Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Reality of Our Salvation
Scripture: 2 Peter 1:1-2, 12-15
Code: 1395

I. INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1980 I took a three-month sabbatical from Grace Community Church. During that time I received no new revelations, nor did I discover any new truth that will instantly change our lives. But I did learn something important: the Christian experience is not a matter of what's new, but remembering what's old.

As I travelled across the country I had many opportunities to teach and answer questions. I discovered that the same questions were on the hearts of many people, whether they lived in northern California, Texas, Arizona, Arkansas, Illinois, New York, or Connecticut. They all wanted to know basic spiritual truth.

I left Grace that summer with some anxiety. It was my twelfth year there, and for the first time I was thinking about going somewhere else. I had been asking myself how I could keep speaking the same things to the same people. I thought I had to be more creative, or else go to another church where I could draw from my old sermons. (But I'm sure someone would accuse me of preaching an old sermon because he had heard the tape!)

Soon after we left Southern California I received an inquiry from a church about being their pastor. The church was located in an area I had a great longing to live in. For the first time in my life I didn't want to say no. I wanted to pray about it because I wanted to know if it was where God wanted me. I struggled to know if it was time for me to move on. What triggered that struggle was the challenge of teaching God's Word in a another way. So I went on a sabbatical, thinking that the Lord might open up some new vistas for me.

I read Scripture voraciously, trying to see something new. But everything I read sounded like the same message from God only in different words. So I have to confess that after three months Grace Church got back what went away, only with a few refinements. After drawing close to the Lord, He put a freshness into my ministry.

I asked the Lord to show me a passage of Scripture that would express what I was feeling to others. His Spirit drove me to 2 Peter 1. When I came back I read it, pondered it, and talked with some of the pastors about it. Peter was called to feed a flock and so have I. He was a shepherd, a pastor, and an

overseer, and I can identify with him. In this epistle Peter expressed his heart to his flock.

Reports from Across the Country

Many people around America told me that they were sustained by the ministry of Grace Church and Word of Grace. We visited an Amish family on their farm in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Their kitchen looked like our living room; it was huge! One wall was completely filled with tapes. Every day the family would gather together to feed on the Word of God through the tapes.

When we were in Schroon Lake for a pastor's conference we ran into a special family at a pizza parlor one afternoon. This man and wife and their two teen-age children walked in and sat down. They kept staring at us the whole time. Finally, the man said to me, "You're John MacArthur, aren't you?" I said I was. He said, "We came here to see you." I said, "Are you here for the week for the conference?" They said, "No, we just drove in today from Florida." Now Schroon Lake is in upstate New York, well over a thousand miles from Florida. I said, "How long are you staying?" He said, "We have to leave the day after tomorrow. We just wanted to come and see you. We've been listening to the radio program and getting the tapes, and have become dependent on your teaching. We wanted to be sure there was someone behind that voice who was real and who lived out those truths." So those dear people sat down with us and we had a wonderful time together. They gave us a lovely gift as a remembrance, and the next day they went back to Florida.

In city after city that kind of thing happened. One young pastor came up to me with tears in his eyes and said, "John, don't do anything different and don't let anything change because so many of us are depending on you and your ministry." That puts a lot of responsibility on us, knowing that so many others are depending on the feeding they receive from the tapes, the radio program, and our staff. I don't know what has caused this response other than the sovereignty of God. I continued to hear people tell me that they didn't want anything new--just more of what they had been receiving. The Lord confirmed that novelty is not my calling; He wants me to teach His Word. And His Word is not new, it's old; but it's very fresh. Those kinds of experiences drove me to 2 Peter 1.

LESSON

II. THE MINISTRY OF REMEMBRANCE (vv. 12-15)

Peter says, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and are established in the present truth" (v. 12). You might think that since the people were taught and established Peter might say, "It's time for me to leave. They can handle life without me. Better they should hear teaching from someone else." But it hit me that Peter said, "Even though you're established in the truth, I'm staying around to make sure you remember it." Then he said, "Yea,

I think it fitting, as long as I am in this tabernacle [his body], to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shown me" (vv. 13-14). The Lord told Peter that he would be martyred (John 21:18-19). So he didn't know how much time he had left. As long as he still had time, he would continue to remind the people of what they knew and were established in. Then Peter said, "Moreover, I will endeavor that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance" (v. 15). The ministry comes down to simply establishing people in the truth and then reminding them of it. We at Grace Church had twelve years teach the truth, and now God has called us to remember it.

A. The Purpose of Remembrance

Any good teacher knows one thing about his pupils: they forget what he teaches them. He knows that because he himself forgets. Once in a while I have to listen to an old tape to remember what I believe on a certain passage because I forgot how I interpreted it. Any teacher knows you teach by repetition. He also realizes that his students can become so familiar with certain material that they don't hear what he teaches them. If you teach the same truth in the same words, they think they know it and don't need to hear it. So you teach the same truth in a different way. It is my commitment to bring to you a ministry of remembrance--to keep teaching you the Word of God in fresh and exciting ways. We need to remember the timeless divine principles that glorify God.

1. The importance of recalling spiritual truth

Within our bodies is an amazing instrument called the brain, which enables us to learn. Everything we hear, see, or experience is stored in cells in our brains. Nothing is ever forgotten; it is simply stored. God has given us the capacity to live out spiritual truth because we can receive and store it.

a) Expanding storage capacity

I discovered by doing a study on the human brain that although everything is stored, whenever you recall and relearn something you expand the brain's storage capacity. So the more you hear and apply something you learned, it occupies a greater part of your thinking processes. As you hear and respond to God's Word, it takes over a larger portion of your thinking process. I have heard it said that we use only a small percentage of our brains. I'm sure you'd agree that we don't use all that's available to us.

(1) Select illustrations

Samuel Taylor Coleridge relates the tale of an ignorant slave girl who was never taught to read or write. But she could repeat verbatim long passages of Hebrew. On closer examination it was discovered that she worked for a scholar who constantly read aloud from rabbinical books. She could

repeat long passages of Hebrew by rote because all that she heard from the scholar had been stored in her brain.

In the first Greek class I ever took the professor made us memorize 1 John 1:1 in Greek to get a feel for the language even though we couldn't translate it. I can still repeat it today.

I took piano lessons when I was young. I performed in one recital and played "The March of the Wee Folk." I was seven years old. To this day I can play "The March of the Wee Folk"--and only "The March of the Wee Folk!"

(2) Spiritual implications

Repetition expands our capability of recall. Recovering spiritual truth demands repetition and use. The more you hear, think through, and apply spiritual truth the more it begins to dominate your thinking. Eventually you will react involuntarily in the proper spiritual manner to any situation because a particular spiritual principle has become so much a part of you.

Some people have told me they need to hear the teaching of the Word of God on radio or tape every day to keep their spiritual life in order. That was hard for me to understand until I realized that many people in our country attend churches where they are not fed the Word of God and given principles to live by. Therefore they are at the mercy of society. They are bombarded by the filth of the world through its books, newspapers, television, radio, movies, and music. It happens in the office, at school, at home, or wherever else we are. The evil of the world makes constant impressions on our minds.

No longer can Christians be sustained on a diet of spiritual truth on one Sunday morning a week. You can't counter the onslaught of the world's system unless you expose yourself to the truth of God daily. When your mind feeds on the things of the world, your automatic response will be ungodly. When you feed on the Word of God just once a week you won't be able to control your responses to the glory of God. You cannot live for God's glory unless you are exposed to His truth daily so it might be stored in your mind for instant recall.

It has been said of Mozart that he could hear a piece of music once and weeks later write an entire score from memory of that piece. That's what is known as eidetic imagery. Early twentieth-century German psychologist E. R. Jaensch coined the term and believed that all young children are eidetic. The brain is a marvelous tool God has given us.

Another psychologist said that people who blame themselves for having a poor memory usually find they never really learn the material in the first place. It is learned only when it is reactivated and reiterated.

God has designed our physical structure to accommodate our spiritual needs. We have a marvelous capacity for memory. Scriptures is full of reports of how God's prophets were called to tell His people to remember. If I can serve no other purpose than that, I serve the highest purpose of God. First, I want to establish you in the present truth. But second, I need to constantly jog your memory so that you never forget those truths. The more they come to the front of your mind, the more you will find your spiritual responses becoming involuntary because you have become so dominated by the truth of God.

b) Encouraging spiritual diligence

(1) Deuteronomy 8:1-2

The book of Deuteronomy is a preparation for God's people to live to His glory in the land of promise. "All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee" (vv. 1-2). Moses told the people to remember the old truths.

(2) Deuteronomy 8:11-14

"Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his ordinances, and his statutes, which I command thee this day, lest, when thou hast eaten and art full and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold are multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord the God." Prosperity has a built in curse--it makes it easy for us to forget.

(3) Deuteronomy 4:5-9

Moses said, "Behold, I've taught you statutes and ordinances, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land to which ye go to possess it. Keep, therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, who shall hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God as near unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and ordinances as righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget" (cf., Deut. 6:12).

(4) Psalm 119:16

The psalmist said, "I will not forget thy word."

(5) Proverbs 3:1

Solomon said, "My son, forget not my law, but let thine heart keep my commandments."

(6) Ecclesiastes 12:1

Solomon said, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." When the mind is young and fresh, and it receives godly input, and the repetition of years builds on that, there is security for old age in godliness. If you forget God when you're young and your mind becomes dominated with things of the world, it is hard to relearn spiritual truth. So start when you're young.

Then Solomon goes on to describe old age and all its accompanying problems and infirmities. Apparently, Solomon didn't apply spiritual truth when he was young, so in his old age all he could say was, "Vanity of vanities ... all is vanity" (v. 8).

2. The danger of forgetting spiritual truth

(This point is discussed in chapter 2.)

B. The Theme of Remembrance

(This point is discussed in chapter 3.)

III. THE SPECIFICS OF REMEMBRANCE (vv. 1-11, 16-21)

Peter saw himself as I see myself--as one sent by God to remind you. I take seriously exhortations from people around this country to continue doing the same thing. We are not to be committed to anything new, but to something old, and to keep repeating it.

In 2 Peter 1:12 Peter says, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things" (emphasis added). What things? The things he just spoke of in verses 1-11, and the things that follow in verses 16-21.

A. The Reality of Our Salvation (vv. 1-2)

"Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior, Jesus Christ: grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus, our Lord"

Words like "faith," "righteousness," "Savior," "grace," "peace," and "knowledge of God," all describe salvation. Peter is referring to our redemption. He calls on us to remember the reality of our salvation. Christians can become very critical about little things they don't like in their lives and forget the magnanimity of their redemption.

One advantage I had for the three months I was away from Grace Church is that I had no responsibility other than to teach and be with my family. I didn't have to deal with the petty problems that often come up in ministry. When you get away from the little things and can stop being critical or analytical, you can enjoy the greatness of God and the wonder of salvation. We were removed from the environment of ministry problems. There was a certain sense in which that cleansed my heart. When I came back to the church, the little problems and disagreements didn't stand out to me anymore. I could sense only the glory and joy of the fellowship. I believe we can lose the proper perspective of our salvation.

1. The gifts of God (v. 1)

"Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior, Jesus Christ"

a) Faith

Peter wants to remind us that we have "obtained like precious faith." What does he mean by that?

(1) The allotment of faith

The concept of the verb translated "obtained" is to receive by allotment. You didn't get something as much as it was given to you. The word is used to refer to choosing by lot. God has at times revealed His will through the casting of lots. So Peter is communicating the idea of a divine allotment. Believers have been alloted faith from God.

(a) Human faith

Human faith is seen in the faith it takes to turn your car ignition on and know that the eight spark plugs firing under the hood won't blow you into eternity. You have faith to fly on an airplane even though you can't see the pilot behind the closed door. You have faith to ride in a car on the highway even though you don't know if it's going to end abruptly around the next bend. You have faith to eat in

a restaurant even though you've never been in the kitchen. You have faith to do a lot of things in life, and that's natural human faith. But that kind of faith won't redeem anyone.

(b) Saving faith

The faith that saves is a gift from God. What Peter speaks in verse 1 is not the faith--the content of the Christian faith. It is not Christian theology. It is saving faith, which we have received by divine allotment. I hope you haven't forgotten that God didn't have to give it to you, but that He did so out of His marvelous sovereignty. I look at verse 1 and say, "God, how can I ever thank You for the saving faith you have given to us?" Ephesians 2:8 says, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Saving faith is a divine gift, not a human work. Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing about Jesus Christ.

All across this country I saw people living without God, and I was thankful for my redemption. Are you? I hope you haven't forgotten the meaning of your salvation.

(2) The equality of faith

(a) Equal value

In verse 1 Peter calls our faith "like precious faith." That is a translation of the Greek word isotimos. That word means "of equal value" or "of equal honor." There are no first-class and second- class Christians. Some people believe you become a Christian first, and that if you get your spiritual act together at some later time you get promoted to the level of disciple. But verse 1 says we have obtained a saving faith of equal value. There's no inequality in the body of Christ. Galatians 3:28 says, "There's neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." First Corinthians 6:17 says, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." The faith we have received is equally valuable.

(b) Equal standing

Isotimos is frequently used in a political sense in Greek writing. It means "equal rank" or "equal standing." In Christ we all stand equal. The righteousness of God is imputed to us, and believers all have an equal standing before Him.

No matter who you are, whether educated or uneducated, rich or poor, we all have received a saving faith that is equal in value and that gives us equal standing before God. That's what makes the body of Christ so wonderful. We all come from every imaginable walk of life, and none of us have anything over anyone else. We all will spend eternity in heaven. We all will know the glories of being like Jesus Christ because our salvation knows no grades. There is no distinction, no upper-level disciples, no

secret 144,000 who will get all the good things in glory. We have equal value and equal standing in our faith.

b) Righteousness

In verse 1 Peter tells us how it is that we have equal value and standing in our faith: "Through the righteousness of God and our Savior, Jesus Christ." Righteousness is a consummate word. So much of its interpretation depends on the context. Paul frequently used it to speak of total righteousness--the nature of God. Peter used it here to refer to God's fairness and justice.

We've all received a faith of equal value and standing because we have a God who is fair and doesn't make distinctions. God is not a respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11). People say, "I wish I was a Christian like the apostle Paul." I've got news for you--you are! Peter says you "have obtained like precious faith with us" (2 Pet. 1:1). Who is the "us"? Peter and the apostles. You are just as honored in your saving faith, just as exalted in your standing, and just as much a recipient of the justice of God as an apostle. All of us are sinners, so God doesn't distinguish between us. He has given us His mercy and grace equally. Every time I see a believer who doesn't believe he has the resources to live the Christian life, I remind him he has everything the apostle Paul had. God gives salvation to us equally and values us equally. You are of as much value to God as anyone who enters His kingdom.

2. The response of the believer (v. 2)

"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus, our Lord."

God has given us salvation so He can multiply grace and peace to us. But that can happen only through knowing God. Verse 1 shows the divine side of salvation and verse 2 the human side. God does His part and we respond by getting to know Him. The Greek word translated "knowledge" is not gn[ma]osis, the simple word for knowledge; it's epign[ma]osis, which refers to a deep, full, rich, genuine knowledge.

a) Eliminating the superficiality of belief

The reality of your salvation is this: you have received from God a precious saving faith that gives you a perfect standing in Christ equal to all other believers. It is designed to multiply grace and peace to us. But that happens only when you have a deep true knowledge of Christ. And that eliminates the superficial people--those who jump on the Jesus bandwagon through cheap grace and easy believism. There is a lot of superficiality in Christianity. But Peter is saying that a deep knowledge of Christ is an indicator of true saving faith.

b) Embodying the fullness of Christ

What is the deep, full knowledge of God? Verse 1 refers to "our Savior, Jesus Christ" and verse 2 to "Jesus, our Lord." Some people believe you can accept Christ as Savior and later as Lord. But here we see in one verse that He is Savior and in the other He is Lord. Those two descriptions are the composite of who He is. What then is a true deep knowledge of God? The perception of Christ as God, Savior, and Lord in the fullness of all that those terms embody. You are redeemed when you perceive Christ to be who He is, not when you add Him to your life as if He were some spiritual trinket.

Peter was writing to people who claimed to know Christ, but were continuing in immoral behavior. He was probably using the word epign[ma]osis like a catch phrase because they used it. Only he is putting authentic Christian content into it and telling them that they had better have a genuine knowledge.

A Scary Sermon

When I left on my three-month sabbatical, the elders of Grace Church suggested that I preach on true salvation from Matthew 7. They believed it to be the best message I could give at the various places I would be visiting. When we were in New York I began the week of a conference by telling the people that we would study Matthew 7:13-27. Many were surprised because the usual fare at Bible conferences is about spiritual life or the Holy Spirit. The people attending the conference were having a good time sailboating, swimming, and participating in other recreational activities. But then I hit them with Matthew 7 about the broad road and the narrow way.

After I preached the first day one lady said, "Now you did it. My husband will never come back to hear you again this week." I told her I was sorry to hear that. One fellow told me that I had put a great pall over the conference. I told him I thought that was good because we need to think about our salvation, and said I'd pray the Lord would show him what I was trying to say. On the third day three gentlemen approached me and one said, "We're very concerned. We've been listening carefully to what you have been saying. The three of us are Sunday-school teachers, but we don't know if we're truly saved." I had a wonderful talk with them and was able to help them get their lives settled with the Lord.

There are a lot of people who are involved in the church but have never looked back to see if their salvation was legitimate. I received similar reactions in the many places I shared that message. I put some of that material together to give to a publisher. But they refused to publish it because they thought it would scare the Christian community.

Conclusion

There is much to be thankful for. First, I'm thankful for the reality of my salvation. Are you? I'm thankful it was given to me by a divine allotment on an equal basis with the apostles and every other believer. I'm thankful I've been given equal standing before God so all that is His is mine. He's multiplying grace and peace to me because I have a true and deep knowledge of Christ as God, Savior, and Lord. There is so much to remember, but be sure to dwell on the great reality of your salvation.

Focusing on the Facts

1. According to 2 Peter 1:12-15, what is the key to ministry?

2. How does the human brain help us to live out spiritual truth?

3. How can a Christian counter the onslaught of the things of the world?

4. According to 2 Peter 1:1-2, what does Peter want Christians to remember?

5. How does the believer obtain his faith?

6. Define human faith. Define saving faith.

7. What does Peter mean by the phrase "like precious faith" (2 Pet. 1:1)?

8. How can a Christian have "like precious faith"?

9. How should the believer respond to the salvation offered to him by God (2 Pet. 1:2)?

10. What is a true, deep knowledge of God?

Pondering the Principles

1. For any believer to be able to remember and apply spiritual truth demands a mind filled with God's Word. It has been said that our mind is a muscle that needs constant exercise. Begin today to fill your mind with spiritual truth by exercising it through memorizing Scripture. Start small. Memorize one of your favorite passages (not more than ten verses) this week. Find a passage of similar size and memorize it the following week. As you become more adept at memorization, you can expand your

efforts to include a chapter, or perhaps even an entire book! Be sure to review the passages you have previously memorized so you won't forget them.

2. Have you forgotten the meaning of your salvation? If you have, and even if you haven't, think back to what your life was like before you were saved. What changes has the Lord made in your life since that time? As you look back on all those changes, thank the Lord for each one. Thank Him for making salvation a reality for you. Beginning today, make it a practice of remembering all that God has done in your life and thank Him for it.

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