

Be Who You Are



SABBATH—MAY 20

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Peter 1:1–15; Ephesians 2:8; Romans 5:3–5; Hebrews 10:38.

MEMORY VERSE: “So you should try very hard to add goodness to your faith. To goodness, add knowledge. To knowledge, add the ability to control yourselves. To the ability to control yourselves, add the strength to keep going. To the strength to keep going, add godliness [being godly]. To godliness, add kindness for one another. And to kindness for one another, add love” (2 Peter 1:5–7, NIV).



Peter gives us a list of good things a Christian should be and do.

THIS WEEK'S LESSON COVERS 2 PETER 1:1–14. In these 14 verses, Peter teaches us about living a holy life by faith. He then discusses what God's power can do in the lives of those who have given themselves to Jesus.

In these verses, Peter gives us a list of good things a Christian should be and do. These good things also are called virtues. Peter lists these virtues in a special order. One virtue or goodness follows another virtue or goodness, which follows another, and so on, until they reach a high point with the most important virtue of all: love.

Peter also writes to believers about what it means to be in Christ and to have “their past sins . . . washed away” (2 Peter 1:9, NIV). Peter then brings in the idea of being sure of salvation and of the promise of eternal life in the Lord's “kingdom that lasts forever” (2 Peter 1:11, NIV).

And finally, Peter gives a short talk on the important topic of the state of the dead. What a lot of rich and deep truth in just 14 verses!

A PRECIOUS FAITH (2 Peter 1:1–4)

Read 2 Peter 1:1–4. What does Peter say we have been given in Jesus Christ? That is, how is the truth of God’s mercy and forgiveness seen here?

Peter begins his second letter by saying that he writes to “those who have received a faith as valuable as ours” (2 Peter 1:1, NIV). The word translated as “valuable” is translated as “precious” in the King James Bible (KJV). It means “of equal value.” Either way, Peter says that the believers have received this precious faith. He does not say that they earned it or deserved it. Instead, it is a gift from God. Or as Paul writes, “God’s grace [forgiveness and mercy] has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation [does not] come from anything you do. It is God’s gift” (Ephesians 2:8, NIV). This is to say that faith is precious because “without faith it is impossible to please” God (Hebrews 11:6, NKJV). And by faith we lay hold of many wonderful promises.

Peter also points out that Jesus has given us everything we need for life and holiness (2 Peter 1:3). Only through the power of God do we even have life. Only through His power can we be holy. And this power is given to us “because we know the God who chose us” (2 Peter 1:3, NIV; read also John 17:3).

We are called to love God. But how can we love a God we do not know? We come to know God through Jesus, the Bible, and the created world. And we come to know God through the experience of living a life of faith and obedience. We come to know God and how real He is as we experience what He does in our lives. This knowledge will change us. And we come to know God through the grace that He gives to us.

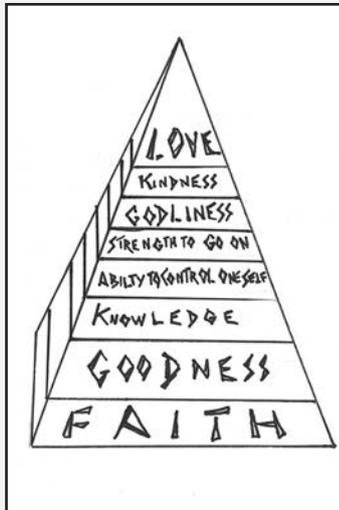
Next, Peter says we also have been given “great and valuable promises” (2 Peter 1:4, NIV). These promises include sharing in “[God’s] nature [holiness]” (2 Peter 1:4, NIV). Humans were created in the likeness, or image, of God. That image has been greatly spoiled and ruined. So we must be born again. Then we will have new life in Jesus. Jesus works to renew His image in us. But we must flee evil practices if we want this change to occur.

What would your life be like if you had no faith? How does your answer help you understand why the gift of faith is so precious?



Jesus has given us everything we need for life and holiness. And we come to know God through Jesus, the Bible, and the created world.

LOVE IS THE GOAL OF A CHRISTIAN LIFE (2 Peter 1:5–7)



Each virtue or goodness builds on the virtue or goodness before it. At the end of the list, the final virtue reaches a high point in love.

Read 2 Peter 1:5–7; Romans 5:3–5; James 1:3, 4; and Galatians 5:22, 23. What same theme appears in each verse?

Thinkers in the ancient world often made lists of virtues. Virtues are the good things a person is and does. There are several examples of such lists in the New Testament (Romans 5:3–5; James 1:3, 4; Galatians 5:22, 23). Peter’s readers no doubt knew about such lists. So Peter has arranged his list of virtues in a special order. Each virtue or goodness builds on the virtue or goodness before it. At the end of the list, the last virtue reaches a high point in love.

Each virtue Peter lists in 2 Peter 1:5–7 has an important meaning:

Faith: Here faith is nothing less than a saving belief in Jesus (read Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38).

Goodness: Goodness comes from the Greek word *arête*. *Arête* means goodness of any kind. It was valued among thinkers of the ancient world. Yes, faith is important. But it must lead to a changed life. Such a life will be filled with goodness or doing what is right.

Knowledge: Here, Peter talks about the knowledge that comes from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

The ability to control oneself: Experienced Christians are able to control their thoughts and desires. Some thoughts and desires can lead to overdoing something.

The strength to keep going: This strength involves remaining loyal to what is right in the face of hard times and persecution.

Godliness (being godly): In the Roman world, the word translated here as “godliness” means doing what is right. Godliness results from a belief in a god. In the New Testament, this word also can mean good behavior that comes from belief in the one true God (1 Timothy 2:2).

Kindness: Christians are a family. Godliness will lead to kindness between members of this family. It also will lead to being kind to others outside this family.

Love: Peter brings the list to a high point with love. Here, he sounds like Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:13.

Before Peter begins the list of virtues, he says that we should “try very hard” (2 Peter 1:5, NIV) to gain these virtues. What does he mean by that? What part does human effort have in living godly, faithful lives?

BE WHO YOU ARE (2 Peter 1:8–11)

Peter first gives us the list of virtues we should try to gain as Christians. Then he tells us what the result of gaining those virtues will be.

Read 2 Peter 1:8–11. Here, Peter speaks about two things: (1) what has been done already for each Christian and (2) how a Christian should be living. What is the link between these two things?

Peter urges his readers to live according to what is true in Jesus. The virtues of faith, goodness, knowledge, the ability to control oneself, the strength to keep going, godliness, kindness, and love “should describe you more and more. They will make you useful and fruitful as you know our Lord Jesus Christ better” (2 Peter 1:8, NIV).

The problem is that not all Christians live according to this new truth in Jesus (2 Peter 1:8). Such people have forgotten that they were washed clean from “past sins” (2 Peter 1:9, NIV). But in Christ, they receive forgiveness. He shares with them His holiness, or divine nature. As a result, they must “try very hard to show that God has appointed [called or chosen] you to be saved” (2 Peter 1:10, NIV). There is no excuse for living as they had done before. There is no excuse for being Christians who are not useful. And there is no excuse for Christians who do not produce fruit (the virtues) in their lives.

“We hear a great deal about faith. But we need to hear a great deal more about works. Many are lying to themselves. Why? They live an easy-going life. They practice a religion that has no cross in it.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, page 50.

Read Romans 6:11. How does Paul say here what Peter says in 2 Peter 1:8–11?

In a way, both men say, “Be what you are.” And what are we? We are new creatures in Christ. He has washed us clean from sin. He shares His holy life with us. That is why we can be “like Christ.” Being like Christ is what “Christian” means.

How much “like Christ” are you? How can you be more like Him?



We are new creatures in Christ. He has washed us clean from sin. He shares His holy life with us. That is why we can be “like Christ,” which is what “Christian” means.

REMOVING THE “TENT” (2 Peter 1:13, 14)

In 1956, Oscar Cullmann wrote a short study called *Immortality [Eternal Life] of the Soul or Resurrection [Return to Life] of the Dead? The Witness [Evidence] of the New Testament*. In this study, he argues that the idea of the immortal (eternal) soul that does not die is false. He says that it goes against the idea of the resurrection. Cullmann also says that the New Testament supports the resurrection of the dead.

“No other publication of mine,” Cullmann later wrote, “has provoked [created] such enthusiasm [excitement] or such violent hostility [hatred or dislike].”

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–57. What does Paul suggest happens in death?

A study of what the New Testament says about death and resurrection has convinced most New Testament thinkers that Cullman is correct. The New Testament does, in fact, teach the idea of the resurrection of the dead. But it does not teach that the human soul survives the death of the body. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18, Paul comforts those whose loved ones have died. He reminds them that when Jesus returns again He will raise the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:12–57, Paul gives a long description of resurrection. He begins by pointing out that Christian faith is founded on the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus was not raised, then any faith in Him is useless. But Paul says that Christ has indeed risen from the dead. He is the first of all those who will rise from the dead. And Christ’s resurrection from the dead makes it possible for all those in Him to rise from the dead also.

In 1 Corinthians 15:35–50, Paul talks about the new bodies believers will have when they are raised from the dead. Paul shows the difference between the new bodies we will receive and the bodies we now have. What we have now will die. But what we will have in the resurrection never will die.

So clearly the New Testament teaches how death is connected to the resurrection. But the New Testament does not teach the idea of a soul that lives forever. Understanding the truth of the resurrection is important when reading 2 Peter 1:12–14.



Christ’s resurrection from the dead makes it possible for all those in Him to rise from the dead, .

FAITH IN THE FACE OF DEATH (2 Peter 1:12–15)

Read 2 Peter 1:12–15. What does Peter mean when he suggests that he will soon put off his “tent,” or body?

Second Peter 1:12–14 gives us the reason why Peter writes his second letter. This letter is his last message for the church. The reason is found in the wording of 2 Peter 1:13, 14. It shows that Peter expects to die soon. For example, Peter uses the word for “tent” to mean the body. And his “tent,” or body, will soon be taken down or removed by death. It is very clear that Peter means his body when he says, “my tent will soon be removed” (NIV). As a result, modern translations of the Bible often use the word “body” in place of “tent.” For example, the New Revised Standard Bible (NRSV) translates 2 Peter 1:13, 14 using these words, “as long as I am in this body . . . since I know that my death will come soon” (NRSV). Nothing in Peter’s words suggests that the soul lives on after death. So Peter’s tent, or body, will be “removed” by death. But his soul will not stay alive in death as a separate living thing.

Read 2 Peter 1:12–15 again. How does Peter seem to deal with his coming death? And what does that thought and feeling teach us about faith?

Peter writes 2 Peter 1:12–15 knowing that his life will soon come to an end. But he seems to have no fear of evil to come when he dies. Instead, Peter thinks about the well-being of those whom he is leaving behind. He wants them to stand strong in the “present truth.” This is because present truth is the truth needed for the time in which people live. In other words, as long as he is alive, Peter shall remind believers to be faithful.

We can see how real and deep Peter’s experience with the Lord is. Yes, he will die soon. And it will not be a pleasant death, either (read John 21:18; Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Teachers; Leaders]*, pages 537, 538). But Peter’s concern is for others. It is not for himself. Truly, Peter is an unselfish man. He lives out the faith that he teaches.

How does our faith help us deal with the terrible fact of death? What has Jesus done for us that can give us hope? How can we learn to cling to this wonderful hope, even as we face death?



Present truth is the truth needed for the time in which people live.



“Peter was nailed to the cross with his head downward.”

—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 538.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: As we saw, Peter knows that he will die soon. And he knows how he is going to die. That is because Jesus Himself told Peter in John 21:18.

So how exactly does Peter die?

“Peter was a Jew and a foreigner. He was sentenced to be whipped and put to death on a cross. Peter prepared himself for his terrible death. He remembered his great sin in turning away from Jesus in the hour of His trial. Once Peter had been so unready to accept the cross. But now he thought it a joy to give up his life for the gospel. At the same time, he could not forget that he denied, or turned away from, his Lord. So he felt that dying in the same way as his Master died was too great an honor. Peter was truly sorry for the sin of denying Jesus. And he had been forgiven by Christ. Christ shows His forgiveness by asking Peter to feed the sheep and lambs of the flock. But Peter could never forgive himself. Not even the thought of how much he would suffer on the cross could lessen his feelings of bitter sorrow for his sin. So Peter had one final request before his death. He begged the men who put him to death to let him die upside down. His request was granted. So Peter was nailed to the cross with his head downward. And in this way, he died.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 537, 538. So, even with the thought of his coming death before him, Peter’s last concern was for the spiritual well-being of the flock.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think of all Peter writes about the need for Christians to live holy lives. So why do so many of us still fail to be what we should be in Jesus?
- ② In class, go over the list given in 2 Peter 1:5–7. How can we better show these virtues? And how can we help others who want to do the same?
- ③ Peter fails Jesus in the past. But Peter’s writing shows in a powerful way the great work that Christ does in him afterward. What hope and comfort can we take from Peter’s example?
- ④ In 2 Peter 1:12, Peter writes about “the present truth” (NKJV; or “deep roots in the truth” [NIRV]). What was “present truth” in Peter’s time? What is it in ours?