

Covenant History Series
Second Peter—Partaking of the Divine Nature

Sunday, November 15, 2009

Introduction

The author identifies himself as **Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ** (1:1). Simeon is a longer form of Simon, like Douglas is the longer form of Doug.

Peter makes several allusions in the letter to incidents recorded in the Gospels and Acts:

- Jesus' prediction concerning the Peter's death (Jn. 21:18-19); cf. 2 Peter 1:13-14
- The Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36); cf. 2 Peter 1:16-17
- Peter's acquaintance with the apostle Paul (Acts 9:26-28; Acts 15; Gal. 1:18); cf. 2 Peter 3:15-16

Purpose

The *first* epistle of Peter was written largely to guard his readers against dangers arising from *outside* the church, namely, the threat of persecution. He wrote in order to strengthen and encourage them. The second letter, however, was written to guard the church against threats from *within*—threats arising from the influence of false teachers.

The nature of the false teaching Peter warns them against seems to have been antinomian in character. An antinomian is one who is “against the law.” The word comes from the Greek: *anti*, a prefix meaning “against”, and *nomos*, meaning “law”. An antinomian, then, is a Christian who lives without regard to God’s law, which is something of an oxymoron, isn’t it—*a Christian who lives without regard to God’s law?* A Christian is to be characterized by obedience to God. But it has been a recurring problem in the church—this notion that Christians are not required to obey the law of God. The notion arises from presumption. It is all too often the case that people presume upon the kindness and mercy of God. They take it for granted. “Of course God will forgive me. After all, he’s *God*...and that’s what God does. He forgives sin. It’s his *job*.”

See Romans 2:4-5

The antinomian character of the false teachers had to do particularly with sensuality, or sexual licentiousness, as if there was no need to observe the boundaries God has placed on sexual expression, but to live with an utter lack of self-restraint.

Read chapter 2 and point out the many references

Compare what Peter says in 3:15-18a

It is on account of these things that he takes great pains at the beginning of the book to instill in his readers a desire to pursue holiness.

And the message of the book is as timely as ever. There are many who profess to know God, who claim to be Christians, many who attend church, many who are members of a church, who live with a careless disregard of God’s law. We even have entire denominations who publicly advocate the practice of what God has stated that he abhors

(e.g., abortion, homosexuality, liberal divorce laws, etc.). There are leaders of churches who are very vocal, very active, who lead the way in championing causes that God abominates—and they’re doing it *in the name of God*.

“There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...” (2:1; cf. Acts 20:30; Matt. 24:24).

And so to prepare them for this ahead of time, he not only warns them that they are coming, but he impresses upon them the need to recognize the greatness of our calling.

Read 1:3-8

(1:3) His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.

Peter would have his readers to know what Paul wrote to the Colossians, namely, that they were *complete* in Christ (Col. 2:10). There was nothing they had need of that was lacking. **All things that pertain to life and godliness** had already been granted to them through Christ.¹ This is similar to what Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with *every spiritual blessing* in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3). Our redemption in Christ is complete. There is nothing which is lacking. There are aspects of our redemption that are yet in the process of being worked out (e.g., sanctification), or which remain yet entirely in the future (e.g., resurrection), but they are nevertheless ours. They belong to us as the purchased possession of Christ. Nothing is lacking.

¹ The verb is *δεδορημένης*, the perfect passive participle of *δωρέομαι*, *to give freely, to grant*. The perfect tense “implies a process, but views that process as having reached its consummation and existing in a finished state” (Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 200).

False teachers always claim that something is lacking which only they can supply—a new revelation perhaps, or their own peculiar interpretation of Scripture. This is how they gain a following. But we should be careful to hold fast to the truth as it has been delivered by Jesus Christ and his holy apostles.

We are always susceptible to the desire for novelty, for theological innovation. The old truths become *passé* over time, and lose their fascination. Familiarity, as they say, breeds contempt. Unless we guard our hearts against this we will become like the Athenians who “would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21). Instead, we should “ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it,” as the prophet Jeremiah said (Jer. 6:16). The writer of Hebrews tells us that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever,” and that therefore we should “not be led away by diverse and strange teachings” (Heb. 13:8-9). On the contrary, we should be suspicious of doctrines or practices that are presented as “new.” We should instead “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Everything pertaining to life and godliness has been granted to us by his **divine power**. Our hope of salvation rests upon the omnipotent power of the Almighty God! If *he* has granted us these spiritual blessings, then our salvation is secure. No man on earth and no devil in hell can thwart it. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31b).

The spiritual blessings of which the apostle speaks come to us through **the knowledge** of God. This is the chief thing: the knowledge of God, which is given to us in the Scriptures. We’ll talk more about this in a moment.

God is said to have **called us to his own glory and excellence**. He means we are called to imitate God's own glory and excellence. We are to shun, to avoid that which is sinful and unworthy, and we are to imitate the glory and excellence that belong to our God.

(1:4) **by which** [God's glory and excellence] **he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.**

It is by an appropriation of the promises of the gospel that God's people **become**, as Peter says here, **partakers of the divine nature**. It's important to point out that the apostle is speaking *ethically*, not *metaphysically*. This is to say, Peter is not suggesting that our human nature is transformed into deity. Metaphysically we are human beings and shall always remain human beings. That's *what* we are. Let Shirley MacLaine sit on the beach and chant, "I am god," if she wants to, but it doesn't change the fact that she is only a human being. It won't be long before God disabuses her of the notion.

When Peter speaks of partaking of the divine nature, he's not saying that we *now*, or ever shall become in any sense God—either in the Eastern sense of absorption into the One, or the Mormon sense of being raised to divine status, or in the New Age sense of having a spark of divinity within us. Metaphysically we are human beings and shall forever remain so. It's true that we are created in the image and likeness of God; but the very fact that we are created points to the impossibility of our sharing *metaphysically* in the divine nature. There is an impassable metaphysical gulf between the creature and the Creator.

We may, however, partake of the divine nature in an *ethical* sense. That is, by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit we come to share in his holiness. We become *like* him in the practice of righteousness. This

is clearly what the apostle has in view here, for he connects becoming “partakers of the divine nature” with “having escaped the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” Further, in this same connection, he speaks in the three following verses of our need to add virtue upon virtue (1:5-7). This is his own explanation of what he means by partaking of divine nature. It’s ethical, not metaphysical.

Now, he says that we have escaped the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. The world is full of “corruption.” The Greek word translated “corruption” was frequently used to describe the decomposition of a dead body. Peter uses the word twice in this sense in 2:12. Here, in a powerful figure, it is used in the sense of moral depravity, and as the opposite of “divine nature.” He uses it in the moral sense again in 2:19.

The corruption that is in the world is said to be present **because of sinful desire**. He is referring to that innate sinful nature that caused Eliphaz to describe man as “abominable and corrupt...who drinks iniquity like water” (Job 15:16; see also Jas. 1:13-15).

I want you to get what he is saying here. We are all well aware of the fact that in Christ Jesus we have the forgiveness of sins, the cancellation of guilt, the remitting of the punishment which is due to us as a result of our wrongdoing. Thanks be to God! But what Peter is saying is that in Christ Jesus we have an escape from the corruption of sin. It is no small part of our salvation that we have been freed, not only from the *penalty* of sin, but also from its *power*. A part of Adam’s punishment was not only physical death, but spiritual death, as well; that is, the corruption of his nature, such that he became a slave to sin (Jn. 8:34). The law of sin and death began to reign in his members (Rom. 7:23); and with the imputation of his sin to all his posterity (Rom. 5:18-19), the entire human race has been sold into bondage to sin (Rom. 7:14). It is like a genetic disease passed down from

generation to generation. It is a condition from which it is impossible for any man to free himself.

Thus we have a two-fold need which is met in our salvation through Christ. We have the need of forgiveness for the sins we have committed, as well as strength to overcome the innate power of sin. The blood of Christ atones for the guilt of sin, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit sets us free from the law of sin and death “in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4). The Christian is enabled by the grace of God to walk in obedience to God’s precepts for he is no longer under the dominion of sin. We have, therefore, escaped the corruption (the moral putrefaction) that is in the world because of sinful desire. We no longer live according to the dictates of the flesh. We no longer make a practice of evil.

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love (1:5-7)

Notice that he does not conceive of our sanctification as a matter of “let go and let God.” Rather he conceives of it as a matter that requires some effort. He says that we are to **make every effort** to do it. The NASB says, **apply all diligence**. We are not to be passive or listless in the matter of our sanctification, but active and energetic. We are to exert ourselves. Paul exhorted the Philippians to “work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12), and used other expressions, as well, that imply strenuous effort. For example, he spoke to the Corinthians of “disciplining” his body and making it his slave (1 Cor. 9:27). To the Colossians he spoke of “putting to death” what was sinful in them (Col. 3:5).

That which we are to make every effort to do is to **supplement** your faith with virtue. He says, “In your faith supply moral excellence,” etc. The word for supplement is ἐπιχορηγέω, used once in verse 5, but implied six more times throughout verses 5-7, before the introduction of each new virtue named. It means to *provide lavishly* or to *supply in abundance*, i.e., more than what is barely required.

The apostle specifically names seven things they were to supply to their faith: virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love.

(1:8-9) For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

In these two verses the apostle introduces a contrast between those who possess the above named virtues and those who do not. Those who possess them are assured of being **ineffective or unfruitful** in their Christian life.

Those who are devoid of these Christian graces are said to be **nearsighted** and **blind**.

Peter’s point is this: the Christian who fails to cultivate the graces belonging to a devout life lacks a keen spiritual perception. He may see things that are near at hand—temporal things, worldly things—but he cannot see heavenly and eternal things.

Indeed, Peter says that such a man has **forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins** (i.e., his sins prior to his conversion and baptism). He has forgotten his *need* for cleansing. He has forgotten the damnable guilt of his former sins and his exposure to the

wrath and curse of God on account of them. None who remember these things can sin lightly, or neglect to pursue holiness.

He has also forgotten the *end* of his purification: that is, that he might be a partaker of the divine nature and so escape the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire (1:4).

God forbid that we should be so utterly unmindful of, and ungrateful for, our cleansing from our former sins.

Read 1:10-15

In chapter two we have his warnings against the false teachers.

In chapter three he speaks of the certainty of the judgment to come, and encourages them not to be moved by the scoffing of scoffers who say, "Oh yeah? Where is this judgment you're talking about? You say judgment is coming, but where is it? I haven't seen it? 'Ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.' "

Peter says, "No, you're forgetting a few things. Things don't always remain the same. Remember what God did in the days of Noah?" Earlier he had reminded them of what God did to the angels who sinned, and what God did to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Things don't always remain the same. God *does* bring judgment on sinners in history, and will do so at the end of history, as well. The seeming delay, which sinners make a mock of, is for mercy's sake. He says, "Count the patience of our Lord as salvation" (3:15).

3:17-18

Outline

- I. Address and salutation, 1:1-2
- II. An exhortation to grow in grace, 1:3-15
 - A. God's power and promise to enable our growth (1:3-4)
 - B. Christian graces to add to faith (1:5-11)
 - C. Peter's desire to remind them of these things (1:12-15)
- III. The certainty of the gospel's message, 1:16-21
 - A. Eyewitness testimony (1:16-18)
 - B. The testimony of the prophets (1:19-21)
- IV. A warning against false teachers, 2:1-22
 - A. Their past, present and future menace, and the certainty of their destruction (2:1-3)
 - 1. Heresy (2:1)
 - 2. Sensuality (2:2)
 - 3. Greed (2:3)
 - B. Historical examples of God's judgment against those who depart from the truth (2:4-9)
 - 1. Fallen angels (2:4)
 - 2. The ancient world (2:5)
 - 3. Sodom and Gomorrah (2:6)
 - a. Assurance that God will both rescue the godly and punish the wicked (2:7-9)
 - C. Further description of the false teachers (2:10-22)
 - 1. Despising authority and suffering the consequences (2:10-13a)
 - 2. Reveling and carousing (2:13b-14a)
 - 3. Greedy like Balaam (2:14b-16)
 - 4. Their vain promises of freedom (2:17-22)
- V. The Day of the Lord, 3:1-18
 - A. Reminder of the words of the prophets and commandments of Christ (3:1-2)
 - B. Mockers of the promise of His coming (3:3-13)
 - 1. They deny God's historical acts of judgment (3:3-4)
 - 2. God's historical acts of judgment asserted in the case of the flood (3:5-6)
 - 3. God's future act of judgment by fire asserted (3:7)
 - 4. The seeming delay of God's future judgment explained (3:8-9)
 - 5. Description of the day of the Lord (3:10-13)
 - C. Living in the light of the day of the Lord (3:14-18)
 - 1. Strive for purity (3:14)
 - 2. A warning against abusing the patience of the Lord (3:15-18a)
 - 3. Concluding doxology (3:18b)