

2 Peter 1:1 – 11

What Kind of Faith Have You Found?

(2 Peter 1:1) “Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

What kind of faith have you found?

I think it is safe to say that the vast majority of people who are affiliated with any sort of church understand that Christianity has something to do with faith. But what kind of faith? How would those people describe it? What characteristics would they give? How does faith connect with real life? What results do they anticipate?

Do people think of their own faith as being the same as that of Peter?

Think about the results of Peter’s faith. He gave up his career, was hunted by the authorities, imprisoned several times, tortured, and, if the traditions are correct, was finally executed because of that faith.

Would Peter write to us as those who have obtained “like precious faith”?

Each of us has a different concept of just what faith is. At the same time, most people, with those widely different conceptions of faith, would all (or mostly all) say that faith is best described by the Bible.

How does that happen? How can all those differing ideas come from the same Bible? I think it is because people start out to learn about faith, either by reading the Bible or by listening to various religious teachers, with certain preconceptions, with certain assumptions. They already have some notion, right or wrong, of what faith is, so they interpret what they hear or read according to those ideas that they already have.

If you think that faith requires certain behaviors, you will find passages that describe behaviors.

If you think that faith is mental, you will find passages that describe that.

If you think of faith as the way to get to heaven, then that is what you will hear.

So what’s the point? If people are going to find what they already believe, what’s the use? And, how can Peter expect to find people with “like precious faith”?

The cure for this problem is context. Peter did not assume that everyone already knew what kind of faith he had. Certainly, Peter had described it several times before, but he did not assume that they all got it. He says he had told them before, in verses 12 through 15, that he is reminding them, and that he doesn’t mind reminding them repeatedly. In between, in verses 2 through 11, Peter describes that “like precious faith.” That was Peter’s point, to describe the attributes of the “like precious faith.” Certainly, Peter wants his readers to understand faith, but it’s much more than that. He wants them to be confident and full of joy because of that “like precious faith.”

And that is my point as well. As we review Peter’s review, we will find lots of words that have been overused and misused for so long that the message gets lost in translation. So, I’m going to stop and talk about each of Peter’s various facets of faith, how each facet can enable us to be full of confidence and joy in a broken world. If you will read this paragraph each day for a month, I think you will be able to start each day with a smile, genuinely happy that the sun came up because you have great stuff to do – and I don’t mean going to school or going to work or even recognizing that you don’t have to do either one because it’s Sunday. Rather, you’ll wake up knowing that you know who you are – and be happy about it – you will know what you are

about – and think it’s great – and you will look forward to the things you need to accomplish – because it matters to someone bigger than yourself.

So, let’s get started, verse 2, “Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”

Often, this verse is passed over as the introduction, like the first century equivalent of “Dear Fred.” Far from it. The first two facets of that “like precious faith” are “grace and peace be multiplied to you.” This could not be a standard greeting placed at the top of letter because no other religion focused on grace or peace. This was new stuff. Certainly, a few centuries later, after Christianity became fashionable, important people started using it as a salutation, but it was because of Christianity, not because of the world.

Grace. Grace is the collection of all the godly character traits with emphasis on the way those traits are integrated and consistent. It is not a gift, it’s a description of what makes God so remarkable. And, Peter is praying that the Christians receiving this letter will be absorbing this quality as they are transformed into the image of Jesus by the indwelling Spirit.

When you wake up in the morning, think about that Jesus redeemed us from the right-and-wrong mentality and transferred us to a faith mentality. This is described as grace because God did not go off one side of the road and demand payment to justice, nor did He sweep justice under the rug so that He could have a family. All of God’s character traits were present and working together in His scheme for rescuing us from ourselves. And, He wants us to develop that same character, the character of Jesus.

This, Peter says, multiplies peace. But what is peace? If you were to look up all the places that this word is used in the New Testament, you would find that peace is the opposite of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33) and the desired normal state. Peace is contrasted with darkness and the shadow of death (Luke 1:79). The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:6).

Does your faith bring peace, or does life still confuse you? Does the darkness of the world, does the shadow of death wreck your day, or do you have peace? Many people are troubled by the fact that so much evil goes on in the world. They have no peace because the shrapnel of this world hits everyone without regard to who is right and who is wrong. Many people have given up on God because they cannot reconcile the fact that lots of bad things happen to good people, and God let it happen.

But that attitude makes a big assumption – that the universe was created for people, that we are the point of creation. We’re not. The universe is an incubator for faith, not an all-inclusive resort. Right and wrong, good and evil, are not the point. It’s all about faith or not. Once we realize that, we can have peace multiplied to us in this smelly old incubator.

Verse 3, “seeing that His divine power has granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by His own glory and virtue”

As the sentence unfolds, we are not just those who “know.” It is not just that the world is a ticking bomb, but we know that there is not a thing we can do about it, so we can relax. No, through that knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, He has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness. This is the “like precious faith” we have – we possess all things that pertain to life and godliness. We are not passive participants in life. We are not those who are swept along by the events of this world. Instead, we have all that is needed for successful life, and the ability to live it in a godly way.

First, how do we measure a successful life? Think about the many ways people measure their own lives and the lives of those around them. Of course, some people are driven by money, possessions. He who dies with the most toys wins. But, at some point, just about everyone

realizes that there is no destination on that road. It just keeps going and going, but you never arrive, so there's no real satisfaction.

Some set their sights on leaving the world a better place, which is the sandcastle-on-the-beach mentality. The tide is going to come in and wash it away. Doing good stuff is part of a life of faith (Ephesians 2:8, "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God created beforehand that we should walk in them."), but making improvements to the décor of the Titanic is not the point.

Some people focus on family, which is nice as long as they all play along. But they don't. Each person is a free agent. Not all have faith. Some may not even have physical family.

But there is a way that works. As this paragraph continues, Peter will unfold some of the pathways to success in this life, and he will describe more in the rest of the letter, and more in the previous letter about which he is reminding his readers, and through the rest of the Bible. Peter's summary right here is that God calls us by His glory and virtue.

"Glory" is one of those religious words that has had its meaning obscured. Put simply, the glory of God is a parade of God's character traits. We are pulled into faith by the character of Jesus. And this is not a new idea. All through history, people have been drawn to charismatic individuals, although usually with a few bumps in the road. We are drawn to faith by the character of Jesus. Further, we are drawn in by His virtue. And how does the word "virtue" fit in? In that time, that word was used to describe one's mastery of something, like an artist or a n architect or a musician. In this case, Jesus' mastery is of living – just living. He displayed a mastery of living on this broken planet amidst a vast majority of not-so-nice people. Our "like precious faith" is based on the character of Jesus and our mastery of living. We can wake up in the morning and smile at the day because our faith is based on that model, rather than the latest imperfect stab in the dark or the newest claims for an unseen path through the fog.

Verse 4, "whereby He has granted unto us His precious and exceedingly great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in that world by lust."

Faith is defined by its promises. My latest definition of faith is "being absolutely convinced that I have neither the skill nor the resources to accomplish a promise, but setting out to do it anyway because God promised." The key ingredient is the one who issued the promises.

Everyone has faith in something, perhaps in themselves, perhaps in an institution, perhaps in another person. Will faith in the government result in peace (freedom from confusion)? How about faith in the economy? Faith in my ability to win, whatever win means? Faith that I can successfully evade justice?

Promises, the foundation of faith, are only as good as the one who issued the promises. God has issued "exceedingly great and precious promises." Like what? There are hundreds. Some deal with philosophical concepts like justice and eternity. God has issued great promises about how we have been rescued from ourselves, about a permanent destination. Other promises deal with everyday problems, like the promise that with every temptation, God will provide the way of escape. Other promises address the physical necessities of life, like food and clothing, like having the physical resources to do good stuff. Either we believe the promises, outrageous as they may sound, or we don't. Either we step past the fact that the promises are well beyond our own skills and resources and trust that God will take care of it, or we rely on what we can see. Knowing the promises, and knowing that the one who promised is faithful, makes this "like precious faith" the foundation of a successful life. Confusion goes away, we have peace because we have confidence that God will handle all that stuff I do not understand.

If we act on these promises, we become partakers of the divine nature. That in itself is hard to accept. But it's a promise; either we believe it or we don't. But I've looked in the mirror; my nature is less than divine. I can look back at my track record and be reasonably sure that my character has not always been from above.

What is this "divine nature"? Simply put, it is summarized by the word "holy." That's what holy means, the nature or essence of God. So when Peter quoted Leviticus in 1 Peter 1:16, "As it is written, 'Be holy as I am holy,'" Peter was saying the same thing there as he is writing here. Take on the nature of God.

How does that bring peace? Sounds to me like a recipe for frustration. Start back at the top of the story. Verse 1, "To those who have received like precious faith with us by the righteousness of God our Savior Jesus Christ." God our Savior Jesus Christ. God came to earth as a man, Jesus, and demonstrated what successful life is about. "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." Know Jesus; that's the pattern. "As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness." By His divine power, not by my intellectual capacity or superior self control. "Through the knowledge of Him who called you by glory and virtue." Know His character and the successful application of that character to real life and we also can succeed. "Through these you may be partakers of the divine nature." That's a promise that seems beyond belief. And that's the point. Either we believe it or we don't.

"Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." How many people who care about God have given up on this promise? God has opened the prison doors, and people refuse to escape. Why? Because they don't really believe the promises. They are comfortable with the fake humility of "I sin every day." God's promise says, "You don't have to." Jesus did it; so can you. You are partakers of the divine nature through those outrageous promises. If I had the skills or the resources to accomplish those promises myself, it would not be faith; it would be sight.

And how do we handle the fact that we fall short? Jesus said, as recorded in Matthew 5:48, "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Many very weird doctrines have been invented to try to reconcile my lack of resemblance to Jesus with my hope of being acceptable to God. The problem centers around a legalistic re-definition of that word "perfect."

First, remember, we have been redeemed out of slavery to sin. Previously, we had bought into the system of right and wrong, and we failed. Jesus not only paid off all our maxed out debts, He also transferred us into a completely different kingdom with a different economic system and monetary policy. The coin of Jesus' realm is faith. Unfortunately, most religious people haven't figured that out, so they still measure everything by the right-and-wrong mentality, the sin mentality. So, they define "perfect" as "not doing anything wrong." That's not what the word refers to. If you were to look up all the places in the New Testament where that word is used, an entirely different picture emerges. The word we have translated as "perfect" means "consistent." Be consistent as your heavenly Father is consistent. Make sure that what you know is right in your head actually passes down and comes out through your hands..

How does that help? Does it make sin OK? No. It just takes the focus off of keeping score. How can we rejoice, how can we have peace, how can we succeed when we see our pitiful performance? Look how Peter addresses that point.

Verses 5 – 8, "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue (mastery of living), to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance,

to perseverance, godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and are increasing, you will be neither useless nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Faith grows. It’s a process, and it has steps. Many people get crossed up because they try to skip through the sequence. Not that you don’t need to think about love until you have mastered all the ones that are mentioned before it, rather, don’t skip any steps or you will create a dam, preventing the flow to the subsequent character traits.

When you trust God’s promises (faith), mastery of living will result, because the excuses will stop making sense. As virtue grows, understanding grows, again because the excuses stop making sense. As knowledge grows, methods for defeating old habits are found. As self-control increases, we go longer between disasters, and we learn perseverance. As we begin to persevere in virtuous choices, our natures begin to resemble God’s nature: godliness. As we start thinking like God thinks, we begin to act in the best interests of our brothers and sisters in Christ. As we learn how that works, we can expand to acting in the best interests of people who are still stuck in this broken world.

Getting things out of sequence doesn’t work. Without perseverance, self-control doesn’t happen. Each step is important. But, it is not that you have to absolutely master one before moving on to the next. It’s trickle down economics.

Again, how does this help us wake up with a smile? How does this give us peace? Because we stop keeping score. As I have said before, if you look up all the passages in the New Testament that use the word joy or rejoice, you will find that the only source of joy that is given is to rejoice in the successes of faith. It’s not a batting average. No inspired writer kept track of the failures. In the faith economy, there are only successes. What the right-and-wrong mentality calls failure is just a success that hasn’t happened yet. We rejoice in the successes of our faith or in the successes of the faith of others, which trickles over into successes of virtue, which leaks over into better understanding, which waters emerging self-control, which develops perseverance, which puts on the fruit of godliness, then brotherly kindness, then love. Faith to love, one success at a time, without keeping score.

But sometimes I don’t have many successes to rejoice about. Sometimes things just go poorly. Remember that the only source of joy recorded in the New Testament is rejoicing in the successes of faith. If you check out the specifics, usually the rejoicing is about the successes of someone else’s faith, not the successes of my faith, which is one of the main reasons Christians get together on a regular basis – to share those successes of faith so we can all rejoice and press on, smiling – not gritting our teeth.

Among the famous people in the New Testament who told others about Jesus, what was their success rate? If any of them had more than one response out of a thousand hearers, I would be surprised. If they kept score, the gospel would never have gotten out of Jerusalem.

We can feel useless in the kingdom if we do not occupy those traditional positions of influence in the church. But notice that Peter did not include leadership or evangelism in his list. Did Peter write, “And add to your love, evangelism, and until you reach that last step, you are useless and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Wrong. But that is not to say that evangelism and leadership are not important, any more than bad behavior is not important. Rather, it’s not on the scorecard. The way Peter puts it, if we grow our faith through these steps all the way to love, we will be fruitful. We will be useful. Evangelism and leadership happen because the grace of God is on our minds. The promises of God are on our minds. So, these

concepts spill out of our mouths. What is on your mind eventually spills out of your mouth. If we were keeping score, that would be a scary thought.

But we have a tendency to abandon even the best of intentions. For example, in the holiday season, good eating habits give way to weight gain. Successes of faith give way to attendance at religious performances. How do we keep from losing sight of the objective? Peter continues. Verses 9 – 11, “For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things, you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Don’t forget how you started – by the integrated and consistent character of God, His grace. Each of us was rescued from the messes we made of life. We had bought into the right-and-wrong mentality and had run up a huge debt. The debt was paid by the sacrifice of Jesus and, just as importantly, we were not left in that same old economy just to run up another huge debt, repeating the cycle of failure and repeated rescue. Government programs may operate that way, but God does not. God rescues us once and transports us to a totally different kingdom based on faith. But even the successes of faith can be rationalized into complacency. My faith can become just another excuse for a self-centered life if I forget how I got here.

How do we enjoy life? How do we make sense of the confusion of this world? How do we have “like precious faith”? (1) Remember the rescue. (2) Know and believe the promises. (3) Develop the divine nature. (4) Don’t keep score.