

Why This Study?

Much has been written with regard to the current culture war Americans are embroiled in. It is easy to see the moral decay, militant anti-Christianity, and family decline. It is easy to see that the decline is picking up speed. Clear differences can be seen when comparing the present with things just a few years ago.

How do Christians engage in times like these and actually advance the cause of Christ?

Are we prepared to stand in the gap, move in faith, and lead those around us toward the God who loves us?

We serve the great God who has more than enough power to repair our individual lives and bring times of refreshing to us. Christians don't bury their heads in the sand or throw their hands up in defeat. God's people stand tall in their commitment, take the battle to Satan, and defend areas of vulnerability. It is this way that we follow Peter's admonition in his first epistle:

Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.

– 1 Peter 1.13-16

In his second epistle, Peter opens with some of the most practical instructions for taking the battle to Satan and his efforts to lead our individual lives, our families, and communities away from God. If we are going to have any impact on those around us, we must be committed to our individual responsibility to add to and grow our faith. As we do this, we'll find the natural result of our growth is an increasing influence on our families, circle of friends, and ultimately, those we engage with inside our community.

Over the next thirteen weeks, we will take an in-depth look at 2 Peter 1.1-11. In it we find the encouragement to hold onto the knowledge of how we have received *everything required for life and godliness*. We are reminded of the *very great and precious promises* that enable us to *share in the divine nature* and *escape the corruption that is in the world*. We are exhorted to develop our faith and assured that when we do we will *confirm our calling and election* we will *never stumble*. Finally we are told that as faithful Christians we can look forward to a glorious *entry into the eternal kingdom, ... which will be richly provided*.

Are you ready? Let's go. Let's learn what it takes for us to *conform our calling*.

Lesson 1

Recipients of Divine Power

2 Peter 1.1-3

1.1-2 - Introduction

As Peter's letter begins, he identifies himself as a servant and apostle of Christ. His inclusion of the word *servant* gives us a little insight into his heart. Peter, once brash, outspoken, and confident in himself, now confesses his submission, sense of duty, and obedience to Christ. But he also was writing from a position of authority and dignity. As an apostle he was divinely commissioned to impart the truth he received from the Holy Spirit. Although not specified, Peter's intended audience is probably the same one addressed in his first letter: those in northern Asia Minor, 1 Peter 1.1. It would have mostly been a Gentile audience, written toward the end of Peter's life, i.e., ~ 68 AD.

Peter's statement in the second part of verse 1 really stands out. He speaks to those who have *received a faith equal to ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ*. Note right from the beginning how Peter places the source of our salvation on a divine level. In the original language the word we use for *received* refers to the Old Testament practice of casting lots¹ in order to learn God's will. In a broader sense the word means "to obtain by divine will."² Faith is not something handed down to only the well-connected or privileged few but is freely available and given to all who choose to believe. Faith is something all believers share in common, whether one is like Peter, who was with Jesus and a divinely appointed apostle, or a common person either Jew or Gentile. Faith brings the same spiritual privileges to every person, regardless of earthly rank, position, heritage, race, education, gender, etc. For more biblical teaching on this read Galatians 3.26-28; Romans 10.12-13.

Also note how the only way this is all possible is by *the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ*. Everything in your spiritual life hinges on the work Jesus did while on earth, ultimately leading to the cross where He died in your place as the perfect sacrifice. This verse is also one of the sixteen times in the New Testament where the title of "Savior" is given to Christ. While that is the essence of Biblical teaching regarding the purpose of Jesus' coming, it is also important to note that since Peter is writing primarily to a Gentile audience that the usage of "Savior" fit in very well in the Gentile vernacular of the day. "Savior" was a very popular pagan-religious term that was often applied to Hellenistic savior-gods and divine rulers, especially in the Caesar cult.³ If this is the case, then Peter is using the common religious vocabulary the day in order to stress who the real Savior and God is.

¹ Leviticus 16.8-10; Joshua 7.14; Proverbs 16.33; 18.18; 1 Chronicles 25.8-31.

² Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 581.

³ Bauckham, Richard J. *2 Peter, Jude*. Vol. 50. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1983, p. 159.

In verse 2, Peter writes out the standard greeting common to most New Testament epistles. While we often read of *grace* and *peace* in these salutations, here we see the added component of *knowledge*. Peter opens the epistle with a stress on knowledge and also closes it in the same way:

Therefore, dear friends, since you know this in advance, be on your guard, so that you are not led away by the error of lawless people and fall from your own stable position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.

– 2 Peter 3.17-18

In other words, Peter wants us to make our spiritual life very personal. We're not in the midst of an academic pursuit simply for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, we're taking in the word of God deep into our heart for the purpose of transformation and relationship with our Creator. Included with that comes knowledge of specific things about God and who He is, His church, and what He expects from us. This is, as Moo describes, "a knowledge of God that unites head and heart."⁴

1.3 – What Jesus provides

Divine power

The New Testament makes clear that our ability to accomplish anything spiritually comes by divine power, not our own. This goes all the way back to initial salvation. We did not birth ourselves spiritually. Rather, we surrendered to God on the occasion of our baptism and allowed His Spirit to do the work of washing and regeneration directly upon our heart, Titus 3.5. In Ephesians 1.18-19 Paul prayed that our understanding of the *immeasurable greatness of His power toward those who believe, according to the mighty working of His strength*. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that raised us spiritually from the dead and remains in us. Later in Ephesians Paul writes about this power and how it is through God that we are able to experience a reality *far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us*, Ephesians 3.20. This power is what fuels our works in the kingdom as we live to glorify God and expand His kingdom.

As we reread 2 Peter 1.3, please note the verb tense: *His divine power **has given us***, ... This is describing an action that happened once in the past and continues into the present. God's power was not only demonstrated on the occasion of our baptism (when we received salvation), but it continues to be in us to this day.

Everything ...

Do not pass over this word, because this takes a very important place inside the sentence. It is written emphatically. The ability to live the type of life that God desires is within the grasp of every Christian. We are without excuse if we fail to follow through because we have already received everything that is

⁴ Moo, Douglas J. *2 Peter, Jude*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996, p. 38.

necessary to do so.⁵ No part of divine power has been held back from us. We've been given every *spiritual blessing*, Ephesians 1.3. God *freely gives us all things*, Romans 8.32.

.... **required for life**

God wants us to lead stable, productive, and influential lives as we sojourn on earth. To facilitate this, He has imparted to us His eternal word, provided us with spiritual leaders who exhort and teach, and given us fellow Christians to lean upon. When trials come, we have the avenue of prayer and the promise that if we will cast our care upon Him, we will receive His care, 1 Peter 5.7. Through the application of Biblical principles, we can lead exemplary lives, live inside meaningful relationships, and impact our communities in a positive way. Christianity equips every Christian, despite their circumstances, to lead the best life possible here, while living with growing anticipation for the *eternal life* that is to come.

.... **required for godliness**

“Godliness” comes from a word that means “piety” and focuses on “reverence towards the gods,”⁶ the devout practice for, and appropriate beliefs about God. Another writer describes it as “good worship,” that “summarizes the behavior expected of Christians who have come to know the God of Scripture.”⁷ You have everything you need to live the type of life God desires. Godliness is the *activity* of this life. All that we need to preserve, strengthen, and bring to consummation has been provided.

1.3b – How Jesus provides

All of this comes *through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness*. Our ability to lead the type of life God desires comes by a deep and genuine knowledge. Our understanding and acceptance of the fact of Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf fuels our motivation to live as a Christian should. In our relationship with Him we grow each day with a larger conviction and courage to live like Jesus did. As we do this, He continues to provide guidance, support, and care. This is why the apostles spent so much time directing the early Christians to grow in knowledge. Colossians 1.9-11 and Ephesians 3.17-21 are two such examples that go along with what Peter emphasizes in this short epistle.

The *calling* in this verse is a common expression inside the New Testament.⁸ This is God's general call upon men/women to be saved. This call came by the goodness and glory of Christ. When combined with “glory,” “goodness” refers to the divine moral excellence of Christ, focusing especially on the beauty of His goodness. In the original language when the term *goodness* is applied to God, it refers to “that which manifests divine miracle-working power for good.”⁹ Think of how that plays out here. We trust in

⁵ Davids, Peter H. *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006, p. 168.

⁶ Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 731.

⁷ Moo, p. 41.

⁸ 1 Peter 1.15; 2.9; Romans 1.7; 8.28.

⁹ Hillyer, Norman. *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011, p. 161.

the fact of Jesus' death and what it accomplished and the divine miracle of His resurrection. Through this and the message of the apostles, God has called us. We respond to that calling through our belief, repentance, and baptism, resulting in salvation.

For thought and reflection

1. Share your own thoughts about Peter's description of himself as a servant and apostle. How does this provide us with an example to follow as we lead our own Christian life in whatever capacity we serve?
2. What is so important about Peter's statement of those who have *received a faith equal to ours*? How is this especially relevant to our day and age?
3. Whose divine power is in view at the beginning of v. 3?
4. Why is the word *everything* stressed?
5. In what way has Christ provided you with everything you need to live in this life & the life to come?
6. In what way has Christ provided you with everything you need in order to live a *godly* life?
7. What is meant by *knowledge* in this epistle? Is it merely academic knowledge, or is it something else?

8. When were we called to salvation?
9. How far was God willing to go to save you?
10. Why are *glory and goodness* such important ways to describe Jesus?