

## EXPONENTIAL GRACE



**2 Peter 1:1-11**

*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:*

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

<sup>3</sup> *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, <sup>4</sup> 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.*

<sup>5</sup> *For this very reason, **make every effort** to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.*

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

Some of you know that Ryan was invited to go backpacking last August in Glacier National Park. He had never been backpacking nor had he even been camping for more than a few nights in his entire life. It was an absolutely wonderful and unforgettable experience—and it required a lot of planning. For a whole week in the wilderness, the group needed to carry all of their clothes—and it got really cold at night, even in August—a sleeping bag, a mattress pad, tents cooking gear, all of their food, first aid supplies, toiletries, a rain suit, bear spray, etc. The point is that even though it was no picnic carrying a 60 pound backpack up and down steep trails, Ryan and the rest of the crew had all that they needed for the trip. Their supplies were complete.



Ryan and his group had three parts to the trip. First, they gathered supplies, they took the journey and they had a destination. I think Ryan's backpacking trip is a good metaphor for what Peter taught in this section of his letter. First we will examine the supplies that we have been given for the Christian life. Second, we will look at the journey itself and finally we will see the destination.

### **Our Supplies**

Peter began his second letter

with this same idea in mind. *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.* When it comes to the Christian life, our supplies are complete. We have everything we need. And since the journey of the Christian life is so important, it is vital that we know what we are carrying around in our pack.

First, note that it is the Lord's divine power which has supplied us with these gifts and treasures. We did not work for any of these things. We did not earn them and we do not deserve them.

Second, what we have been given is what we need for life and *godliness*. This is not a set of supplies to help us survive in life but also thrive in godliness. God did not supply us just so that we can eek out an existence in this life or scratch and claw our way to basic survival in life, even though there may be days of grief and suffering where merely surviving is a good day. God supplies us not just so that we can survive but so that we can thrive in godliness.

The term godliness can sound so generic and super spiritual, like when we say, "She is really a godly woman, isn't she?" In some contexts that might just mean that the woman in question is a regular church attender and is a really, really nice person. This woman's "niceness" might be the fruit of her walk with the Lord or it might be because she is a really nice person. There are all kinds of lukewarm believers who are really nice just as there are hordes of unbelievers who are really nice. We all have known people over the years of whom we have said, "You know, that person would make a really good Christian, wouldn't they?" What we mean is that they already seem like a good Christian and in point of fact, they seem nicer than most of the Christians we know, but we know they are not yet a believer. Therefore, godliness is much more than being nice, but it is certainly not less. We will get into a fuller definition of godliness later but first, let's see what else we have been supplied with.

The second half of verse three states: *through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.* The glory and excellence of the Lord is another way of saying his pure holiness and his utter perfection. Tell me—how does a person enter into the pure holiness and

utter perfection of the Lord? You must first be covered by the blood of Christ. You must be radically saved or else the glory and excellence of the Lord would consume you in an instant.

As part of our the amazing gift of salvation, the Lord has also (verse 4) *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.*

We should take these a phrase at a time. God's great and precious promises certainly include every single promise in his word but I think Peter especially has in mind promises that help us work toward godliness. For example, let's consider Romans 6. *For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.* <sup>11</sup> *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* <sup>12</sup> *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.* Because of the death and resurrection of Christ, we are now dead to sin. Do you believe that? Do you believe that sin has no ultimate power over you? Do you believe that every sin you commit is a direct choice to sin? Do you believe that you have a choice not to sin? Before you were called into the glory and excellence of Christ, you had we had no choice but to sin. We were slaves to sin, mastered by it, chained to it and bound by its will. But just one of the great and precious promises is that we are dead to sin, therefore, let not sin reign in your mortal body to obey its passions. Can we ever be reminded of this too often.?

One more great and precious promise would be the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.* I love this simple promise. If the Lord is my shepherd, then I shall not be in want, because what I ultimately want *is* my shepherd and I already have him. Do you see how simple this is? Peter means for us to meditate upon these and every other great and precious promises.

What else do we have? The next phrase reads, *so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature.* At first glance, I think the New Agers in our town might even like this verse? "Yeah, man, I'm trying to discover the divine spark within me, man." The classic New Age belief is that we are all gods and somehow conveniently forget that we were. Of course we should recognize this as the very first lie in human history when the serpent said to Eve, "*You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*" (Gen 3:4-5). "You will be like God" is the same thing as saying, "You are god and you just need to discover the divine within." We are not divine and therefore cannot discover the "divine within," but that we are partakers of the divine nature. This means two things, at least. First it means that we are in the presence of God. We are partakers with the One who is divine, the Sovereign of the universe, not because we have attained to such a state of perfection, but because he has called us into his presence through faith in his son, Jesus.

But it also means that we share some of these qualities of his divine nature, what is usually termed God's communicable attributes, which simply means that God "communicates" or shares these attributes with us. These attributes are easily seen, especially when we contrast them with his incommunicable attributes, which are characteristics that he does not share with us. These are the things which make God, God—infinity, omnipotence, omnipresence, self-sufficiency and omniscience. We cannot share these with God because we are the created and not the Creator. Characteristics that God does share with us would things like *virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love.* Does this list sound familiar? These and

many other fruits of the Spirit are all characteristics that can develop and grow within us, but let's lay those aside for the moment because they are not part of our supplies, per se. remember, we are taking inventory of the supplies that God has given us before we embark on the journey itself.

The final phrase comes at the end of verse four—*having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire*. This is every bit like the Romans 6 passage we looked at before. Notice that this is described as past tense—we have escaped the corruption that is in the world. We have died to sin. Sin no longer has mastery over us.

Christian, we are well supplied. We have been given everything we need for in order to live a Godly life. We have full potential to grow as a believer. Your circumstances do not matter. Every believer has the chance to grow in godliness. Now you might think, “Well what about the person who was raised in a loving, Christian family? Don't they have a better chance of maturing in their faith than the person who was raised by an alcoholic atheist; or by an abusive parent; or by a parent who loved conditionally and drove you to their standard of perfection? Wouldn't the child in the loving home have been given a greater chance for success?”

In many ways, I would agree with this. The child raised in a loving Christian family does have a certain advantage over someone raised in a troubled, non-Christian family. This is why we stress the vital role of parents. Parents should strive to live a life of godliness, at least in part, in order to increase the success of their children's future faith. Let's face it—if you are an NFL Hall of Fame quarterback named Archie Payton, it is much more likely that your two sons, Eli and Manning, will also be NFL quarterbacks, right? However, just because the child was raised in a solid, Christian home has some sort of advantage, does not mean that the person who was not raised in such an environment cannot grow in great strides of godliness. Each believer has everything that they need to live a life of godliness.

We must never say that we were not equipped. Do you remember what happened when Moses went to Egypt to ask Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave their bondage in slavery? Before it got better, it got worse, didn't it? Pharaoh did not decrease their daily quota of bricks but he no longer supplied them with straw to make the bricks. They were in an impossible and desperate situation because they were not adequately supplied. But we must never say that we do not have all that we need. We have all we need for this journey. Now let's see what this journey entails.

### **Our Journey**

Peter writes,<sup>5</sup> *For this very reason, **make every effort** to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,*<sup>6</sup> *and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,*<sup>7</sup> *and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.*

If you are not opposed to writing or underlining in your Bible, then I encourage you to underline the phrase, “For this very reason.” It is the key phrase in this section of Scripture. Peter has one of those intimidating lists here. Paul has several such lists in his letters and most of them tend to make us squirm. Faith? A little bit. Self-control? On my better days. Steadfastness? It all depends on the circumstances. Not only is this one of those challenging lists, but we are told to make

every effort to increase in these character traits. Some of you are thinking, “Yeah, I do try hard already and I don’t seem to get very far.”

But what is the key phrase in this section? *For this very reason* is the key phrase which means that the key to increasing in these godly character traits lies in what came before. The reason that we can make every effort to become more godly is because of what has already been done for us. Do you remember the fancy word for spiritual growth? Sanctification is that word and it simply means being made holy, which is exactly what Peter is writing about. It’s easy to make sanctification over complicated but it is simply this—Sanctification is living out the reality of our justification. And justification is what we have been talking about all morning—what Christ has done for us—the supplies in order to walk the journey of faith. This is what Christ has done for me, therefore work out your faith in fear and trembling, as Paul put it. *For this very reason, make every effort*—i.e. since we have been given all that we need, then work hard at digging these things out. God will never call you to the impossible. What God commands, God supplies.

I am reading a 150 year old book called *Mysterious Island* written by Jules Verne. The book is nothing like the Disney type movie that is playing in the theaters. The story is about five men shipwrecked on a deserted island thousands of miles from civilization and they happen to be God fearing men who practice a Sabbath rest on Sunday. They landed with nothing but the clothes on their back but in a short time, they proceed to make bricks, knives, axes, saws, explosives, hammers, weapons. How did they make all of these things when they started with nothing? Everything they made was contained within the potential of the island. They had been supplied with everything they needed and they only needed to draw it out of the island and put the pieces together. In the same way, we have everything we need in potential form we just need to draw it out in our journey of faith. Remember—what God commands, God supplies.

Furthermore, Peter states that we not only have to have these qualities but we need to be growing in them. *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.*<sup>9</sup> *For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.* Did you catch the importance of verse nine? If you are not growing then you have forgotten that you have been cleansed from your past sins. In other words, if you are not progressing in your sanctification it is because you have forgotten your justification. You have forgotten that you have been supplied with everything you need for life and godliness. Worse still, when we don’t progress spiritually, we are categorically stating that God’s divine power is not sufficient for us. Or perhaps we are making the statement that God plays favorites because he seems to have supplied other people with what they need but God left me out of the picture.

We can list all of the excuses that we want but the fact remains we have everything we need for life and godliness. What if Ryan’s backpacking group gathered all of their supplies, traveled the 36 hours to Northern Montana and said to one another, “Well I guess we can’t go backpacking. Poor us, we just don’t have what it takes to get the job done.” We all recognize that this would be a flimsy and ridiculous excuse but you are far more equipped for spiritual growth than this group was for backpacking. We need to leave behind our excuses and walk this journey of faith.

Let's take just one of these characteristics from Peter's list and apply it to our personal lives. Let's take self-control. Self-control is a part of godliness so how do we grow in it? First, we check our supplies. We take a spiritual inventory. Number One—we are called to his own glory and excellence. If you have thrown yourself on the mercy of Christ alone and placed your faith in him, you are a new creation in Christ. You are born again. But what difference is the miracle of your new birth making in your pursuit of self-control? Verse nine tells us that if we lack self-control it is due to the fact that we have forgotten that we have been cleansed from our past sins. Does anyone actually forget that they are saved? That's not possible but it is possible and far too probable that we forget the practical ramifications of our precious salvation.

So what do we do? We check through our supplies again and see his great and precious promises. This is not just the two verses I mentioned earlier but the entire Word of God. But Houston, we have a problem—our Bibles gather dust on our shelves and we wonder why have a problem with self-control. So is that the answer—if I read my Bible every day God will give the gift of self-control? I can tell you this much—if you don't read your Bible you will not grow in your self-control. You have got to expose yourself to these great and precious promises.

It's like a carpenter who leaves his tools at home in the garage. Just because you have tools doesn't make you a carpenter. I have tools in my garage but I am not a carpenter. In fact, I am one tool short this year because last year I managed to saw off the power cord on my skill saw. Regular immersion in the Word of God is the foundation to all spiritual growth. If you have a problem and you are not reading your Bible, honestly, I don't really want to talk to you. How can I or anyone come alongside of you and walk with you on this journey of faith if you refuse to become engaged in it? Furthermore, since self-control is fundamentally a lack of discipline, what better way to start to develop more self-control than to begin a discipline of Scripture reading? Reading your Bible is not some magic bullet but it is indispensable to all spiritual growth.

If you take a look at your spiritual supplies, there is one thing we have not seen in our inventory. It is something that is assumed by Peter but not explicitly stated. Let me give you a hint. What does this list—*Knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love*—remind you of? It is very similar to the list in Galatians five which are all fruits of the \_\_\_\_\_? These are fruits of the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity is dwelling within every believer. This is a whole other sermon in itself but I wanted to make sure we saw that this is also part of our supplies.

Next in the pack of supplies you see verse four again—you have escaped the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. When applied to your daily life this simply means, you don't have to sin. Say that with me—"I don't have to sin." I am not telling you this truth. God is telling you this vital truth.

I don't want to oversimplify this to the point of seeming to imply that you will never sin. Even one character trait like self-control covers a broad spectrum of issues from everything from needing more discipline in your life all the way to serious addictions. Moreover, generally speaking, these character traits will be developed over time.

## ***EXPONENTIAL GRACE***



Let me close by describing Exponential Grace. Exponential grace is LIFE raised to the power of GOD. You have the divine power of God through all of these gifts and spiritual supplies available at all times. Grace multiplies exponentially in your life and you just need to draw on this power. When life is difficult, check your supplies, because what God commands, God supplies.

Rich Maurer  
March 26, 2012