

Be Who You Are



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Pet. 1:1–15, Eph. 2:8, Rom. 5:3–5, Heb. 10:38, Rom. 6:11, 1 Cor. 15:12–57.*

Memory Text: “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” (*2 Peter 1:5–7, NIV*).

One of the astonishing things about the New Testament is how much truth can be “crammed” into a very limited amount of space. Take this week’s lesson, which covers 2 Peter 1:1–14. In these 14 verses, Peter teaches us about righteousness by faith. He then gets into what God’s power can do in the lives of those who have given themselves to Jesus. He talks about the amazing truth that we can become “partakers of the divine nature” (*2 Pet. 1:4*) and that we can be free from the corruption and lust of the world.

In fact, we get not only a kind of catalog of Christian virtues, but Peter presents them in a specific order. One follows another, which follows another, and so forth until they climax into the most important one of all.

He also writes about the reality of what it means to be in Christ and to be “cleansed” (*2 Pet. 1:9, NIV*) from our old sins, and then even brings in the idea of assurance of salvation, the promise of eternal life in “the everlasting kingdom” (*2 Pet. 1:11*) of the Lord.

And finally, we even get a little discourse on the crucial topic of the state of the dead. What a lot of rich and deep truth in just 14 verses!

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 27.

A Precious Faith

Read 2 Peter 1:1–4. What does Peter say that we have been given in Jesus Christ? That is, how is the reality of grace seen here?

Peter begins this letter by saying that it is addressed to those who “have obtained like precious faith with us” (2 Pet. 1:1, *KJV*); or “a faith of equal standing with ours” (*RSV*). The word translated as “precious” means “of equal value” or “of equal privilege.” He says that they have “obtained” this precious faith; not that they earned it or deserved it but that they have received it, a gift from God. Or, as Paul has written: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8, *NKJV*). It’s precious because “without faith it is impossible to please” God (Heb. 11:6). It’s precious because by this faith we lay hold of many wonderful promises.

Peter emphasizes that the “divine power” of Jesus has given to us everything that concerns life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). Only through the power of God do we even exist, and only through His power can we attain holiness. And this divine power is given us “through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:3, *NKJV*; see also John 17:3).

We are called to love God, but how can we love a God we don’t know? We come to know God through Jesus, through the Written Word, through the created world, and through the experience of living a life of faith and obedience. We know God and the reality of God as we experience what He does in our lives, a knowledge that will change us. And we come to know Him through the reality of the grace that He bestows upon us.

Peter then says something even more incredible: that we have also been given “great and precious promises,” which include becoming partakers of the “divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). Humanity was originally created in the image of God; that image has been greatly defaced and degraded. When we become born again, we have a new life in Jesus, who works to restore His divine image in us. But we must flee the world’s corruption and lusts if we want this change to occur.

What would your life be like if you were devoid of faith? How does this answer help us to understand why the gift of faith is indeed precious?

Love, the Goal of Christian Virtue

Read 2 Peter 1:5–7; Romans 5:3–5; James 1:3, 4; and Galatians 5:22, 23. What similar theme appears in these texts?

It was common among philosophers in the ancient world to list virtues. Such lists are often called a “catalogue of virtues,” and there are several examples in the New Testament (*Rom. 5:3–5; James 1:3, 4; Gal. 5:22, 23*). It was highly likely that Peter’s readers were familiar with such lists, although there are interesting differences between what a philosopher might list and what Peter lists. Note that Peter has arranged these deliberately in a sequence, so that each virtue builds on the previous virtue, until it reaches a climax in love!

Each of the virtues Peter uses has significant meaning:

Faith: In this context, faith is nothing less than a saving belief in Jesus (*see Gal. 3:11, Heb. 10:38*).

Virtue: Virtue (Greek *arête*), a good quality of any kind, was heralded even among pagan philosophers. Yes, faith is crucial, but it must lead to a changed life, one in which virtue is expressed.

Knowledge: Peter surely isn’t talking of knowledge in general but rather the knowledge that comes from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Temperance/Self-control: Mature Christians are able to control their impulses, particularly those impulses that lead to excesses.

Patience/Steadfastness: Steadfastness is endurance, especially in the face of trials and persecution.

Godliness: In the pagan world, the word translated here as “godliness” means ethical behavior that results from a belief in a god. Within the New Testament it also carries the concept of ethical behavior that results from belief in the one true God (*1 Tim. 2:2*).

Brotherly kindness: Christians are like a family, and godliness will lead to a community in which people are kind to one another.

Love: Peter brings the list to a climax with love. He sounds like Paul, too: “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (*1 Cor. 13:13, NKJV*).

Before Peter begins the list of virtues, he says that we should “make every effort” (2 Pet. 1:5, NET) to attain these virtues. What does he mean by that? What part does human effort play in our desire to live godly, faithful lives?

Be Who You Are

After giving us the list of what we should diligently seek for as Christians, Peter then declares what the result will be.

Read 2 Peter 1:8–11. What is the link between what has already been done for a Christian and how a Christian should be living?

Peter urges his readers to live according to the new reality that is true for them in Jesus. The characteristics of faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love “are yours and abound” (2 Pet. 1:8, NKJV).

The problem is that not all Christians live according to this new reality. Some are ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:8). Such people have forgotten that they were cleansed from “old sins” (2 Pet. 1:9, NKJV). So, says Peter, Christians should live out the new reality that is true for them in Jesus. In Christ, they have received forgiveness, cleansing, and the right to partake in the divine nature. Therefore they must “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10). There’s no excuse for living as they had done before, no excuse for being “barren” or “unfruitful” Christians.

“We hear a great deal about faith, but we need to hear a great deal more about works. Many are deceiving their own souls by living an easy-going, accommodating, crossless religion.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 50.

Read Romans 6:11. What does Paul say here that reflects what Peter wrote in the texts for today?

In a sense, both Peter and Paul say, “Be what you are.” And we are new creatures in Christ, cleansed from sin, and partakers of the divine nature. That’s why we can live the kind of life that we are called to. We are supposed to be like Christ, which is what *Christian* means.

How “like Christ” are you? In what areas can you do better?

Shedding the Tent

“Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me” (2 Pet. 1:13, 14, NKJV).

In 1956, Oscar Cullmann wrote a short study called *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament*. He argued that the concept of the resurrection is quite incompatible with the concept of the immortal soul. Furthermore, he said that the New Testament lies squarely on the side of the resurrection of the dead.

“No other publication of mine,” he later wrote, “has provoked such enthusiasm or such violent hostility.”

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–57. What does Paul imply happens in death?

A study of what the New Testament says about death and resurrection has convinced most New Testament scholars that Cullmann was correct. The New Testament indeed assumes the concept of resurrection, not the concept of an immortal soul that survives the death of the body. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18, Paul urges those who have lost loved ones to death to be comforted with the knowledge that when Jesus returns again, He will raise the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:12–57, Paul gives an extended description of resurrection. He begins by pointing out that Christian faith is based on the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus was not raised, then any faith in Him is futile. But, says Paul, Christ has indeed risen from the dead, as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. And Christ’s resurrection from the dead makes it possible for all those in Him to rise from the dead, as well.

Paul talks about the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15:35–50. He contrasts the new bodies we will receive in the resurrection with our present bodies. What we have now will die; what we will have in the resurrection never will.

In summary, when the New Testament talks about death, it does so in terms of resurrection, not immortality of the soul. This is important to know as a background to reading 2 Peter 1:12–14.

Faith in the Face of Death

Read 2 Peter 1:12–15. What does Peter mean when he suggests that he is soon to put off his tent/body?

Second Peter 1:12–14 reveals the occasion of the letter. Peter thinks he is about to die, and the letter contains his last message or testament.

That Peter expects to die soon is revealed by the phraseology “as long as I am in this tabernacle. . . . Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle,” which is found in 2 Peter 1:13, 14. Peter likens the body to a tent (tabernacle), which he will put off as he dies. In fact, it is so clear that Peter means his body when he refers to putting off his tent that modern translators tend to translate these phrases as “as long as I am in this body . . . since I know that my death will come soon” (*2 Pet. 1:13, 14, NRSV*). Nothing in Peter’s language suggests that when Peter “puts off” his tent or body, his soul will survive as a separate entity.

Read 2 Peter 1:12–15 again. How does Peter appear to deal with the reality of his impending death, and what does that attitude teach us about faith?

Second Peter 1:12–15 gives added solemnity to Peter’s words. He writes this in the knowledge that his life will soon come to an end. He knows this because, as he said, the “Lord Jesus showed me.” Yet, there seems to be no fear, no worry, no foreboding. His emphasis, instead, is on the well-being of those whom he is leaving behind. He wants them to be firm in the “present truth,” and—as long as he is alive—he is going to admonish them to be faithful.

We can see here the reality and depth of Peter’s experience with the Lord. Yes, he’s going to die soon, and it will not be a pleasant death, either (*see John 21:18; Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 537, 538*), but his unselfish concern is about the benefit of others. Truly, Peter was a man living out the faith that he taught.

How does our faith help us deal with the terrible reality of death? How can we learn to cling to the wonderful hope we have, even in the face of death, because of what Jesus has done for us?

Further Thought: As we saw, Peter knew that he was soon to die. And he knew (and for a long time, too) how he was going to die. That's because Jesus Himself had told him. " 'Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish' " (*John 21:18, NKJV*).

What was his end?

"Peter, as a Jew and a foreigner, was condemned to be scourged and crucified. In prospect of this fearful death, the apostle remembered his great sin in denying Jesus in the hour of His trial. Once so unready to acknowledge the cross, he now counted it a joy to yield up his life for the gospel, feeling only that, for him who had denied his Lord, to die in the same manner as his Master died was too great an honor. Peter had sincerely repented of that sin and had been forgiven by Christ, as is shown by the high commission given him to feed the sheep and lambs of the flock. But he could never forgive himself. Not even the thought of the agonies of the last terrible scene could lessen the bitterness of his sorrow and repentance. As a last favor he entreated his executioners that he might be nailed to the cross with his head downward. The request was granted, and in this manner died the great apostle Peter."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 537, 538. And yet, even with this prospect before him, Peter's concern was for the spiritual well-being of the flock.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In light of all that Peter (and the rest of the Bible writers, too) has written about the need for Christians to live holy lives, why do so many of us fail to "be what we are" in Jesus?
- 2 In class, go over the list given in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Talk about each item and ask yourself: How can we better manifest these virtues ourselves, and how can we help others who seek to do the same?
- 3 Considering what we know about Peter, as revealed in the Gospels, what he writes does show powerfully the great work that Christ did in him, even despite his previous failings. What hope and comfort can we take for ourselves from his example?
- 4 In 2 Peter 1:12, Peter wrote about "the present truth." What was "present truth" in Peter's time, and what is "present truth" in ours?
- 5 "How surely are the dead beyond death," someone wrote. "Death is what the living carry with them." How should we, as Christians, "carry" death?