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## The Second Epistle of Peter

### *Working Out Our Salvation*

*August 13, 2017*

**Sermon Text:** 2 Peter 1:3-11

**Scripture Reading:** Romans 6

2 Peter 1:3-11 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, (4) 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.

(5) For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with **virtue**, and virtue with **knowledge**,

(6) and knowledge with **self-control**, and self-control with **steadfastness**, and steadfastness with **godliness**,

(7) and godliness with **brotherly affection**, and brotherly affection with **love**.

(8) 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**.

(9) For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, **having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins**.

(10) **Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.** (11) For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Many people today claim to be Christians. Certainly we live in an

ungodly nation in many ways, but there are still local churches all around the country populated by people who claim to know Christ. Many of them do not, however. They approach the Christian life carelessly, lightly, assuming that all is well with their soul when it is not.

And these are the things Peter is dealing with in this second letter. What he is writing to us here is very similar to what Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

These things may sound strange to us. Isn't our salvation in Christ completely by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone? The Reformed doctrines emphasize the "solas" – the doctrines *of grace*. How do we square this with what Paul and Peter are saying?

(10) Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Let's look into these things further.

## A False Gospel

You will remember that Peter, as is so common in the New Testament, was writing because false teachers with a false gospel had come into the church. His letter is filled with references to them:

2 Peter 2:1-3 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. (2) And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. (3) And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

And again:

2 Peter 2:12-14 But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, (13) suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their

deceptions, while they feast with you. (14) They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!

And more –

2 Peter 2:17-22 These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. (18) For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. (19) They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

(20) For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. (21) For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. (22) What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

It is very plain then that, as always, the church was threatened by these kind of liars who claimed to be Christians but who abused the grace of God, claiming that the Christian could and even should live just as they did before they knew Christ, partying on, indulging the flesh all they wanted. I suppose we could call their false teaching "antinomianism." No law. Grace abounding, to them, meant license to sin.

Notice carefully what kind of people they were. These are not "pagan" people who made no claim to any religion such as we see all around us in the world today. No. These were people who claimed to know Christ. Peter makes that plain.

- They arose "among" believers
- They once "escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of Christ"
- They once knew the way of righteousness

So plainly these were people who once lived in the world, who conducted themselves in immorality and sensuality and wickedness, who then heard the gospel and made a claim to believe in Christ, who even left off (for a time) their old manner of life in the pigpen, but who then *returned to their evil ways and justified doing so by*

*perverting the gospel of God's grace, and if that were not bad enough they went on the offense to teach their "destructive heresies" to others in the church trying to lead them astray.*

The history of Reformed doctrine (which of course we believe is simply Bible doctrine) shows that these very kind of wicked ones can arise among us. And typically what they do is distort doctrines such as:

- God's unconditional election of His people
- Predestination
- The perseverance of the saints

...making them into excuses for licentiousness and evil. Scripture of course makes it plain that these truths do the very opposite – they move the true Christian to holiness. The Reformed confessions all make this very plain.

John Wesley rejected the doctrine of predestination. In addition, curiously, he taught what we would call perfectionism (total sanctification) in this life. That a Christian could achieve practical sinlessness. These are points that he and George Whitefield never did agree upon.

In recounting this conflict in his

biography of Wesley, Iain Murray tries to understand how it was that Wesley could just never see the glory of these doctrines of Calvinism and why he so hated them. Listen to what he says:

“There was another reason why Wesley was so opposed to Calvinism, as he conceived it. Under the shadow of orthodox Puritan belief Antinomianism had too often sprung up. Testimonies more weight that that of Susanna Wesley's childhood memories endorsed that fact. John Own had written:

‘It cannot be denied but that some men may, and it is justly to be feared that some men do, abuse the doctrine of the gospel to countenance themselves in a vain expectation of mercy and pardon, whilst they willingly live in a course of sin.’

Antinomians, making a Christian profession yet living careless or immoral lives, persisted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Wesley found them in his own societies and a painful example was the disgraceful conduct of his own brother-in-law, the Rev. Westly Hall. But Wesley was convinced that this blight was more common in professedly Calvinistic circles and before the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that might have been true. An unbalanced form of doctrinal preaching, with

emphasis on unconditional election and final perseverance, and faith constantly treated as though it was the only Christian duty, is bound to lead to moral casualties. In emphasizing the danger of Antinomianism Wesley was not dreaming. Before the end of the century the warnings on the same subject were to be common among the Calvinists who followed in the tradition of Whitefield. Henry Venn, for instance, warned his son of it in these words:

‘The sovereign and electing grace of God, by which alone we are brought to Him, bears no proportion in the Scripture to the continual mention that is made of the absolute necessity, beauty, and excellency of a holy life and conversation, in the sight of God and man – bears no proportion, I say, to the practical part of our holy religion...St. Paul had no sooner finished his triumphant account of grace reigning through righteousness, than he leaves the subject; and writes a whole chapter, by way of guarding against Antinomian interpretation of his doctrine.’

But for Wesley, Antinomianism was not a question of wrong balance, or the mishandling of certain scriptures, it was a direct consequence of Calvinistic belief. Teach men to believe in election, and in their future

security, and he feared it would be bound to induce carelessness....So Wesley’s solution was to oppose election...His concern was to uphold the truth that where the work of salvation is real there will always be the ethical, moral dimension.”

[Wesley and Men Who Followed, by Iain H. Murray, Banner of Truth Trust, 2003]

Wesley, of course, was wrong in rejecting these biblical doctrines and as Murray goes on to explain, causes Wesley to at times evidence a weakened doctrine of justification by faith alone and the finality of our justification in Christ. In addition, Wesley’s fear of the teaching of the perseverance of the saints played a role in leading him into the error of his teaching that a Christian can achieve perfect sinlessness in this life.

But the point for our emphasis this morning is *that Reformed Christians must never yield to antinomianism. We must never be deceived into thinking that because of God’s unconditional election of His people to salvation, because of His promise to keep us in faith until the end so that no true Christian will ever be lost, means that our ethics, our morals, our manner of living really makes no difference.* This is precisely what Peter means:

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

What qualities?

2 Peter 1:5-8 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, (6) and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, (7) and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. (8) 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.

Let me, with confidence, propose to you what I conclude is the condition of most local churches and professing Christians today:

*A person can live in habitual, unrepentant, wickedness and yet still be a Christian. In fact, WE are all bound to believe such a person's profession of Christ to be valid and treat him or her as a brother/sister in Christ.*

In other words, the antinomianism that Peter warns us of is indeed alive and

well among us today. Those who propound it are false prophets and they do so because antinomianism is attractive to the sensual flesh of man.

Does my statement sound too gloomy? Does my claim seem overly dark and pessimistic? I could prove this claim to you if you had days and days to sit and listen to the hundreds of cases that take place in local churches every single day. The wicked are treated as if they are genuine believers and anyone who says otherwise is condemned for being legalistic and judgmental. *And these things are happening in Reformed churches as well.*

What does Peter say about such people? Does he tell us to assume that they are Christians? No!

2 Peter 2:20-21 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. (21) For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

Let me close with one more very, very important observation that is VITAL for us to get a firm grasp on. Here it is-

***“We are all sinners” is a false statement. The Bible is quite plain that not all sinners are the same.***

Let me explain what I mean. Yes, we are all born into this world in sin. All people who are outside of Christ are sinners. *But not all sinners are the same in God’s sight.* And Peter’s words here demonstrate that to be true. Listen again:

2 Peter 2:20-21 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. (21) For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them

Is this true of every person who does not know Christ? Was this true of all of us? Or is Peter telling us that God’s wrath is hottest against a certain kind of person – namely, the person who KNOWS the truth of Christ, who then willfully spurns it, and then who sets out to deceive others in the church? Yes, that is exactly what he is telling us.

I work with people (mostly women) every single day who are real

Christians, but who have been horridly abused by evil, evil men who claim to be fine, upstanding Christians. More often than you might think these evil ones are pastors or missionaries or seminary professors. These are people who have wickedly and cruelly abused their wives for *decades*, and all the while have continued to masquerade as the most holy Christians to be found. They stand in pulpits on Sunday, claiming to speak for God *with their victim sitting right there*. They subtly work to introduce their false doctrines (usually patriarchal legalism) into the church. They do all this without conscience.

Now, is it true that they are no worse a sinner than anyone else? No! That is what Peter means when he says of such people, “you know, it would have been better (and you will find this out on the Day of Judgment) that you had never heard of Christ, that you had never claimed to be a Christian, that you had never preached a sermon, than for you to have done all this and yet walk in evil. You are worse off than ever. God’s hot wrath is against you.”

And yet what do we hear in the current and widespread antinomian climate of the church when such a wolf is “outed”? “Well, you know, we are all sinners just like him. We must forgive him and love him.”

Really? The parallel to 2 Peter, the epistle of Jude, says otherwise -

be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:4 For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:11-13 Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. (12) These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; (13) wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

Therefore, we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We must see that the faith we claim is genuine faith as evidenced by the fruits of the Spirit. Because it is only in this way that, as Peter says, we can have confidence that:

2 Peter 1:11 For in this way there will