

I want to start with that striking statement in verse 4
that we become *partakers of the divine nature*.

This is at the heart of Peter’s teaching here in 2 Peter,
so let’s get straight to it!

How can *we* – who are sinful –
and for that matter –
how can *we* – who are *creatures* –
partake of the divine nature?

It’s a very simple concept –
though one that takes a lifetime to understand! –
and will only be fully understood at the resurrection at the final day!

But here it is:

God is one.

We will never participate in his essence.

We will never become the *being* that is the Triune God.

But Peter does not say that we will *become the being* of God.

Rather, he says that we become partakers of the divine nature.

We are granted *communion* with the divine nature.

We share in his energies – his *divine power* – referred to in verse 3.

Think of how Athanasius put it,
God became man, so that man might become God.
Because in the incarnation God joined himself to man.

Jesus is fully God and fully man in one person.

We call that the *hypostatic* union – God and man united in one person (in Jesus).

But there is also a *mystical* union between Christ and his bride, the church.

We are united to Christ –

he lives in us – his Spirit has united us to himself – really and personally –

so that we become partakers of the divine nature

No, we will never become *one person* with him.

We will always remain distinct entities.

But, in the incarnation, God became all that we are by nature,
so that we might become all that he is by grace.

So let’s take a look at how Peter teaches this in 2 Peter chapter 1.

1. Introduction: Peter, Jesus, and You (1:1-2)

Simeon^[a] Peter, a servant^[b] and apostle of Jesus Christ,

Simeon was the name that his parents called him.

Peter was the name given to him by Jesus.

In the gospels he is often called “Simon” – but only here is it spelled *Simeon* – which is the more Hebraic spelling.

But Peter identifies himself as a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ.

In one sense the term for servant (*doulos* – which means “slave”)

is a lowly term –

but it is also the term used in the LXX of Moses “my servant” (Joshua 1:1),

and of the “my servants the prophets” (Jeremiah 7:25),

so when Peter says that he is a slave of Jesus Christ,

he is saying that he serves Jesus *only*.

And he joins this with “apostle” – which means a *messenger* – one who is sent by Jesus.

He is a servant of Jesus, and he has been sent by Jesus –

and so therefore, we need to listen to what he says!

And he writes:

To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

If Simeon Peter stands “above us” in the sense of being a slave and apostle of Jesus, yet he insists that he stands *with us* in faith.

“To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing” –

the King James put it: “to them that have obtained like precious faith with us.”

In other words, “to Gentile Christians.”

1 Peter had been written “to the elect exiles of the dispersion...”

which has a certain affinity to Jewish Christians –

since the ideas of election, exile, and diaspora

would all resonate with the Jewish experience!

1 Peter applies very well to Gentile Christians as well

(since we have been grafted into Israel),

but 1 Peter has a strong Jewish cast.

2 Peter may well have been written as an intentional follow-up to 1 Peter –

speaking particularly to Gentile Christians,

making clear that Peter has indeed accepted the correction of Paul.

(In Galatians 2, Paul says that he rebuked Peter

for his refusal to eat with Gentile Christians).

So Peter now writes “to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours” –
“like precious faith with us” –
we have been joined as fellow heirs with Jesus, the Son of God.

How?

“by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

“Righteousness” has a wide range of meaning –
in its most basic meaning, it is about “justice,” “fairness,” “doing what is right.”

But here we are talking about the way in which the Gentiles
have obtained a faith of equal standing with Jewish Christians.

And it is not particularly the righteousness of the judge –
since he focuses on *the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ*.

And the righteousness of Christ is not so much the righteousness of the judge
as much as it is the righteousness whereby we are made right with God.

This is about what Jesus did on our behalf
so that he might break down the barrier between Jew and Gentile
and bring us together in one new man – in himself –
through his incarnation, death, and resurrection.

And that is why Peter says “the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”
The grammar is very clear that Jesus Christ is our God *and* our Savior.
In the following verse Peter distinguishes between God and Jesus:

² *May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*

But in verse 1, Peter says that Jesus Christ is *our God and our Savior*.
This is at the heart of what 2 Peter is saying about our salvation in chapter 1.
He is about to say that we are made partakers of the divine nature
through his precious and very great promises.

How can *we* become partakers of the divine nature?
How can we have fellowship – communion – *koinonia* –
with the divine nature?
Because Jesus is God.

Jesus and the Father are distinct – hence verse 2 –
“the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” –
but it is proper to speak of Jesus Christ as “our God and Savior.”

As Thomas had said when he saw Jesus after the resurrection, “My Lord and my God.”

Peter and the rest of the apostles never surrendered their monotheism.

There is only *one* God.
But Peter and the rest of the apostles recognize that Jesus is not just a special man.
He is the Christ – the Anointed One – the Messiah –
but there were lots of Christs in the OT – lots of Anointed Ones.
Jesus is different.

Because Jesus is the one who was in the beginning with God.
And he *is* God (John 1).
He shared the Father’s glory before the beginning (John 17) –
something that God doesn’t do with other beings (Isaiah 48:11).

So, for Peter, at the heart of his message is a message about “our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”
If you want to understand how to live as a Christian
(which will be the focus of chapter 1),
then you need to start with who Jesus is!

I suspect that Peter never used the word “Trinity” in his preaching –
but Peter clearly says that Jesus is God – and yet Jesus and God are distinct –
and all of this in the context of the Jewish affirmation that there is only one God!

And that is why he can distinguish between God and Jesus in verse 2:
“May grace and peace be multiplied to you
in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”

Yet in making this distinction, he uses a divine title for Jesus!
Jesus “our Lord.”
Lord *could* be taken in the sense of “king” or other human master,
but it could also be taken as the translation of *Yahweh* –
and in light of verses 1 and 3, I would suggest that is how Peter intended it!

After all, who is the “his” in verse 3?
“His divine power” – whose divine power?
Well, there are two nouns that could work:
God or Jesus our Lord.
One of them has divine power
which has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness,
through the knowledge of the *other one*
who called us to his own glory and excellence.

And *everywhere else* in scripture
it is the Father who calls us to his own glory and excellence –
so we are to understand that it is the divine power of *Jesus*
that has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

Because the statement “Jesus is Lord” is not merely a dig at Caesar.
When we say Jesus is Lord, we are confessing that he is *Yahweh* –

he is the LORD of heaven and earth who has joined himself to our humanity,
so that he might join us to himself!

And all that we are going to say about the Christian life – about Christian ethics –
is grounded in this central dynamic!

Everything else is rooted and grounded in the ‘knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.’
And yes, *knowledge* means more than just knowing information.

But it does not mean less.

It’s certainly not enough to know a bunch of facts about God and the Bible.

But the solution is not to therefore ignore God and the Bible!

Indeed, Peter will tell us in this epistle that the whole question before us
is *what will you do* with your knowledge?

Will your knowledge be effective and fruitful?

Or will it be ineffective and unfruitful?

2. “Make Every Effort”: Grace Promotes Diligence (v3-11)

Verses 3-11 center on the command “make every effort to supplement...”

That’s a very good translation – it captures the sense beautifully!

But the imperative is actually the verb “to add” (or supplement).

You have faith.

And this faith has been given to you by our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now you are called to *add* to your faith –

to build on your faith –

and that requires *effort*.

But before we get to the imperative,

Peter grounds us in the indicative –

the statement of fact of what Jesus has done!!

a. Divine Power, Promises, and Participation: the Heavenly Grant (v3-4)

³ *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to^[c] his own glory and excellence,^[d] 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.*

It’s convenient that Peter has given us the gist of his message in three “p’s” –

Power, Promises, and Participation.

His divine power – that is, *the divine power of Jesus the Messiah* –

has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

How.

“through the knowledge of him who called us...”

There’s that word knowledge again.

In verse 2, Peter prayed that grace and peace would be multiplied to you
in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

(in other words, the knowledge of God brings grace and peace).

Here in verse 3, the knowledge of God is the means by which
we receive all things that pertain to life and godliness.

Later, in verses 5-6, knowledge will be one of the things that we are to “add”
to our faith.

There is no shortcut to loving God that bypasses knowledge.

This should be obvious to all of us!

If you say, “I love my wife, but I don’t know her,”
we would all be quite befuddled!

“I love my wife, but I’m not really sure what she does –
where she is – how she feels about anything.”

Knowing God is a non-negotiable for the Christian life!

Next week we’ll look at how the scriptures teach us the true knowledge of God,
which Peter will contrast with the false teachers and their false words.

But how do you know which teachers are true – and which are false?

You need to know God –

as he has revealed himself through the apostles and prophets.

Because it is through *this knowledge* –

the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence –

that his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

Do you want to be godly?

The word here, *eusebeia*, might be better translated “piety” or “devotion.”

All things necessary for life and for devotion (to God) are ours
through the knowledge of God.

By which, he has granted to us his precious and very great promises,

so that through them – through God’s precious and very great promises –
you may become partakers of the divine nature.

What are God’s promises?

What are God’s precious and very great promises?

Again we are pushed back to the category of *knowledge*.

How do you know what God has promised?

You have to know the scriptures!

You have to know what God has *said!*

It all started in Genesis 3:16 with the promise that the Seed of the Woman would crush the head of the Serpent.

And from that first promise,

God continued to expand on his promises from age to age.

He promised to Abraham three things:

the land and the seed and the blessing to the nations.

He promised Israel that he would give them the land –

and that he would dwell with them as their God.

This began in the Tabernacle –

and was given permanent form in the Temple –

but it all came together in the eternal Son of God

when the Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us.

God fulfilled his promises to Abraham by sending his Son

to be the Seed of Abraham, the true Israel, the Son of David,

the Second and Last Adam –

the temple – the place where earth and heaven meet –

so that all of God's promises would be wrapped up in *him*.

And so through these precious and very great promises

we discover that God's purpose from the beginning

was that humanity would share in the divine nature.

He created us in his own image

because his purpose was to make us partakers of his own nature.

But we rebelled – and we refused his love – his grace – his promises.

And so God did what we could not do for ourselves,

and through his precious and very great promises,

fulfilled in our God and Savior Jesus Christ,

he has joined us to himself.

But notice how Peter says this in verse 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.

Notice that last line:

“having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”

You won't be surprised to hear that the word in Greek is simply the word “desire.”

In the NT, this word *epithumia* is regularly used negatively,

so a lot of translations add the adjective “sinful” in order to make this clear.

As we saw when we went through the book of James,

“desire” is only used positively in the NT

for our desire for Christ and for his people –
in other words,
love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength
and love your neighbor as yourself.

Everything else must be subordinate to that.

Any desire that goes in any other direction –
besides love for God and neighbor
is an *inordinate* desire.

Think of how Peter says it here.
though God's promises you become partakers of the divine nature
having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of desire.

Corruption has the sense of things that decay, perish, and are destroyed.

It is opposed by the word "imperishable" in 1 Cor 15 –
namely, things that do not decay, perish, or be destroyed!

So when Peter says that we have

"escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of desire,"
he is saying that by faith we have passed from death to life.

Jesus said that the one who believes in him, though he die, yet shall he live,
"and the one who lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11)

Corruption – decay, perishing, destruction –
entered the world because of desire.

Adam and Eve desired something besides the love of God and neighbor.

They desired to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.

Sure, it was just a piece of fruit!

But there was a hunger there for a sort of knowledge –
a knowledge that was independent of God;

It's important for us to see that desire is *not* neutral.

Desire either submits to God's will – or it doesn't.

And corruption is in the world because of desire –
because desire, untethered from the love of God,
always leads to death.

And we can escape from that corruption *through* God's precious and very great promises,
by which we become partakers of the divine nature.

You may have wondered –
what is going to keep us from sinning in heaven?

If God simply restored us to the condition of Adam and Eve –
the answer would be, your own willpower!

At which everyone groans and says, “Okay, I’m going to hell!”

But what will keep us from sinning
is what Ezekiel had said in Ezekiel 36,
that God will give us of his own Spirit – give us a new heart –
that we might walk in his ways and obey his commands.
Now, Ezekiel only saw dimly what this would look like.
We see more clearly, because we see Jesus!
We see how God has become flesh and dwelt among us.

And by His Spirit we begin to partake of this new covenant reality –
there is the *already* of our salvation (as well as the *not yet*).

And that’s why Peter exhorts us in verses 5-8 –
speaking of “the fruitful path of faith.”

b. The Fruitful Path of Faith: Knowledge at Work (v5-8)

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue,^[e] 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^[f] are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For this very reason –
because you have already been born again –
because you have already escaped the corruption that is in the world because of desire,
because you are already becoming partakers of the divine nature –
keep in step with the Spirit!

If you think of the list in verses 5-7 as a step-by-step guide,
you may be perplexed since it doesn’t appear to be in any sort of order!
But Peter is not giving us a step-by-step guide.

And the word he uses in verse 5 suggests a better model!

In verse 5 Peter tells us to be diligent in furnishing supplies to faith.
When it says “supplement” your faith –
the verb is a word used regularly to speak of someone
supplying or furnishing abundantly.

In other words, *don’t starve your faith!*
Feed your faith – furnish your faith with the things it needs to flourish!

Supplement your faith with virtue.
Aristotle had written much on the virtuous life.
And Peter feels no need to quibble about the virtues.

Everyone has a basic sense of what is virtuous – and what is vicious.
Furnish your faith with virtue.
Do what is right and good.

And furnish your virtue with knowledge.
After all, how are you supposed to know what *God* considers virtuous?
When in doubt, make sure you are listening to what God says!
Study the scriptures to understand what is virtuous.

And furnish your knowledge with self-control –
the older translations said “temperance” –
moderation – the ability to stay within bounds.
Our day is characterized by a knowledge that knows no bounds!
How do we know the limits of technology?
Well, our day says, “If we can do it, we should do it!”
Hiroshima and Nagasaki raise serious questions about that philosophy!

We now have weapons that make Nagasaki look like a hand grenade.
Fortunately, everyone seems to have agreed that we really *shouldn't*
ever use them!

But unfortunately *moderation* – self-control – temperance –
does not seem to be characteristic of our political leaders.
May the church heed her Master and furnish our knowledge with self-control!

But also supply your self-control with steadfastness.
Moderation is good.
But there needs to be a genuine patience –
a long-term steadfastness –
that endures all things for the sake of Christ.
If you are going to feed your faith – you need patience for the long haul.

And feed your steadfastness with godliness – with piety – with devotion.
In the ancient world “godliness” includes *outward practice* –
not just inward character.
This is why I don't think that “godliness” is a good translation today.
Something like “piety” or “devotion” would be useful.
Steadfastness cannot be cultivated simply by inward character.
You need outward patterns and practices that feed steadfastness.

Godliness – piety – the inward and outward expression of devotion
will feed and nourish steadfastness in the faith.

But the outward and inward expression of devotion cannot simply be for show.
There needs to be a brotherly affection – this is the Greek word *philadelphia* –
we need to have philadelphia for one another!

And brotherly affection is fed by love.

*And if these qualities are yours and are increasing,
they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful
in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is why it requires diligence.

I know for myself, my problem is that when I am not diligent –
when I am *not* making effort –

I tend to become ineffective and unfruitful.

And I would make a good illustration of Peter's point!

I have a lot of knowledge.

When it comes to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ –

I know a *lot*.

And notice Peter doesn't say that the person who is not diligent
doesn't actually know much.

Rather he says that he is ineffective and unfruitful in his knowledge!

Indeed, in verse 9, Peter explains this very clearly:

c. Practice Versus Forgetting: the Way to the Eternal Kingdom (v9-11)

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

Our problem comes when we *forget* that we were cleansed from our former sins,
and so we cease to practice these qualities.

We get shortsighted – to the point of blindness –
so that we do not see where we are or where we are going.

Peter is not saying that such a person is beyond hope!

Rather, he is warning us not to forget!

(And if we have forgotten, he is calling us to repent!)

And so Peter urges us:

¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, ^[g] 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.

Peter is very careful how he says this.

You have been called.

You are elect.

And if you practice these things you will never fall.

What about the one who refuses to practice these things?

What about the one who falls away?

Well, if someone thinks that they are elect and called,
but they refuse to walk in the way of our Lord Jesus Christ –
then we have little reason to think that they were in fact elect and called!

Because Peter says that *in this way* – in what way? –
If you practice these qualities “there will be richly provided for you
an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

You are not justified by your good works.
God did not choose you because you are such a wonderful person.
There is absolutely *nothing* that you can do to save yourself.

But once you have been called –
once you have escaped the corruption that is in the world because of desire –
once you have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours
by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ –
there is no other *way* into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
except through practicing these qualities.

Virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, piety, brotherly affection, love –
these are not optional add-ons that you opt out of if you don’t feel like it!
These are the *way into* the everlasting kingdom of Jesus.
The same verb is used here as in verse 5 –
when we were told to ‘supplement’ our faith with virtue.
We are to furnish our faith with virtue, etc.
“For so an entrance shall be furnished to us into the everlasting kingdom.”

Peter’s not kidding around here!
If you want an entrance into the eternal kingdom of Jesus,
then you need to furnish your faith with virtue –
your virtue with knowledge,
your knowledge with self-control, etc.

Peter concludes in verses 12-15 by saying

3. I Will Keep Reminding You of These Qualities (v12-15)

¹² Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. ¹³ I think it right, as long as I am in this body, ^[B] to stir you up by way of reminder, ¹⁴ since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

In other words,
you know all this!

But I'm not going to be around forever.
So I wanted to make sure that I wrote it down
so that you wouldn't forget!

We need these sorts of reminders.
We are forgetful people –
we get preoccupied with the things of life –
and we lose sight the things that matter over the long haul.
We need reminders.

It's part of why I keep preaching through the whole of scripture –
we need everything that God has given us
so that we may recall these things –
and live as those who are becoming partakers of the divine nature.