

FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS IN A FAITHLESS AGE

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study
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Let's Begin

Reading the newspaper or watching the nightly news, local as well as global, can be depressing. Crime appears to increase while standards of civility and decency decrease. No matter the sphere of inquiry—law, education, politics, art, technology, science, or even religion—one conclusion seems inevitable: the age we live in is a godless age, faithless age. By faithless, we do not intend to imply people at large have no faith. To the contrary, modern people place their faith in countless “deities.” Rather people at large are moving farther and farther away from the historic Christian faith. There was a time when the United States of America could be rightly called, at least in some religio-cultural sense, a Christian nation. Not anymore. We live in a faithless age.

Interestingly, even in the first century the earliest church faced a faithless, godless culture. The Apostle Peter records both what they faced and how to remain faithful in a godless culture. Today's lesson in 2 Peter focuses on a three-fold formula for Christians to remain faithful in a faithless age.

As we begin our study of 2 Peter, note our outline of chapter one below:

- I. Precious Promises of God (vv. 1-4)**
- II. Pure Living for God (vv. 5-11)**
- III. Powerful Truths from God (vv. 12-21)**

I. Precious Promises of God (vv. 1-4)

The first factor to consider in the formula for living faithfully in a godless age concerns the very promises God Himself gives His people. Note Peter's words, “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, 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: 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” (vv. 1-4). The term translated “like precious” is *isotimos*, indicating “equal value” or “equal honor.” Rather than placing himself over others in the church as an Apostle, Peter humbly ranks himself among all God's saints. Each believer has identical promises from God. Furthermore, indicative of this precious faith we possess are several qualities.

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*First, we are saved by a Divine Person (vv. 1-2). “Knowledge” is a key term for Peter; he employs it seven times in this short letter, five times of which are in the first chapter (1:2, 3, 5, 6, 8; 2:20; 3:18). The Greek term is *epignosis*, indicating a full and thorough knowledge, with the knowledge being based upon personal participation. Hence, the salvation we have in Jesus Christ indicates personal participation with Him. Indeed one of the Apostle Paul's favorite phrases in his writings is “in Christ.” We have a personal, intimate knowledge of Jesus when He comes into our lives by faith in Him.*

Second, we are saved by Divine Power (v. 3). Through God's power we are called to Him—“hath called us.” All



are invited to feast upon the Bread of heaven which gives life to the world (John 6:33). No person is barred from the water of life (Isa. 55:1). “Whosoever” will may both eat and drink (cp. John 3:16; Rev. 22:17). In addition, through God’s power we are not only *called* to Him, we are also *changed* by Him—“godliness.” He gives new life which, in turn, demands a new lifestyle. Old things are passed away, and we are new in Christ (cp. 2 Cor. 5:17). How are we changed? Primarily, He changes us through “knowledge” in Him. Everything we need is wrapped up neatly in the Person of Jesus. Nothing else is required but Him. Are we realizing our full potential as redeemed children of God? We may only do so in Christ.

Reflection Connection

When you think of God’s power available to you as a believer, what do you think that means for your everyday life? Be specific.

Third, we are saved by Divine Promise (v. 4). Believers are given promises from the Creator of the universe. Indicative of the promises Christ gives His people are value, quality, and preciousness. We stand on His magnificent promises. Through His Word we are saved. In fact, according to Peter, God’s promises deliver two life-changing realities. First, through His promises we *escape corruption*. Peter notes believers “having escaped corruption.” Moral decay is all around the child of God in this faithless age. Nonetheless, the Apostle assures us we may escape the moral corruption we face. In fact, the corruption is not only outward; we are also susceptible to inward “lusts” which compound our ability to successfully and faithfully live in this godless age. Additionally, His promise delivers a second life-changing reality—we *experience regeneration*. We become “partakers of the divine nature.” The reality is staggering but nevertheless true. When God invades our life through trust in the Savior, we are brought into spiritual union with Jesus, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. No greater truth exists for the child of God than this: God not only walks with us, He also lives in us in this faithless age!

II. Pure Living for God (vv. 5-11)

Not only do believers stand on God’s precious promises, but also we remain obligated to live morally pure lives. Peter writes, “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. 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. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (vv. 5-11). Peter says believers are to “add to your faith.” By this he does not mean faith is insufficient to save us. In fact the Bible is clear we are saved by faith and nothing else (Eph. 2:8-10). Rather, Peter is speaking of *spiritual additives* which mark us as believers. Why? What will these additives do?

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First, spiritual additives equip our life (vv. 5-9). Now that Christ is in us and we in Him, we should “abound” more and more. A profound difference exists between a groping Christian and a growing Christian. Indeed a growing believer “adds” faith to faith and virtue to virtue. He or she seeks “virtue” and goodness in all he or she accomplishes in life. Nothing is performed for selfish desires alone. Christ becomes the ultimate goal in all life. In addition, “knowledge” is added. Like earlier, this knowledge is an experiential event, a knowledge based on personal participation.

Next “temperance” is added to one’s life, a temperance which exhibits an obvious self-control. To this patience is piled on deep and wide. The godly believer in an ungodly age requires patience to endure life’s difficult circumstances. Moreover, both “godliness” and “brotherly kindness” demonstrate a reverent wonder for the life God gives while getting along with God’s people. Too often Christians treat their brothers and sisters as enemies rather than fellow sojourners of faith in this godless age. Finally, believers learn well the necessary art of “love.” We must love deeply and enduringly.

Reflection Connection

Do you think there is adequate emphasis today on developing the discipline of self-control? Why or why not? What are some things Christians need to especially be cautious about pertaining to self-control?

Contrast such virtues we add to our faith with characteristics only a groping Christian may produce (v. 9). Rather than growing and equipping, the groping believer is “blind” making it difficult to see very far. In fact, the one who fails to grow has “forgotten” his or her sins were “purged” and forgiven. A sort of spiritual amnesia takes over. How tragic the believer’s life who fails to grow in Christ adding virtue to virtue in this age of faithlessness.

Second, spiritual additives establish our life (v. 10). Peter insists believers must “give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” The term “sure” carries with it the idea of confirmation. Every believer needs firmness and stability in his or her life. The

assurance we receive is a gracious benefit God gives to His children. Hence, when we consider our life—not to mention when others consider it—there should be some indication which bears reason to believe we are saved.

Finally, spiritual additives enrich our life (v. 11). Peter switches the focus from the present to the future. One day every believer will enter heaven to the place Jesus promised He is preparing (John 14:1-3). Two ways to enter exist for every Christian. On the one hand, believers may enter abundantly, receiving a profound reward only eternity itself is adequate to reveal. On the other hand, some believers will enter “so as by fire” (cp. 1 Cor. 3:15). In other words, their entrance will be by “the skin of their teeth” so to speak. And, while the Bible offers no explanation how some believers *enjoy* rewards while other believers *miss* rewards, we remain confident Peter’s words are both true and relevant: spiritual additives enrich our lives and affect us for all eternity.

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III. Powerful Truths from God (vv. 12-21)

Peter's purpose centered on exposing false teachers and revealing the heresy they proclaimed. And, the only way to deal with heretics and heresy is to have a sure word of infallible authority. Human authority just could not suffice.

First, note the repetition of practical truth. Peter writes, "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. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off *this* my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance" (vv. 12-15). The readers were to be "in remembrance" of the "present truth." In other words, they were to put in practice the truth they already knew. Far too many times we expect God to reveal to us new matters of importance or contours of His will when we are not observing the things He has already clearly revealed to us! God gives us these personal reminders which "establish" us. What is more, the practical truths also serve to "stir you up." Like an ocean storm with a boisterous wind, the Word blows through our lives stirring us to effective action.

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Second, note the presentation of historical truth (vv. 16-18). The Scriptures are not "fables" which men "cunningly devised" (cp. 2 Tim. 4:4; Ti. 1:14). Nor is our faith built on fiction. Rather Peter insists he saw with his own eyes and heard the Master Himself speak from the Holy Mountain (cp. Matt. 17:1-10; 1 John 1:3). Undoubtedly, Peter recalls his experience with James and John when Jesus experienced the Transfiguration. Hence, Peter is testifying as an eyewitness to the glory of the Lord. While we live in an unsure, ungodly age, Peter affirms the life, death, and resurrection of the God-man, Jesus Christ (cp. Heb. 13:8).

Third, note the confirmation of prophetic truth. Peter writes, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (vv. 19-21). No other passage overflows with the Bible's own testimony to itself any more than this one does. The *inspiration* of Scripture is stated—"private interpretation." The literal translation is "unloosing." It means to untie or unbind something which is bound or locked into place. In other words, inspiration means no prophet made the word of God up out of his imagination or concocted it in his human heart. Instead he was "moved by the Holy Spirit." The picture is of a ship being pushed along by the wind in its sails (cp. 2 Tim. 3:16). God guided the human authors. And, while the words they wrote were their words, the *Holy Spirit inspired them and protected them from human error.*

Reflection Connection

When you read the stories of the Bible, what benefit do you gain? Does every Bible story and even the passages of Old Testament sacrifice have something significant to teach to Christian believers? Explain.



In addition, *illumination* is stated (v. 19). The Holy Spirit *inspired* the authors. However, while the Holy Spirit does not inspire us as we read the Word, He nonetheless *illuminates* the Word and shines a light in our hearts so we may understand the Word. Peter says to “take heed” especially with our “hearts” in mind. We build our life on the Word; we live by the Word; we are guided by the Word.

Golden Greek Nugget

Peter tells the believer we are called by God to reflect both glory and “virtue” (v. 3). The Greek term translated “virtue” is *arête*, indicative of an intrinsic goodness about it. In fact the same word, Peter used of God Himself (1 Pet. 2:9). Thus, believers are to reflect the very moral excellence of God Himself.

Wrap Up

No believer can survive in an age of faithlessness apart from God’s precious promises. Through Him and His trustworthiness, our lives experience purity, an otherwise impossible accomplishment. His Word is stable and sure, a solid platform upon which our faith is built.

