to live out the Christian life. So there is no excuse for failure to live Christ-like.

Part of the teaching of the false teachers was something called dualism. That thinking said there was a divide between the immortal, spiritual, divine world, and the mortal, physical, material world. In that false teaching, our physical lives are so lost and so sinful that they can’t be redeemed; we are only saved for when we get to heaven where the immortal world is. This false teaching said that Jesus saved us for the spiritual world, that’s waiting for us someday. But since this physical world is not good and can’t be saved or changed, then it doesn’t matter what we do here; it isn’t going to change anything. So you might as well sin all you want – you are already saved anyway!

Well Peter is very strongly making the point that the knowledge of Jesus we have – our relationship with him – makes a *major* difference in our lives *right now*, as we live godly or holy, Christ-like lives in very practical ways. We were saved *for this life, this world*. We can “participate” in the divine nature in ways that have very practical and moral implications! The grace that God has given us in Christ does not free us from moral obligations; it saves us and empowers us to *live* them. It means we really can “escape” a life of sin and start living for Christ and like Christ in this world. So we renounce sin and we share in Christ’s righteousness and holiness. Participating in Christ’s divine nature is not the goal of our life; it is the starting line! It’s not the roof, it is the ground floor!

So then Peter describes for us...

2. What a Christian acts like. (vs. 5-11)

(...or, the seven habits of the highly effective Christian.)

Let me read those verses to us and then we’ll see what they mean for us:

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 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. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

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

receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:5-11, niv)

So Peter describes these virtues, and tells us to make *every effort* to attain and develop them in our lives if we are going to live the kind of life that Christ’s power enables us to. In fact, Peter literally says, “bend every energy” to acquire and grow in these things. Now there’s some very important things to point out here before we look at the list. First, the list is built on the foundation of faith, and then crowned with love. Faith is the conviction that what Jesus says is true and that we can commit ourselves to his promises and launch ourselves on his demands. And then love is evident in each virtue and the motive of all of them.

Now, each virtue is valuable and important, so it’s not like they are listed in order of importance. As you think about these and the fact that you and I have to work to practice them in our lives, there’s something else important to know: we don’t earn salvation, practicing these without faith in Christ doesn’t save us. But – if we *are* saved, then it is expected that we *must* bend every energy to participate in our salvation. By Christ’s power he has given us new birth, new life, and all that we need to grow in our faith, but it is also up to us to participate in the growth of our faith. That’s why Peter has given us this list of things that we must “bend every energy” to develop in our lives, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. So let’s look at the list. Remember it is built on the foundation of faith; so we must work on:

Goodness means more than kindness; it is living our lives in good ways for the goodness of the world around us and for the good of others. It also means excellence – so we must do our very, very best at all times for good and for these virtues.

Knowledge is what we talked about last week: it is knowing Jesus in relationship with him. But more than just information, we are to live it out in practical ways. It’s the ability to apply to any situation the wisdom that God gives us, deciding rightly and acting honorably in the day to day circumstances of life. It also implies that it is something we will grow more and more in every day and throughout our lives.

Self-control means the ability to get a grip on ourselves; that we won’t let our emotions take over our rational thinking. This is self-mastery. We *will* be passionate about things, but we won’t be driven by our emotions, urges, or lusts. Today we might call this “emotional intelligence.”

Perseverance is more than just patience; that’s too passive of a word. It’s courageous and it’s forward-looking. In other words, it’s the voluntary and daily suffering of hard and difficult things for the sake of achieving God’s purposes in our lives and in the world. It means we live for something bigger than our circumstances; we live to glorify God and to achieve his purposes of loving others and introducing them to Jesus. That puts our circumstances in a different light, so we accept stuff that happens to us, we endure things, we don’t focus on the moment or on the circumstances or get discouraged, because each thing life throws at us, God uses to move us further into Christ-likeness in this world!

Godliness is an interesting word because it literally involves two directions. It means correctly worshiping God and giving him his due, but at the same time it means

correctly serving people and treating them in godly ways. We love and serve God, *and* we love and serve people. Godliness – holiness – means we move both directions; God and people, and we live it out in very practical ways in all of our day to day lives.

So it would make sense then that the list would include *mutual affection*. Your translation might say brotherly love, but it means the same thing. It means that you will love the other people in your church; your fellow believers. This means every Christian, including every member of your church, West Valley Church. But you can practice this best in a small group. I know it's hard during quarantine, but our small group meets weekly on Zoom, we text each other regularly on the GroupMe app, and we pray for each other daily. We call each other "the family we choose." I love them and they love me, and I know if I need anything, they will be there for me. That's mutual affection, and that's a powerful thing that Christianity provides. *Religion* does the opposite; a religious person separates himself from others because he's more religious than others – holier than thou. Christianity bonds people together because we value the other person equally. True Christians have mutual affection for each other.

Love is the crown on top of all the virtues. While mutual affection is about loving other believers, this love is about loving ALL people. It is a love toward others that is as wide as God's love is for us. Remember, Jesus said, "(God) gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike." (Matthew 5:45, nlt) That means we love everyone equally and treat them equally – no matter who they are, the color of their skin, what nation they are from or language they speak, and no matter what their lifestyle. *That's* what shows we are children of God – like Father, like Son. That's what Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 is all about!

All of these together are our moral responsibility, and we must always bend every energy to develop them in our lives. What Peter is saying is that we participate in our salvation. That's why he said in First Peter that we are "being saved" and that's what he meant when we said we are supposed to "work out" our salvation. Is salvation dependent on God's Grace and Christ's work for us on the cross, or is it dependent on our good works? Peter, and the rest of the New Testament answer that question with a resounding YES! *Both* elements are essential to salvation (Philippians 2:12-13; James 2:17).

You wouldn't even be "born again" into new life if it weren't for the hard work and sacrifice of Jesus Christ for you. But at the same time, you cannot accept Christ and then just passively sit back and tell God to do all the work; otherwise we will be immature, adult-child Christians. You and I must bend every energy to work on these virtues in our lives in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Peter indicates that we will get better and better and better at them. We'll work on these for the rest of our lives, here on earth anyway. To fail to do so means that we are spiritually short-sighted and in fact, blind; we can't see past the noses on our faces, we're selfish, we don't have the long view of life, and we are no better off than an unsaved person – we are spiritually blind.

So finally, in order to refute the false teachers and to encourage Christians, Peter gives...

3. Assurance for the Christian. (vs. 12-21)

Now, I'm not going to read these last verses to you; I'm going to ask you, when we are done, to take a moment, read those last verses – 2 Peter 1:12-21 – and then pray about all this. Okay? I'll remind you in a minute, but let me just tell you a little in advance of what you'll read so that you'll understand it.

Although 2 Peter fits the normal description of an epistle or a letter, this particular section is in the genre of a farewell speech. That's because Peter knows he is about to die. In fact, he says that this is going to happen just as Jesus prophesied that it would. That was back in John 21:18-19, when the resurrected Jesus reinstated Peter.

Peter then says that what he's telling them might sound familiar, but these things always bear repeating. Every Sunday I remind us that God loves us and sent his Son to die for us. I've had people ask me, "Why do you say that every Sunday?" My answer is the same as Peter's: "I'll always remind you even though you already know it; it is right to refresh your memory and I'll do it as long as I'm alive." We must never, never forget that we are sinners saved by grace.

In verse 16 Peter refutes the false teachers who say that the stories of Jesus are just "cleverly made up." In fact, the false teachers claimed that there would be no second coming of Jesus, so everyone could just live however they wanted to.

So Peter reminds the readers that they – and we – must participate in Christ's godliness because we have the account of eyewitnesses – the New Testament writers! Peter recounts his experience from Matthew 17 when he saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain, in his heavenly glory, standing with Moses and Elijah. The reason for this is because that event happened right after Jesus was teaching about the second coming. That event was intended to show us what Christ will be like when he returns. And Peter, James, and John saw it and heard it – they were eyewitnesses and ear-witnesses to it.

The other reason we have to be assured in our faith – and to not be led astray by false teaching – is that we have the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus. EVERYTHING that the New Testament eyewitnesses saw and heard were foretold by the Old Testament! And there's no way that the Old Testament could be made up by people; it was written over the course of well over 1,000 years by 35 different authors that didn't personally know the others, on three different continents, and yet they are incredibly consistent in their stories and prophecies that point to Jesus.

There's no way humans on their own could've done that unless there was someone – God Himself – who was inspiring them and moving them to write what they did.

So we have great assurances that we have been saved, that we have the Spirit to help us daily bend every energy to build those virtues into our lives so we can live Christ-like lives in this world, loving God supremely and loving all people equally.

These qualities take time to develop. It won't happen overnight. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you're in it for the long haul, and in 50 years your primary objective will still be to develop these qualities in increasing measure. One writer calls this "A long obedience in the same direction." Put your faith in Christ and what he's done for you. Cooperate with the Holy Spirit – bend every energy you have – to develop these virtues in your life, so that you won't waste your salvation and end up blind, stumbling, and good for nothing.

Prayer

Don't forget: read verses 12-21, and then pray about them before you close out your time in worship today.