

## THE SECOND LETTER OF PETER - PART II

### A LIFE BASED ON FAITH

I. The letter gives the theme that the power and knowledge of God has been given through the apostles so that we may rise from corruption to life with God.

A. In the Pauline letters, as well as 1 Peter, there would be a prayer of thanksgiving right after the introduction. Instead, this letter focuses on the things that God has given His church.

B. This sentence lists three things God gives "us," which could mean the apostles in particular, the early disciples and missionaries, or possibly all Christians. In any case, the gifts are not received by each person alone, but rather in the context of the whole Church.

1. The power of God has given to the Church all that pertains to life and holiness. The claim is nothing less than that the apostles have received all means of salvation and the path to eternal life. This possession of all the means of salvation is part of what it means to say, as we do in the Creed, that the Church is holy. See Catechism 2824.

2. All of these things are given through the knowledge of Jesus Who called "us" to His own glory and excellence.

- The promise is nothing less than that, by truly knowing Jesus we are called to share the glory and excellence of His glorified human nature and even, in a mysterious way, to share in His divine life. Jesus promised such a sharing in His life before, for example, by the image of the vine. See John 15:1-10. St. Paul and St. John likewise indicate that full sight of God will transform us into His image. See Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2; see also 1 Cor. 3:16., 6:19 (describing the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit.).

3. The letter again emphasizes that God has granted "us" (again the leaders or His people together) precious and very great promises that we would escape from this world's corruption and slavery to desire to rise to the heights of divine nature.

- In the pagan world, it was thought that some particularly great people favored by the gods might themselves

become like the gods (which also typically meant as arrogant and power hungry as the gods could be.)

- In ancient Judaism, a few selected people, e.g., the kings, the prophets or the angels, or sometimes the whole nation of Israel as a collective whole, were considered in some way adopted sons of God. See, e.g., Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2, 89:21-28 (the king); Ps 29:1; Job 1:6 (the angels); Ex 4:22; Hosea 11:1 (the nation of Israel; Wis 3:18 (the just in general). But the idea that each person could be a personal sharer in divine life was new with Jesus' ministry.

II. The letter then exhorts the faithful to a life consistent with that glory we have been promised.

A. When St. Paul had spoken of the glory we have as dwelling places of God, he also did so in the context of warning against vices that prevent that life from living within us. See, e.g., Rom. 8:28-39 (encouragement in time of persecution); 1 Cor. 3:10-20, 6:14-20 (warning against vices); Col. 3:5-17 (contrasting a life of the spirit and an earthly life.)

B. Here the letter describes an ascension of the spirit from faith to love (with steadfastness perhaps as the substitute for hope.) The progress sweeps across the range of the moral life, with aspects dealing with our relationship with God (faith, knowledge and holiness) combined with the virtuous life in dealing with the outside world (self-control, steadfastness and brotherly affection), along with the controlling principle of love. There is no neat dividing line between the different aspects; they all grow together.

- St. Paul likewise describe the virtues and fruit os the Spirit growing together in the midst of the world, and with the Holy Spirit. See Rom. 5:3-5; Gal. 5:22-23. There also the life with God involves both good conduct (both in terms of resisting evil and growing in mutual charity) and a growing relationship with God working together.

- The letter refers to a distinction between brotherly love, or regular affection (philadelphia) and the more perfect love that God calls us to (agape.) Cf. John 21:15-19. The former is in no way left behind, but leads to the greater love, a love that the pagan world did not know.

C. The letter promises that such progress will make us sure that we are being fruitful in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The reference here is to an exalted knowledge (epignosein) as opposed to more regular knowledge (gnosi) that the letter referred to in the previous sentence describing the general progress of the Christian life.

- By contrast, lacking these gifts is blind to the great gifts God gives us through the knowledge of Jesus. See also 1 John

2:7-11.

- The letter especially warns those who have been cleansed from old sins, i.e. people who have received baptism, but now do not live out a life in the knowledge of God. The idea is that merely entering the faith is not enough; this life of faith must be maintained. See Gal. 5:18-21; James 1:19-27.

D. On a more positive note, the letter then calls for the readers to make their election firm.

- It is God who elected us, but we confirm the election by our own choice. See Rom. 8:28-30.

- The letter gives an image of this life as a journey during which sin is stumbling and a worldly life is in darkness. But the knowledge of faith gives light for our journey such that, the more light we have, the less likely we are to stumble.

- The journey is to an entry into the eternal kingdom. The image of a kingdom was a very common one used by Jesus, with over 130 references to it in the Gospels. See especially Matt. 5-6, 13; Mark 10; Luke 9-13. But the context is generally in terms of the usually worldly values being turned upside down. See, e.g., Matt. 5:3, 19-20, 19:12-24; Luke 18:16-29; John 18:36. Here too there is a call to defy the world in order to journey to the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

- Noteworthy, the letter refers to the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Jesus and even St. Paul referred to the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. See, e.g., Matt. 5:2-20, 6:33, Mk. 1:14-15, 4:26-30, John 3:3-5; 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Gal. 5:21. The only two exceptions refer to the kingdom in the context of being both God's and the Son's. See Eph. 5:5; Col 1:13. The absolute reference to the kingdom belonging to Christ is another indication of His divinity.

E. The entire passage is written in terms of the two ways, one way to love, light and eternal riches, and the other to darkness. This view of life as having two ways, one to life and the other to death, is common in wisdom literature. See, e.g., Matt. 7:13-14, 24-27; Duet. 30:15-20; Ps. 132:8-11; Prov. 1:8-33; Wis. 1:1-15; Didache ch. 1-6; Epistle of Barnabas ch. 18-20.

III. The epistle then turns to an emphasis on the author's and his associates' reliability.

A. The first argument is from personal witness. It refers especially to the Transfiguration, which showed forth the glory of God.

1. The usual emphasis in the New Testament is that there are personal witnesses to the risen Christ. See, e.g., Acts 1:22, 3:11-18, 10:41; 1 Cor. 15:1-11.
2. Here instead the author focuses on his personal witness to Christ's glory in what appears to be the Transfiguration. Matt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-35. Possibly the reason is that the false teachers were not denying the Resurrection, but rather the fact that the glory and life we are promised comes from Jesus Christ and Him alone. See 2 Peter 2:1. Or possibly, they said that it was permissible to live in a manner that did not respect the holiness of the body. See 2 Peter 2:18; see also 1 Cor. 6:15-20
3. There were three witnesses of Christ on the mountain of the Transfiguration, Peter, James and John, although they presumably told others after Jesus rose from the dead. James was the bishop of Jerusalem and was martyred by Herod Agrippa in 42 A.D. See Acts 12:2. John would still have been alive at the time of the letter; Peter was martyred by Nero about 67 A.D.
4. The idea here, as with the Resurrection, is that these witnesses could not have been innocently mistaken about what they saw. If stories are about events at some undefined time long ago and/or in some far off land and there are no living personal witnesses, people may innocently and even, to some degree reasonably, believe in them. But with regard to the Resurrection and the Transfiguration, one must conclude that the witnesses are either lying (and so determined to lie that they were willing to suffer martyrdom), insane (but so capable that they overcame all persecution), or telling the truth.
5. There is a poignancy as well to this testimony, for St. Peter is anticipating his death, expressed here as "putting off this tent." See 2 Cor. 5:1-10. The comparison of the body to a tent emphasizes the idea of this life as a journey towards a greater homeland.

B. The letter then refers to Scripture as supporting the words of the Apostles.

1. It describes the "prophetic word" as the lamp shining in the darkness until the "day dawns and "morning star rises." The image is of this world (or at least living in this world) as the time of night. But the words of the prophets shows the way in the darkness.

- The dawning day may be either the end of all things on earth or the time in which the believer's faith is confirmed in

a greater union with Jesus that itself makes clear the truth of the words of the Apostles. See 1 John 1:1-4. Through the reading of Scriptures, the written word of God, one comes into a personal relationship with Jesus the living and eternal Word of God. See Catechism 107.

2. The letter then gives a classic definition of the inspiration of prophecy and, but extension of all of Scripture. See Vatican II Council, Dei Verbum 11. The Holy Spirit inspires men to express the words of God. No one can receive this or any other charisms through their own initiative, but rather they come by God's choice.