

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, not only do we get 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?

The Miracle Bible

I was packed and ready to leave for the military. My father put his hand on my shoulder and handed me a Bible to take along.

“I’ll be faithful to God,” I promised my father. I knew it wouldn’t be easy, but I was determined to try.

I joined the other recruits, and we started marching toward the basic training camp. The commander made the march as difficult as possible. We had to cross a river on our hands and knees, and when it became very deep, we had to swim with our heavy packs on.

When we crawled out on the other side our bags were soaking wet, but we were given no chance to rest or dry out. We continued marching at a rapid pace. As soon as we arrived at the camp, we were given other exercises to do. It was late at night before we had time to unpack our wet bags.

Pulling out my clothes and other belongings, I wrung river water out of each item and laid them out to dry. Then my eyes fell on the Bible from my father. I groaned, sure it would be ruined from the water. But as I touched it, it felt dry. Surprised, I pulled it out of the bag. It was dry. Everything in my bag was soaked with dirty water—except for the Bible. It was clean and dry. I was reminded that God was with me.

During the rigors of basic training, however, I sometimes forgot the beautiful evidence of God’s presence. I wanted to keep the Sabbath, but it was difficult. I prayed that God would help me find a way.

Then I learned that the military was looking for soldiers to teach military children. I immediately signed up. Thankfully, I was chosen to teach, so I didn’t have to work on Sabbath.

While in the military, I often shared my faith. My roommate talked to me about the Bible; he said he saw something different in me. He accepted my invitation to attend some evangelistic meetings and later gave his life to Jesus.

Another soldier was a Muslim; his father didn’t want him to become a Christian. But he had attended Seventh-day Adventist schools and was ready to take a stand for Christ. We talked a lot about God, and eventually he became an Adventist.

I knew that God was with me. He had kept my Bible dry on the first day of training, and He had made it possible for me to keep the Sabbath and lead others to Him, even while serving in the military.

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The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Texts:** *2 Peter 1:3, 4, 10, 11*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that everything needed for life and godliness is available through the gift of divine power.

Feel: Experience the assurance that comes from knowing the secrets to success in the Christian life that guarantee a rich welcome into Christ's eternal kingdom.

Do: Be all the more eager to make his or her calling and election sure by securing the Christian virtues in increasing measure.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Secrets to Success in the Christian Life

A What is the relation of God's great and precious promises to escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust?

B How do each of the Christian virtues relate to each other in a way that makes them a "ladder" we can climb to become productive in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?

II. Feel: Finding Assurance of Eternal Life

A How does Peter describe the process of finding assurance of achieving eternal life?

B Why does Peter call for eagerness to make our calling and election sure?

III. Do: Obtaining a Knowledge of Jesus Christ

A How does Peter describe that which we can do to obtain a knowledge of Him, who called us, as the means of receiving everything needed for life and godliness?

B What consequences does Peter say will result from making our calling and election sure?

► **Summary:** Peter identifies the means by which the believer can be assured to make his or her calling and election sure, never fall, and "receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (*2 Pet. 1:10, 11, NIV*).

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *2 Peter 1:2–4*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: It is possible to become partakers of the divine nature and to escape the corruption that is in the world by way of evil desires. It is possible to achieve assurance of success in the Christian life and to be welcomed into the eternal kingdom of our Lord.

In our passage, Peter tells us how we can accomplish all these goals. We must have an effective and productive knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ—who called us to emulate His holiness (*compare with 1 Pet. 1:15, 16*). After describing the ladder of Christian virtues, Peter says, “For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*2 Pet. 1:8, NIV*). Through the divine power made available in the precious promises of His Word, God permits us to become partakers of the divine nature and to escape the corrupt natures we have inherited in this world. Thus, He fits us for eternity.

Just for Teachers: It is important that all of the proper connections within this passage be made lest class members conclude that it is a matter of working their ways up the ladder of Christian virtues, rung by rung, until they achieve success through their own efforts. While it is true that Peter says, “Make every effort to add . . .” (*2 Pet. 1:5, NIV*), he is not encouraging his readers to attempt to climb the ladder on their own or to conclude that God grants them any merit based on their efforts. He begins the discussion, in verse 3, by reminding the reader, “[God’s] divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life” (*NIV*). Peter adds that, by God’s own glory and goodness, “he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature” and escape the world’s corruption (*2 Pet. 1:4, NIV*). Everything good is a gift from God, but we need to exercise our power of choice by being eager to make our calling and election sure (*1 Pet. 1:10*).

Opening Activity and Discussion: Have the class read together 2 Peter 1:2–4. Discuss the divinely appointed elements Peter mentions to achieve spiritual victory.

►STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Centrality of Jesus Christ *(Review 2 Peter 1:1, 2 with your class.)*

As Peter begins his second epistle, he continues his emphasis on the centrality of Jesus Christ that we saw in his first epistle. In the first 15 verses that we will be studying this week, there are six explicit references to Jesus Christ, usually either as Lord or as God, plus many other references to Him through the use of personal pronouns. In verse 1, through a Greek grammatical construction, Jesus is called both our God and Savior. In verses 2, 8, 11, and 14, Jesus is designated as our Lord. In all but verse 2, He is called Jesus Christ, or Jesus the Messiah. In verse 11, He is our Lord and Savior. Clearly, Peter has a very high Christology and wants to communicate this interpretation to his readers. He is proud to bear the name that Jesus gave him, Simon Peter (“the rock”) and to be a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ (*2 Pet. 1:1*).

Consider This: Which aspects of Jesus’ person and work are especially important for my life? In what ways can I make Him the center of my daily life?

II. The Gifts of God’s Grace *(Review 2 Peter 1:3, 4 with your class.)*

Everything we need for life and godliness has been given to us by God’s divine power through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. According to 2 Peter 1:2, grace and peace are ours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. According to verse 8, we need to be kept from being ineffective and unproductive in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter also calls us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It seems that, to Peter, the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is key to our successful growth as Christians. God also has given to us very great and precious promises. Through believing in these promises, we can become partakers of the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world by way of the evil desires that the sinful nature produces. The power is in the promise (*Rom. 4:21*).

Consider This: In what ways are the grace and power of God through Jesus Christ being manifested in my daily life? How have I experienced the power found in the promises?

III. The Ladder of Christian Virtues *(Review together 2 Peter 1:5–11.)*

Here Peter identifies the qualities a Christian must acquire and practice in order to be effective and productive in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who remember that they have been cleansed from their sins (*2 Pet. 1:9*) and who are eager to make their calling and election sure (*2 Pet. 1:10*) will develop these traits in increasing measure (*2 Pet. 1:8*). Then they can be assured that they will never fall (*2 Pet. 1:10*) and that they “will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (*2 Pet. 1:11, NIV*). Invite the class to spend some time reviewing these virtues. Discuss the inter-relationship between them that forms a “ladder” of sorts, leading to upward growth and progress.

Consider This: How many virtues in Peter’s list are evident in my daily life? In what ways am I growing or stagnating?

Discussion Questions:

❶ How does Peter’s catalog of virtues compare with Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23? In what ways can we exemplify these qualities of growing Christians?

❷ What does Peter mean by “the tent of this body” (*2 Pet. 1:13, NIV*)? Compare 2 Corinthians 5:1–4. What does this text tell us about his view of the nature of humanity?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Some Seventh-day Adventists believe that at the end of time there will be a group of believers who will achieve a level of perfection that is absolute. Others believe that the perfection to be achieved is relative, speaking of maturity in faith and practice rather than of absolute perfection. Ellen G. White says, regarding Christ’s injunction in Matthew 5:48 to be perfect, “We may be as perfect in our sphere as God is in His sphere.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 455. This statement suggests relative or moral character perfection (see *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 330, 331). Nevertheless, it would be wise not to get sidetracked. There

is nothing in 2 Peter 1:8–11 that speaks of absolute perfection; only of victory and assurance. Maintain the focus of the text.

Thought Questions:

❶ What biblical promises have I found to be powerful aids in dealing with the corruption that is in the world by way of evil desires?

❷ Where do I find myself on the ladder of Christian virtues? In what ways am I still growing?

Activity: Have the class read together 2 Peter 1:8–11. Discuss the implications (as identified in 2 Peter 1:8, 9) of having the qualities in 2 Peter 1:5–7 versus not having them. Why would it be important to demonstrate an eagerness to make one’s calling and election sure?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: There is a fine balance between assurance and self-confidence in one’s salvation. Ellen G. White warns, “Those who accept Christ, and in their first confidence say, I am saved, are in danger of trusting to themselves. They lose sight of their own weakness and their constant need of divine strength. They are unprepared for Satan’s devices, and under temptation many, like Peter, fall into the very depths of sin. We are admonished, ‘Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.’ 1 Cor. 10:12. Our only safety is in constant distrust of self, and dependence on Christ.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 155.

Activity: Take a poll of the class by secret ballot (so as to maintain confidentiality) in order to determine (1) how many have assurance of salvation and (2) what they understand to be the basis for their assurance (or lack of assurance). Discuss the results with the class.