

Be Diligent, Not Negligent 2 Peter 1

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Peter wrote this book to help believers face a world filled with subtle spiritual deception. He knew that his death was imminent, and he wanted to remind his readers of the truths he had already taught them, so that these truths would continue to safeguard them after he was gone. Peter knew that the threat of false teachers loomed large on the horizon, and he wanted to expose these false teachers in order to expel them from the church.

The purpose of second Peter is twofold:

1. to expose these false teachers for what they were
2. and to set before the churches the conditions of survival when doctrinal and moral perversion infiltrate their churches.

Second Peter is a sermon on spiritual growth, set in the context of threats to Christian stability from destructive and heretical teaching. This same teaching is common today in our society and churches as well. In 2016 we tend to treat sin lightly. We suppose that an immoral lifestyle can be pursued without penalty. This is one of the reasons we are teaching the book Respectable Sins in our adult Bible education hour.

All this may sound a bit negative as we begin this morning. Yet sometimes the negative is what we need to hear. Douglas Moo writes, "So in the Christian life: we need to hear the negative now and then that we might be warned about dangers and steer clear of them. Peter found himself in situations where the negative was needed."

This morning we begin with a chapter full of keywords – the most frequent of which is some form of remember and remind. And remember, Peter is the man who forgot. Jesus warned him about denying him before the cock crowed. By this time in early church history, Peter was probably one of only three apostles left alive. Peter does not want his readers to forget the things he had previously taught them.

And so let's begin 2 Peter chapter 1 this morning with the first 4 verses.

We begin to see right away the righteousness of God proclaimed. In verses one and two, we see that God's righteousness is precious. There is great value attached to our faith. We have obtained a faith of equal standing with the apostles.

But we know that don't we? We understand that all come to salvation the same way. But this would've had great meaning to Peter's readers.

Remember they are living in a time of tension between Jew and Gentile. There is full membership of Gentiles into the new covenant people of God. The terms on which they would be accepted are a huge issue for the early Christians to face. Do you remember one of these conflicts? Do the Gentiles need to be circumcised?

When Peter briefly reminds his Gentile readers that they enjoy a faith as precious as that of Jewish Christians, he is speaking of great significance.

Peter then goes on to speak of the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord as a means by which they might enjoy grace and peace in abundance.

It is no accident that Peter returns to the same concept of knowledge at the end of the letter in chapter 3:17 – 18 where he writes, “*You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. ¹⁸ 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. Amen.*”

In verse three we see the power of the righteousness of God. God has given us everything we need for living a holy life.

In verse four we see God’s promises,

- first for protection in that we will be delivered from the corruption of this world
- and next our participation in that we will actually share in the Lord’s divine nature.

Spiritual maturity begins with God’s power and his promises in verses 3-4. It is his divine power that is given to Christians all that we need both for new spiritual life and for godliness. Christ’s attributes of divine majesty and moral goodness have been instrumental in giving believers not only what is needed for a godly life but also those very great and precious promises that enable us to participate in the divine nature itself.

This is an absolutely incredible truth! In one phrase Peter brings into view the ultimate content of the promises of Jesus Christ, that we shall partake in the divine nature! This partaking is solely an act of God’s graciousness and generosity in order that we might escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

These words immensely influenced the young John Wesley in the middle of his spiritual crisis. He wrote in his diary, “all these days I scarce remember to have opened the New Testament, but upon some great and precious promise. And I saw, more than ever, that the gospel is in truth but one great promise, from the beginning of it to the end.”

Look with me at verses 5-11.

We are to add these virtues to our faith.

The positive include: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love.

The negative warns us that if these are lacking, we will become spiritually blind.

In verses three and four, Peter has laid the ground work for a main point in his letter by reminding his readers that they have been provided with the power to live godly lives.

Now he gives us the key point itself: Christians need to live godly lives.

Peter spells it out for us so that we don’t miss the connection. It is “*for this very reason*”, that is, God’s provision of all that we need, that we are to seek spiritual maturity. Peter’s using strong language here to emphasize just how strenuously we need to pursue this goal. “Make every effort,” he says. The word effort implies earnestness, haste, and zeal.

The point is clear. Spiritual growth is not a matter that Christians can treat lightly; it is a goal to which we need to give ourselves body and soul, every day of our lives.

It is significant that Peter begins with faith and ends with love. Faith is the foundational Christian virtue and with that we respond to God's call and come to know him and his son. But true Christian faith *always* leads further and *proves* itself in love.

In verses 10 and 11 we see the certainty and importance of godliness. By doing these things, we validate our own salvation *per se* (faith without works is dead).

Peter motivates the reader to take action based on the truths shared in the previous section. Therefore may relate to the danger of spiritual blindness, but more likely refers back to all the verses three through nine.

Be all the more diligent picks up the basic exhortation in verse five, that effort is to be directed toward making their calling and election sure.

So you and I seek to grow in virtue in order to validate this calling of God.

But wait a minute! How does Peter's stress on our own effort to become godly fit with the New Testament emphasis on the Spirit as the one who transforms us? If it is the spirit who does this thing, how can Peter make it seem that our own effort is crucial? The New Testament makes crystal clear that both are necessary if we are going to make any progress at all in godly Christianity.

On the one hand, God's new covenant with his people is marked above all by a new and empowering presence of the Spirit. This means that obedience to God, in contrast to the situation under the old covenant, is a matter of the heart and of God himself producing that obedience within us.

But there is another side to the picture. Peter focuses on the need for our own effort in becoming holy; and he says the same thing in First Peter where he quotes God's own words, "Be Holy because I am Holy."

What should be obvious to all of us is that, to properly understand all of Scripture, we must make room in our understanding of transformation for both the divine and the human side. We must insist both that it is God, by his Spirit, who makes us holy *AND* that we, ourselves, have the job of becoming holy.

Peter is urgent and insistent on these things. And one of the reasons we will now see in verses 12 to 15.

God has revealed to Peter that he will die a martyr's death for Christ. And Peter is making every effort to assure that his readers remember the great spiritual truths in his letters. These verses are transitional. Peter has introduced the letter and its central purpose and in verses 16 to 21 he will begin to explore the specific issues that have led him to write this letter.

But before Peter does that, he does two things:

- he commands them for their spiritual maturity in verse 12
- and he lets them know of his impending death in verses 13 to 15

The “*Therefore*” at the beginning of verse 12 creates a connection between verses 3 to 11 and verses 12 to 15. Peter is suggesting that it is because the believers ultimate reward (v11) depends on earnestly striving for godliness (vv5-9) that Peter will continue to remind them of these things. The idea of reminder, or remembering frames this passage, being found in verse 12 and verse 15. Peter is not saying anything new to these Christians. Peter probably is referring to the weight that he hopes his words will have upon them.

The time available for Peter to continue his ministry is limited. He realizes he will soon die. How does he know this? Because the Lord Jesus Christ had made it clear to him. And so, in some way, this is Peter’s deathbed plea.

Finally, we look at the testimony of two witnesses in verse 16-21.

Peter has just finished highlighting the importance of what he had to say in verses 3 to 11 by reminding them in his final words. Now he turns to a doctrinal issue that the church at this time was most in need of remembering in their present circumstances. He’ll return to this theme again in chapter 3. Peter is answering accusations by false teachers concerning authority and truth. We know this from the upcoming discussions about false teachers. While we don’t see it yet, Peter says in verse 16 that their agenda of denying the apostles teaching about Christ’s return comes from their cleverly devised myths.

Peter attacks their eschatological myths by reaffirming, “*the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*” and by citing two reasons why Christians can be sure that this coming will take place.

1. The eyewitness testimony of Peter himself and the other apostles who had seen the Transfiguration of Jesus.
2. The reliability of the prophecies of Scripture.

We see in Peter’s writing the testimony of two witnesses.

- This would have been critical to his Jewish readers. Under the Old Testament law, a person could not be put to death without the testimony of at least two witnesses.
- Later in Revelation we will read about two witnesses.
- When Jesus speaks of confronting and restoring one another there are multiple witnesses involved to verify the veracity of testimony.

Peter and two other apostles were eyewitnesses to the Transfiguration of Christ. Peter’s reminder from eyewitness testimony is critical. Peter and the apostles made known the return of Christ not in following “*cleverly devised myths*”, but in being “*eyewitnesses of his majesty*.”

Christ’s majesty is indicated in the Transfiguration of events by the accompanying signs and by the voice from heaven. God was there upon the holy mountain. Not only was Peter an eyewitness of the event he was an ear witness as well. God did indeed speak. He spoke from the “*Majestic Glory*”, which is Peter’s phrase for the cloud that Matthew reports, the awesome sign of the presence of God from the Old Testament.

As amazing as witnessing the Transfiguration was, the prophetic word has been made more certain by the Transfiguration. While Peter James and John can testify to the revelation of Christ glory on the mountain, also testifying to Christ’s glorious appearance at the end of history are

the prophets. While Peter, James, and John saw the glory of Christ upon the mountain, the prophets saw the lamp shining in the darkness.

What Peter is saying is very important, and having just told us to pay attention to the prophets, he now has something for us to grasp "*first of all.*" We must understand that "*no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.*" There is only one correct original interpretation! That is what the original author meant to transmit to the original audience. And Peter repeats himself in verse 21, "*for no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man*", or as one commentator put it, "Isaiah did not get out of bed one morning and say, I have decided to write some prophecies today." Instead, "*men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*"

False prophets spoke of their own things, from their own ideas, but no true message from God ever arose from their human determinations.

There is no doubt about the authority of the second group of witnesses to the promises of God. God spoke to them and through them.

It is a marvelous thing to see how God could take each man and use him, without changing his style or interfering with his personality, to write God's word so that God's message comes across as God intends it to.

The written word, like the Lord Jesus, the living Word, is both human and divine.

- Jesus could weep at a grave, but he could also raise the dead.
- He could sit down at a well because he was tired and thirsty, but he could also give the water of life to a poor sinner.
- Jesus could go to sleep in a boat, but he could also still the storm.
- He was a man, but he was God as well.
- And the Bible is both human and divine.

So what is significant to us today from what we studied this morning?

Remember. Some of Peter's readers failed to remember, and the consequences were dire.

Participating in the divine nature is a great and precious privilege. Through our union with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we share in something of God's own holy nature, separated from the corrupt world around us. And it is precisely for that reason that we are called on to progress in holiness and godliness. It results in the knowledge of Christ. It is not just a faith that knows facts; it is a faith that intimately knows a Person. It is a faith that embraces Christ and trusts him and believes him in an obeying way.

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, by which 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.

Standing on the promises of Christ my King,
Thro' eternal ages let His praises ring;
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,
Standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises that cannot fail, When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail Standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises I cannot fall, List'ning ev'ry moment to the Spirit's call,
Resting in my Savior as my all in all, Standing on the promises of God