

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Blessed Partakers

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. (2 Peter 1:1–4, KJV 1900)

New Testament writers distinguish between what God gives to His elect in the new birth and their subsequent use of those things in conduct. What He gives in the new birth is the result of His will, purpose, mercy, and grace, with no contribution, causative or instrumental on our part. What grows out of those gifts in the resultant life that a regenerate person lives, Scripture attributes to both God's indwelling Holy Spirit and to our willing and conscious choice to obey. A major focus of Scripture on these subsequent-to-regeneration-actions emphasizes our gaining knowledge of what and how to do His commandments.

And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. (Jeremiah 3:15)

In our gaining of this knowledge, God does not sovereignly reveal His truth. Jeremiah, as well as many other inspired writers of Scripture, affirms that we must pursue, prayerfully and earnestly seek this knowledge, and put it to use after we gain it. In the immediate context of our study passage, we shall learn that regenerate people who fail to make their faith fruitful, not only do not learn, but actually forget such major truth as having been purged from their sins. (2 Peter 1:5-9) In the list of attitudes and behaviors necessary to transform this faith into fruitful faith, God-glorifying faith, knowledge is the second item only to virtue. As with the many other subsequent enrichments of grace in the life of a regenerate person, God clearly provides assisting and enabling grace, but not coercive manipulation. Thus, you consistently see the interaction of the Holy Spirit and of the regenerate person's will in these acts of obedience in the Scriptures dealing with these behaviors.

In this point, Peter follows the pattern perfectly. God has given us this "...like precious faith...through the righteousness of God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Our attaining grace and peace, however, is contingent on our "...knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." Paul follows this pattern on a similar theme.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1–2, KJV 1900)

Notice Paul's simple point. Although we stand in grace, we only have access to it, to its active use and influence in our lives, by faith. This passage does not address lost, hell-bound sinners, but children of God, active participants in the Christian community or church in Rome. This premise needs additional development, our task for this study.

Occasionally, folks who lean too far in the fatalistic "God does everything—I do nothing" direction will claim that God is the cause of two distinct electing actions. First, He chose all of His elect in Christ for eternal deliverance from their sins, spirit, soul, and body; a sure outcome based on the finished work of our Surety, the Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly, they claim that, within the large number of God's chosen family, He also chose a small, elite number to whom He determined to reveal His truth so powerfully that they cannot resist, doubt, or refuse to believe. No surprise, of course, they always claim to be part of the second class of elite believers in the family of God. Peter refutes this idea, as do many other New Testament Scriptures. The idea fails to acknowledge Peter's repeated point in our study passage. The distinction between those who have obtained this faith and those who bring it to God-glorifying fruit is not an irresistible divine decree; Peter repeatedly tells us that we reach this fruitful state through knowledge. He also adds a second caveat. "...having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Peter affirms this point shortly by placing virtue first in his list of the seven essential fruit-bearing steps by which we magnify the faith given into God-glorifying, fruitful faith. Sinful lust surrounds us in this world. The idea reaches far beyond sexual ideas. It often involves a lust for power, for popularity and belonging to a respected group of people. The godly, fruitful

believer confronts these leanings in his own heart and seeks from Scripture the right tools to escape. We need this exercise daily. Once, my uncle, a respected preacher, had preached at a meeting in west Tennessee. After the service closed, a man walked up to my uncle and started flooding him with accolades, "Elder Holder, that was the ablest sermon I ever heard in my life." After a few of these expressions, my uncle looked out over his glasses with his sharp eyes and replied, "Brother, the old devil tells me that almost every time I walk out of the pulpit," with which he quietly turned and walked away. The preacher who fails to escape this lust for position and power shall also fail to bear God-honoring fruit in his life. He will become too busy bearing fruit for himself, a sad example of this lust.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises.... Immediately prior to this thought, Peter emphasized the gaining of knowledge that brings the potential of this faith to fruition in our lives, "...through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." We learn about God's "...exceeding great and precious promises" through the knowledge of which Peter writes. Simply stated, the promise of temporal blessings in the here and now stands on God's commandment to us as His children that we strive to gain the knowledge of His grace and truth found in the Scriptures and clarified through the gospel; not on an irresistible divine decree. In the real world where we live, a pastor routinely observes the practical experience of this truth. One member of the congregation that he serves will consistently invest regular time in prayerful study of the Scriptures. This habit is lifelong, not temporary or occasional. Over time, this member will grow in sound knowledge of the Scriptures. Through that knowledge of the Scriptures, applied to life, this member will also grow in peace and grace, learning what to avoid—to "Escape" (2 Timothy 2:22)—and what to follow or pursue. This member's conduct will increasingly light the way of peaceful grace to others in the church family and in their lives. The pastor will likely observe the growth in this believer from naïve, and sometimes sharp, youthful zeal to a gentle mellow grace that rubs off on others. In the same church, the pastor will likely observe another member who seems quite sincere and devoted, but, over time, other things constantly interfere. For this member, there is never time or occasion to do what he knows he should do. There is always a reason that he didn't follow through with that devoted Bible study. For this believer, time does not cultivate and mature a growing mellow grace, but, sadly, a growing harshness to increasingly find fault and demand that others go their way or face their anger.

In these two people, we observe the practical reality of Peter's lesson. By neglecting to grow in the knowledge and grace that Scripture teaches, we endanger our ability—and our desire—to bring godly spiritual fruit to ripe perfection and to the glory

of our God. As Peter opens his second letter with this theme, he also closes it on the same point.

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18 KJVP)

...that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature. The word here translated "partakers" was translated from a Greek word that means—

...one who participates with another in some enterprise or matter of joint concern—'partner, associate, one who joins in with.'¹

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary's* primary definition of the English word is

...a person who takes a part or share, a participator, a sharer. (Foll. by of, in.) LME.

First century Greek or twenty-first century English, the meaning is the same. Peter is not giving lost sinners the key to gaining the new birth. He is instructing previously born-again believers how to live in a God-honoring work with the Lord Jesus Christ. You and He work together to accomplish this goal. (2 Corinthians 6:1)

When Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, taught His own interpretation and application to life of His law, "...but I say unto you," He gave us the tools to live the life that Peter describes in our study passage, how to be partakers of the divine nature. The alternative for a believer is to be a partaker of the nature and character of this wicked world in which we live. The difference could not be more dramatic or opposite.

When Jesus surprised and taught the Samaritan woman at the well, He showed her the same truth.

Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:13-14 KJVP)

Although I haven't read the book, I recently heard about a book written by a contemporary Christian, the title emphasizing that people behave like the god that they worship. How true! How much of God's loving mercy do we manifest in our daily personal conduct with the people in our lives? Do they get a true sense of our God's merciful goodness by observing our conduct? Should they?

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 446 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor