

Faith Of Equal Standing

2 Peter 1:1-2

¹ Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: ² May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Peter 1:1-2 (ESV))

All too often, I can find myself falling into the trap of thinking that the troubles and the misguided thinking of the people and the culture of our day are unique to us only, in our day, that in days gone by, in the “good old days”, things and people were different, those days being a much simpler place and time and people being kinder and gentler.

And perhaps, in some ways that may be true. Perhaps wickedness and suffering have become greater on the earth today than ever before, but then maybe not. Maybe it is simply that with all the media available to us, we are just more aware of its presence.

But here, as we begin to take our first steps into this Book of 2nd Peter, we quickly find that many of the same kinds of troubles and sufferings and wickedness were present two thousand years ago, just as they are today, sufferings and troubles coming from influences from both outside the church, and also coming from within the church’s own congregations. And “faith”, or the “lack of faith”, seems ever and always at the center of it all, both in the problems and in the solutions.

This letter by the Apostle Peter is the second letter that he wrote to this group of Jewish believers. And to remind us . . . these folks were a group of Israelites who, after the exile of the Jews from Israel several hundred years earlier, had been resettled in these lands, lands that are now part of modern-day Turkey.

Peter’s first letter to these folks seemed to have as its main concern that they be firmly established in their faith. There in verse 3 of 1st Peter chapter 1 we read,

³ . . . According to (God’s) great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5 (ESV))

Here in these words, we are reminded that our faith and our eternal salvation is all of God’s doing and nothing of ourselves, kept and guarded in heaven so that no one can take it from us. And it is by and through His great mercy and grace that we have been

born again. And it was God Himself who “caused” our salvation to take place. He “caused” you and me to be “born again”. Those words again in verse 3 of 1st Peter 1 that we just read,

³ . . . According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3 (ESV))

And just a quick reminder about these precious words . . . yes, you and I do definitely have a “free will”, and there are a lot of choices that we do have to make. But these words are also undeniably true. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has “caused” me, has “caused” you to be born again. That cannot be stated any more clearly!

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3 (ESV))

With that being said then, we see that the first letter that God sent to these dear folks was primarily intended to firmly establish them in their faith. But note here also in this second letter that God is “reconfirming” their standing in Him, and that He is reconfirming that “faith” is at the heart of all that He desires for His children.

And here, God reminds these folks that their saving “faith”, faith that was imputed to them through the righteousness of Christ, was in every way the exact same kind of faith and of “equal standing” as with all other believers, even of “equal standing” with the Apostle’s own faith. Listen!

¹ Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:1)

May we pause for a moment and examine this thought, because this is a very, very big assertion, “a faith of equal standing with ours”? Here was the Apostle Peter, once a man with a weak and wavering faith, but now filled with the Holy Spirit was a towering “giant of the faith”; he was the very “best friend” of Jesus Himself, the man who had walked and talked with Jesus for three and a half years, the leader of Jesus’ inner-circle of leaders, one of three, along with James and John, who had been privileged to witness the “transfiguration” of Jesus and to hear the confirmation from God the Father saying, “this is my beloved Son”, and the same man whom Jesus had appointed to be the leader of the church, this was who was telling these simple folk that their faith was of “equal-standing” with his own.

To use a today expression, we would certainly have responded, “no way”, “no way” is my faith equal to yours Peter! But it was and it is! Basic “faith”, real and true “faith”, the “faith” that brings each of us to salvation is really the same for all of us. The simple words of the Apostle Paul in Acts 16, say it clearly and simply, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved”.

“Belief”, simple belief in the Lord Jesus, that He is Savior and Lord, and that we need Him to save our soul, is all that we need, and then we are saved. And then we are in “equal standing” with everyone who is saved, even the Apostle Peter.

And yes, some people do have their own way of defining “belief” and “faith”, often corrupting its meaning and its power. And because of that, their “professed” faith, or their “hypocritical” faith may not be the “real faith” spoken about here.

But may I assure us again from these words that “faith”, “simple faith” in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ truly will save our souls. And may I also assure us that our saving faith is on an equal standing with our brethren in the other denominations, our Baptist, our Methodist, our Charismatic brethren, and others. And that their saving faith is on an equal standing with ours. And it is not prideful for us to believe that our faith does actually put our salvation on an equal standing with even the Apostle Peter, and with Billy Graham and with every other believer everywhere.

May I pause here for a moment and ask you again . . . “Do you have this simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?” If you do, then you are saved eternally. But if you do not, then you must not let this moment go by. I again give you the simple words spoken by the Apostle Paul, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household.”

Returning to our scripture passage . . . so then, now that these dear folks have been established in their faith, and then reconfirmed by these words, what is God’s purpose in writing this second letter to these folks? It is clear in the next few verses immediately following onto these, that God is saying to these dear ones that yes, you are saved, and you have all the faith you need to be saved, but salvation is only the beginning. I have much, much more that I will ask of you, because “to whom much is given, much is required”.

God is saying “Now it is time for you to get up and to move on ahead”, here, strongly urging these dear ones to not simply remain where they were in their faith, but to get up and get on about an “increase” in the “working out” of their faith.

I'm reminded of the Children of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness all those many years. There came a time for them to "get up" and to move on into the Promised Land. We find those words in the Book of Joshua, God saying those very simple words "Get up, it's time to move ahead"!

And here God is saying the same thing to these people, and He is saying the same to you and me, "Now it is time to get up and to move on ahead".

To remain where those folks were in their faith was not good. To remain stagnant will allow a person's faith to weaken and falter, especially when the "spiritual warfare" mentioned in the upcoming chapters of this Book begins to rage against them. These dear ones desperately needed to prepare themselves for all that lay ahead of them by "building up" their faith, both the depth of it and the defenses of it.

And the same is true for you and me, and that is another reason why God gave this 2nd letter. God knew that down through the generations and now in our present generation, we would need these same words of assurance and these same instructions, that after we are saved, we must "get up" and move on ahead in the "building up" of our faith.

And verse 2 expresses this "building up" of their faith. Listen!

² May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Peter 1:2 (ESV))

God knows the hearts and minds of men, and He knew that these dear people, though saved, were still very unknowledgeable and very uncertain as to the next steps that they needed to take. And God, in His loving generosity quickly added "grace upon grace" and "peace upon peace" to their uncertain souls. Jesus' gentle words echoing in their minds saying, "my peace I give to you. It is a peace that the world cannot give". "Come to me and find rest for your weary souls"!

And though this verse 2 does not look much like an "instruction" it really is an "instruction". Listen!

² May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Peter 1:2 (ESV))

To often, preachers like me will read words like these at the beginning of one of these bible letters and treat the words like they are simple platitudes, much like in our own letters that begin with words like, "We hope you and your family are doing well". But such is never true with God. He does not waste His words. These are important words of assurance, and they are words of instruction.

And the instructions are that, yes, “new believers” will receive “grace and peace”, and abundantly so, “multiplied” to us, but that God’s “grace and peace” will not just descend down upon us out of heaven, but rather that God’s “grace and peace” will come to each of us through our very intimate and sought after “knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord”. Listen!

² May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Peter 1:2 (ESV))

I have said to you on other occasions that our English language is oftentimes woefully inadequate to express the deeper meanings of some of the Greek and Hebrew words given to us in the bible. And that is so with this word “knowledge”!

The “knowledge of God” spoken about here is truly a very, very special kind of knowledge, like no other. We will study much more about this special “knowledge of God” more and more over the coming weeks, but we will need to take at least a small step this morning into the understanding of its meaning!

This word, translated here in verse 2 as “knowledge” comes to us from the Greek word “epignosis”. But notice that in verses 5 and 6, we have another word that is also translated as “knowledge”. That word comes from a similar Greek word “gnosis”, the same word but without the “epi” as the prefix, words translated the same, but having a very significant difference in their meanings.

Some would argue then that the bible is “mistranslated”, but not so. It is simply that our English language would need several words to adequately translate the one word in the Greek. That is why you and I need to spend a lot more time in these scriptures. It will be in those studies that the Holy Spirit will reveal these differences in meanings to us.

In verses 5 and 6, the word knowledge (gnosis) has the meaning of “learning”, such as the kind that we might gain from study and training and science. But the word in verse 2 for “knowledge” “epignosis” has the deeper and fuller meaning of “full discernment”, and “experiential” knowledge, the kind of knowledge that is most always gained in the context of personal relationships with people.

In other words, you would not use this word “epignosis” in talking about the “knowledge” that is required to work a math problem, or to “know” how to speak a foreign language, or even having an academic knowledge about someone or something, such as, knowing about historical figures or other such matters.

No, this word “epignosis” should be used when speaking about knowing a person. And not only knowing them, but knowing them intimately, as with a wife or a husband, or a good friend, someone you would have a caring relationship with.

And that same kind of “knowledge” would also be said to apply to these scriptures. The scriptures are the “revealed word” of God, “revealing God”, revealing His Person, His nature, His character, His plans and His purposes. And these words have the very presence of the Holy spirit within them. So then, it is proper to say that through our knowledge (epignosis) of these scriptures, God’s Holy Spirit will give us a “revealed knowledge of the Person of God”, an “epignosis” of Him.

Why is this so important to consider? It is because a lot of people have “knowledge” about God. Great academic minds study all about God and know many, many things about Him. But they only have “gnosis”, a learned kind of knowledge, but without any of the special power and revelation that will come from the “epignosis” that the Holy Spirit will bring to us.

I have run out of time, but we will pick back up here next week. But may I ask you . . . “What kind of knowledge do you have of God? Is your knowledge of the deep and intimate kind, the “epignosis”, or do you only know about God, “gnosis”? I plead with you, get to really know God intimately and personally!

² May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Peter 1:2 (ESV))