

Thus far in our Bible notes on Peter's epistles, we have established that Peter writes in order to strengthen his brethren, even as Jesus had promised (Luke 22:31-32). But Peter's effectiveness in teaching the scattered Gentile believers throughout the Roman world depended on more than Christ's bare promise that he would be a crucial source of strength for his brethren; it also required the Spirit to work ever-deepening faith in this Apostle. It is to Peter's precious faith (which he shares with his readers) we turn now – because the very same faith wrought in Peter is being wrought in us.

Mon/Tues: Read 1 Peter 5:8-9; 2 Peter 1:1-10 and Proverbs 3:5-6

Emptied and Refilled

Let's examine Peter's success in strengthening his fellow believers. The proof of such strengthening is on display in 2 Peter 1:5-10 where Peter expects that these believers will add to their faith spiritual fruits such as virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, and godliness. But make no mistake. Though the list of characteristics of Christian living in 2 Peter 1:5-10 are essential in any sincere profession, there is a special emphasis in 1 and 2 Peter on faith alone as the basic weapon by which to resist Satan and to grow as a believer.

Faith is key in resisting Satan in (1 Peter 5:9 "Resist him standing firm in the faith") and it is the precious jewel in all who believe (2 Peter 1:1 "a like precious faith."). Faith is the only grace by which we can be both emptied of hope in ourselves and stirred up to hope in Christ. Faith helps us let go of our self-centered confidence and at the same time strengthens our grip on Christ alone. In this way, faith is what could be called "extraspective" (i.e. looking outside of itself to Christ as one's only hope.)

Faith empties the soul of its own wisdom, understanding, and fullness, that it may act in the wisdom and fullness of Christ. The only advice for preservation in trials and temptations lies in that of the wise man, Prov. 3:5: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding." This is the great work of faith; it is faith; it is to live by faith. The great cause of men falling in trials is their leaning upon their own understanding and counsel." John Owen – Vol. 6, pg. 146

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that saving faith is the virtue that becomes active *especially* in our times of weakness.

1 Your harps, ye trembling saints,
Down from the willows take;
Loud to the praise of love divine
Bid ev'ry string awake.

2 Though in a foreign land,
We are not far from home;
And nearer to our house above
We ev'ry moment come.

3 His grace will to the end
Stronger and brighter shine;
Nor present things, nor things to come,
Shall quench the grace divine.

4 When we in darkness walk,
Nor feel the heav'nly flame,
Then is the time to trust our God,
And rest upon his Name.

5 Soon shall our doubts and fears
Subside at his control;
His loving-kindness shall break through
The midnight of the soul.

6 Blest is the man, O God,
That stays himself on thee:
Who wait for thy salvation, Lord,
Shall thy salvation see.

Trinity Hymnal (ed. 1961) #595

Weds/Thurs/Fri: Read 1 Peter 5:8-9, Luke 22:31-32, 2 Peter 1:1

When Virtue Fails

Peter exalts faith as a unique saving grace: just as he calls it “precious faith” (KJV 2 Peter 1:1) and he also accords to faith the power to resist Satan (1 Peter 5:9). He learned from the Savior that faith is the grace within us that will most readily stir Him to action on our behalf.

This is why Christ tells Peter that His intercessions for the Apostle have zeroed in on ensuring that his faith won’t fail. (Luke 22:32) He doesn’t tell Peter that He has been praying for him so that ...

... his patience won’t fail.

... or that his courage won’t fail.

... or that his self-control will remain constant.

... or that Peter will remain steadfast.

... or that Peter’s godliness will be impeccable.

... or that his affections for the brethren will remain warm and ever faithful.

All these virtues (most of which are listed by Peter in 2 Peter 1:5-10) are important evidence of the true Christian life, and no one who claims to be saved can be wholly devoid of these fruits of salvation. In the sense of producing fruit, then, faith is never alone. But that does not take away from the fact that all these virtues failed in Peter when he denied Christ, and they can fail at significant times of testing in our lives too.

What then are we to do when our virtues fail us? That is when faith steps to the fore, since it does not *look within us for strength, certainty, or confirmation - but rather looks solely to Christ for rescue*. This is what brings to faith a victory and deliverance from sin, with all the associated fresh forgiveness we need.

God has made faith to be the only vehicle for accessing Christ’s saving power; the only instrument by which salvation is received, and the only means by which God’s righteousness in Christ is freely imputed to us.

A common illustration is that faith is the “empty hand” by which salvation is given to us. Faith brings no merit or praise to us since it receives from Christ a perfect salvation which only He wrought on our behalf.

Meditate and Pray: Sing about the unique, saving power that God accords to faith, using these hymns that speak of the Christian hope primarily in terms of trusting in God through Christ's finished work on the Cross and by the Holy Spirit:

1 My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Refrain: On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
all other ground is sinking sand;
all other ground is sinking sand.

2 When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
in every high and stormy gale
my anchor holds within the veil. [Refrain]

3 His oath, his covenant, his blood
support me in the whelming flood;
when all around my soul gives way,
he then is all my hope and stay. [Refrain]

4 When he shall come with trumpet sound,
O may I then in him be found;
dressed in his righteousness alone,
faultless to stand before the throne. [Refrain]

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1 God moves in a mysterious way
his wonders to perform;
he plants his footsteps in the sea,
and rides upon the storm.

2 Deep in unfathomable mines
of never-failing skill
he treasures up his bright designs,
and works his sovereign will.

3 Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
the clouds ye so much dread
are big with mercy, and shall break
in blessings on your head.

4 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
but trust him for his grace;
behind a frowning providence
he hides a smiling face.

5 His purposes will ripen fast,
unfolding ev'ry hour;
the bud may have a bitter taste,
but sweet will be the flow'r.

6 Blind unbelief is sure to err,
and scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
and he will make it plain.

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Sat/Sun: read 1 Peter 5:8-9 and 2 Peter 1:1**Faith in Christ Alone, Triumphant**

It is not just Peter and His Lord who bear witness on the pages of Scripture to the unique saving significance of faith. Satan himself shows faith's importance; it is the Christian grace which he most often attacks. When faith in Christ is strong, the Christian is kept dependent on Christ and humbly watchful against Satan. When faith is weakened by pride, blinded by self-confidence, or mixed with a works-righteousness that boasts in other Christian virtues (but not faith) – then is the believer, like Peter in Luke 22, most vulnerable to Satan's attack.

Peter boasted that “even if all others should forsake Jesus, he would not.” Peter had great confidence in his courage and his loyalty to Jesus. He had great “self-faith,” believing in the purity of his motives to defend Christ at all costs. He also had great confidence in his leadership position over the other Apostles and in his theological grasp of Christ's Messiahship. It was Peter who had seen Christ's identity as Messiah first according to Matthew 16:16-17.

But because Peter was living (in reality) by a faith mixed with a sense of attainment and proud self-interest, when it came to *listening to* the words and warnings of Christ about the evil hour that was coming upon the whole world, his faith was subject to destruction in Satan's hands, if Christ had not stepped in to pray for him and his faith.

We must end this week's notes by marveling at the Holy Spirit's gentle work of drawing Peter back to Christ. Luke 22:61-62 (Christ's reclaiming gaze on Peter and Peter's bitter tears of repentance) are proof that Peter's faith is saved by the Spirit, in answer to Christ's prayer.

Mark this great lesson: Peter's greeting to the church in 2 Peter 1:1 comes with the purpose of assuring his readers that *their faith* was just as precious in their ordinary office as believers as *his faith* was as an Apostle. Why? Because all faith, no matter how weak and timid and small it may be – has direct access to the fundamental union with Christ that is the essence of our salvation.

Faith may be of different abilities and strengths, but since it is authored by the Holy Spirit, it is rooted in the Spirit's regenerating power. Though my own faith may be as small as one rung in a ladder, the Spirit will not disown my weak faith, since He is the author of it. Instead, He builds that one rung into the massive ladder of salvation that reaches by Christ's merit and righteousness all the way up to Heaven!

What a carpenter Jesus is! He is able to craft a perfect, sinless faith from His own life of obedience and service. He is then able to draw upon the limitless resources of this faith and apply His faith to us. The result is that the Spirit works that faith into our lives, thereby uniting us to Christ forever. This is why faith remains and saves – even when, like Peter in Luke 22 – all other virtues or semblances of Christian living were being submerged under Satan's attack and Peter's sinful denial of Christ.

In the same way and at certain times of testing, our Christian graces can be submerged under waves of sin. But Who keeps the spark of saving faith from being extinguished? Only the Savior who will not snuff out the smoldering wick and will not break the bruised reed.

Meditate and Pray: I close with this quote that speaks of the power of Christ to preserve our faith.

The principle of our holiness as in us is weak and infirm, *because it is in us*; in some to so low a degree as is often imperceptible to themselves.

This (almost imperceptible spark of spiritual life) the Holy Spirit preserves and cherishes, so that it will not be over-powered by corruptions and temptations.

Among all the glorious works of God, next unto that of redemption by Jesus Christ, my soul most admires this work of the Spirit in preserving the seed and principle of holiness in us, as a spark of living fire in the midst of the ocean, against all corruptions and temptations with which it is impugned.

Many breaches are made in and upon our course of obedience by the incursions of actual sins; these He cures and makes up, healing our backslidings and repairing our decays. And He acts (applies) the grace we have received by constant fresh supplies. (Any Christian) lacks much of the comfort and joy of a spiritual life who does not diligently observe the ways and means whereby it is preserved and promoted.

John Owen volume 3, pages 397-398