

## "The Divine Nature" - 2 Peter 1:1-4 (Page 1395 in Pew Bibles)

This morning, we begin what I pray will be a fruitful journey through the second Epistle of Peter. If you look down at verse 14, you will note that Peter wrote this letter at the very end of his life.

*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 Peter 1:13-14)*

At the end of John's gospel, we can see what Jesus showed Peter regarding his death.

*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." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me." (John 21:18-19)*

Shortly after this letter was written, Peter would indeed be crucified. Church tradition tells us that he was crucified upside down, at his own request. He did not feel worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord. But as long as Peter was still alive, he wanted to be doing what Jesus told him to do. Jesus told him to tend His flock, to feed His sheep and Jesus told Him to "Follow Me."

Jesus is who Peter lived for. So the purpose of this letter is to "stir up" believers. He wanted to remind us of the Divine truth while he was still drawing breath. As Christians, we desperately need reminders because our flesh is forgetful. As sheep, we tend to stray and we tend to be led astray.

Now in First Peter, we learned how we Christians are to respond to a culture that is fundamentally hostile to Christianity. Peter was dealing with a threat that came from outside the Church. He was dealing with the very real threat of persecution, state-sanctioned persecution.

But here in Second Peter, he is dealing with a threat that comes from inside the visible Church. It was a problem then and it is a problem today. John writes:

*Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 John 2:18-19)*

God has revealed His truth through the testimony of the prophets and the Apostles. His truth is recorded in the pages of this Book. But there have always been those who claim to have some new revelation, some different spin on the truth. Christian teachers and preachers are not called to be innovative. If their message deviates from the truth of this Book, they are false prophets.

Peter is going to show us how we Christians are to respond to false teachers who pretend to be Christians. I hope you realize that not everyone who claims to be a Christian actually is one. I hope you realize that there are many pastors and teachers who are wolves in sheep's clothing. And they can be really, really popular. They often preach to huge congregations. They write best-selling books. They have television and radio

programs. They have really big incomes. They spread lies that come straight from the pit of hell.

As Jesus' return draws near, it's only going to get worse. Paul wrote to Timothy:

*But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. (2 Timothy 3:13)*

Not only do false teachers spread deception, they often believe the lies that spew forth from their mouths. They might even believe they have a special anointing from God, and how dare anyone challenge them by bringing up the clear teaching of Holy Scripture!

Don't be deceived. Jesus said:

*For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. (Matthew 24:24-25)*

Jesus warned us. Paul warned us. John warned us. Peter warned us. We need to be warned! We need to be on our guard. That is why God the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to write down these words.

*Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: (2 Peter 1:1)*

Peter starts by introducing himself. He is a bondservant of Jesus Christ, that is, a *dulos*, in the Greek. We've come across this word many times before. If Jesus truly is your Lord, then you must be His *dulos*. If you confess Him as Lord, then you must submit to His will. Jesus gets to call the shots in the Christian life and that's a really good thing, because He only wants the best for you.

But Peter is not only a *dulos* of Christ, he is an Apostle of Jesus Christ. That is a really big deal. There are only 12 Apostles of the Lamb and the family of God is built on the foundation laid by ...

*... the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, (Ephesians 2:20)*

It is the testimony of the Apostles that gave us our New Testament.

Now, I want you to notice an astounding thing: Peter is writing ... *To those who have obtained like precious faith with us.* Despite the fact that Peter is one of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb, every Christian has obtained like precious faith with Peter. In other words, if you have found your life in Jesus Christ, you have the same standing in the family of God that Peter has, the same standing that John has, the same standing that Paul has.

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28)*

What is your standing in Jesus Christ? As you sit here this morning, you are either alienated from God or you are one in Christ Jesus. If you are alienated from God, you are standing on a plank suspended over the eternal fires of hell and that plank consists of rotting wood. You could go through at any time.

We're all sinners here.

*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)*

We're all guilty of cosmic treason and the wages of our sin is death, not just the death of your body but the eternal death of your soul. The horrors of hell cannot be adequately described by human language. Jesus said it is a place where your worm will not die and your fire will not be quenched. It is an eternity of separation from God in the most exquisite agony and you are only your next breath away from that agony.

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, entered into His creation as a human baby. He lived the perfect, sinless life none of us could ever hope to achieve. Then He sacrificed that life on the cross to pay the death penalty for your sin and for mine. Yes ...

*... the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*

All you have to do is believe ... just accept it by faith. But you have to voluntarily turn your life over to Jesus. You have to confess Him as Lord. You have to believe that God raised Him from the dead so that you can have a living, real-time relationship with Him. And then, from the point in time when you pray and ask Jesus to be your Savior, you must seek Him with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength. You must find your life in Him.

What is your standing in Christ today? Are you one in Christ Jesus? Or are you standing on that rotting plank, ready to sink into the Lake of Fire?

*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, (2 Peter 1:2)*

It might be tempting to blow right by verse two, as it sounds like it's just a typical Christian greeting, but there is some important stuff here.

Grace is unmerited favor. That is what God bestows upon us when we trust Jesus. You do not deserve salvation; you deserve condemnation. So do I. By sending Jesus to the cross, God is extending infinite mercy to those who will believe.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

Peace is what we attain as a result of God's grace, peace with God, and peace with ourselves. This is a supernatural peace, a peace that comes from knowing we have been reconciled with God and we are no longer under judgment. It is a peace that allows us to face the trials of life with a certain calmness, because we believe God is working all things together for good.

Peter is pronouncing a blessing on us. He wants this grace and peace to be multiplied to us. In other words, he wants us to experience an ever-increasing sense of grace and peace. The knowledge of grace and peace should increase as we live out our Christian lives. The senior saint has many years of experience in recognizing the goodness of God. As long as we don't harden our hearts, as long as we don't become distracted by the stuff and junk of this world, we will experience more and more of this grace and peace.

But notice that this grace and peace comes through the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ. This is going to be a central theme of Peter's letter. I think Peter selected this word very intentionally. Or better still, the Holy Spirit selected this word very intentionally. As we'll find out when we get deeper into the letter, the doctrine being

promoted by these false teachers is what we call a proto-Gnosticism. The Gnostic Greek philosophers had a number of beliefs that were beginning to creep into the Church. One of those beliefs was that you could only get to God through a sort of mystical, secret knowledge that was only available to a few gifted individuals.

*Gnosis* is Greek for knowledge and that's where the term Gnosticism comes from. They taught that what you had to do was actually abandon rational thought and let this secret knowledge sort of seep into your consciousness. Of course, you might be able to buy your way into this secret knowledge by giving money to those who were already living on a higher plane. False teachers and cult leaders have always found ways to get rich by peddling their lies.

This heresy hasn't gone away. You can see forms of it in New Age religions of our present time. And you can see it promoted by false Christian teachers today, teachers and preachers who place a premium on emotion apart from Bible study, teachers and preachers who claim to have a special anointing from the Holy Spirit and then teach things that cannot be supported by Scripture.

The word Peter uses for knowledge is *epignosis*. If *gnosis* is knowledge, then *epignosis* is super-knowledge. It is precise and correct knowledge of all things ethical and divine. But here is the thing: It is not secret. It's not secret knowledge available only to a few enlightened folks. It is available to everyone. God wrote it down for us.

*... as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, (2 Peter 1:3)*

Let me unpack this verse, sort of back to front. First the phrase: *Him who called us by glory and virtue* If you have trusted Jesus as your Savior, it is because God called you. You are of the elect.

*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Peter 2:9)*

Jesus said:

*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, (John 15:16)*

It is God who saved you by His divine power and by His divine power, He has also given us everything we need for life and godliness. Everything! He hasn't left anything out. Oh, if only we would always pay attention to Him! This gift comes to us through the "knowledge of Him" and yep, that is *epignosis* – super-knowledge.

Look at Verse 4:

*by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, (2 Peter 1:4)*

Where does one find these exceedingly great and precious promises? That's right, they are recorded on the pages of this Book. (Bible)

*... that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:4)*

Okay, God has provided the means for us to escape the corruption of the world, but what is this divine nature we get to partake of? This phrase, "partakers of the divine nature", can be a bit confusing. Peter actually borrows the phrase from the Greek philosophers

who were deceiving Christians. It is a Gnostic term, but Peter turns the tables on their heretical meaning. Peter uses it in the appropriate, Biblical way.

First, I need to tell you what it doesn't mean. It does not mean that we will become God. It doesn't mean we will be of the same essence as God. God is God, you are not. That will never change.

What it does mean is that through the promises in Christ we obtain God's holiness. God is holy! It is one of His attributes. He is immaculately holy. God has called us to share in the sphere of His holiness and that involves fellowship with the godhead. As John puts it:

*... that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3)*

You cannot have that fellowship unless and until your sin is dealt with. The prophet Habakkuk, speaking to God, says:

*You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. (Habakkuk 1:13)*

But once you have accepted the salvation that is available through faith in Jesus, you immediately become positionally righteous. You have taken Jesus' righteousness on yourself as if you were putting on a cloak and when God looks at you, He no longer sees your sin, he sees the righteousness of the Son. He sees you as holy to the Lord.

But it is more than positional righteousness. Through the process of sanctification, you are being remade into the very image of Christ. You are progressively becoming more like Jesus. You won't get there in that body of flesh you're lugging around, but you will begin to see the fruit of the Spirit manifest in your life and one day, we will get resurrected bodies that will no longer be subject to sin.

*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1 John 3:2)*

Holy. We will live eternally with Jesus in a state of sinless perfection. We will have bodies designed to inhabit the new heaven and new earth where righteousness dwells. And on that day, we will be partakers of the Divine Nature. We will no longer be subject to the ravages of sin. We will escape the corruption of this world. We will be free from the lust of the flesh and we will be holy.

I am so looking forward to it. I hope you are too. But in the meantime, we need to remember who we belong to. We belong to Jesus. So let us keep our eyes on Him, not on the world. Let us be greatly encouraged by the victory He has already won, not on the death wails of a fallen world.

*For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:16-17)*

Let us seek diligently to do the will of God. It is how we participate in the Divine Nature.