

2 Peter 1

FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS IN A FAITHLESS AGE

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Student Guide

Reading the newspaper or watching the nightly news, local as well as global, can be depressing. Crime appears to increase while standards of civility and decency decrease. No matter the sphere of inquiry—law, education, politics, art, technology, science, or even religion—one conclusion seems inevitable: the age we live in is a godless age, faithless age. By faithless, we do not intend to imply people at large have no faith. To the contrary, modern people place their faith in countless “deities.” Rather people at large are moving farther and farther away from the historic Christian faith. There was a time when the United States of America could be rightly called, at least in some religio-cultural sense, a Christian nation. Not anymore. We live in a faithless age. Interestingly, even in the first century the earliest church faced a faithless, godless culture. The Apostle Peter records both what they faced and how to remain faithful in a godless culture. Today’s lesson in 2 Peter focuses on a three-fold formula for Christians to remain faithful in a faithless age.

1. Precious Promises of God (vv. 1-4)

The first factor to consider in the formula for living faithfully in a godless age concerns the very promises God Himself gives His people. Each believer has identical promises from God. Furthermore, indicative of this precious faith we possess are several qualities.

First, we are saved by a Divine Person (vv.1-2). The salvation we have in Jesus Christ indicates personal participation with Him. Indeed one of the Apostle Paul’s favorite phrases in his writings is “in Christ.” We have a personal, intimate knowledge of Jesus when He comes into our lives by faith in Him.

Second, we are saved by Divine Power (v. 3). Everything we need is wrapped up neatly in the Person of Jesus. Nothing else is required but Him. Are we realizing our full potential as redeemed children of God? We may only do so in Christ.

Third, we are saved by Divine Promise (v. 4). according to Peter, God’s promises deliver two life-changing realities. First, through His promises we *escape corruption*. Moral decay is all around the child of God in this faithless age. His promise delivers a second life-changing reality—we *experience regeneration*. When God invades our life through trust in the Savior, we are brought into spiritual union with Jesus, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. No greater truth exists for the child of God than this: God not only walks with us, He also lives in us in this faithless age!

Question: *When you think of God’s power available to you as a believer, what do you think that means for your everyday life? Be specific.*

2. Pure Living for God (vv. 5-11)

Not only do believers stand on God’s precious promises, but also, we remain obligated to live morally pure lives. Peter says believers are to “add to your faith.” By this he does not mean faith is insufficient to save us. In fact the Bible is clear we are saved by faith and nothing else. Rather, Peter is speaking of *spiritual additives* which mark us as believers.

First, spiritual additives equip our life (vv. 5-9). Indeed, a growing believer “adds” faith to faith and virtue to virtue. He or she seeks “virtue” and goodness in all he or she accomplishes in life. In addition, “knowledge” is added. Like earlier, this knowledge is an experiential event, a knowledge based on

personal participation. Next “temperance” is added to one’s life, a temperance which exhibits an obvious self-control. To this patience is piled on deep and wide. Both “godliness” and “brotherly kindness” demonstrate a reverent wonder for the life God gives while getting along with God’s people. Finally, believers learn well the necessary art of “love.” We must love deeply and enduringly. Contrast such virtues we add to our faith with characteristics only a groping Christian may produce (v. 9). The one who fails to grow has “forgotten” his or her sins were “purged” and forgiven. How tragic the believer’s life who fails to grow in Christ adding virtue to virtue in this age of faithlessness.

Second, spiritual additives establish our life (v. 10). Every believer needs firmness and stability in his or her life. The assurance we receive is a gracious benefit God gives to His children. Hence, when we consider our life—not to mention when others consider it—there should be some indication which bears reason to believe we are saved.

Finally, spiritual additives enrich our life (v. 11). One day every believer will enter heaven to the place Jesus promised He is preparing (John 14:1-3). Two ways to enter exist for every Christian. On the one hand, believers may enter abundantly, receiving a profound reward only eternity itself is adequate to reveal. On the other hand, some believers will enter “so as by fire”. While the Bible offers no explanation how some believers *enjoy* rewards while other believers *miss* rewards, we remain confident Peter’s words are both true and relevant: spiritual additives enrich our lives and affect us for all eternity.

Question: *Do you think there is adequate emphasis today on developing the discipline of self-control? Why or why not? What are some things Christians need to especially be cautious about pertaining to self-control?*

3. Powerful Truths from God (vv. 12-21)

Peter’s purpose centered on exposing false teachers and revealing the heresy they proclaimed. And, the only way to deal with heretics and heresy is to have a sure word of infallible authority. Human authority just could not suffice.

First, note the repetition of practical truth. They were to put in practice the truth they already knew. Far too many times we expect God to reveal to us new matters of importance or contours of His will when we are not observing the things He has already clearly revealed to us! *Second, note the presentation of historical truth* (vv. 16-18). Peter insists he saw with his own eyes and heard the Master Himself speak from the Holy Mountain. Peter is testifying as an eyewitness to the glory of the Lord. While we live in an unsure, ungodly age, Peter affirms the life, death, and resurrection of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Third, note the confirmation of prophetic truth. No other passage overflows with the Bible’s own testimony to itself any more than this one does. The *inspiration* of Scripture is stated—“private interpretation.” Inspiration means no prophet made the word of God up out of his imagination or concocted it in his human heart. Instead he was “moved by the Holy Spirit. And, while the words they wrote were their words, the *Holy Spirit inspired them and protected them from human error.*

In addition, *illumination* is stated (v. 19). The Holy Spirit *inspired* the authors. However, while the Holy Spirit does not inspire us as we read the Word, He nonetheless *illuminates* the Word and shines a light in our hearts so we may understand the Word. We build our life on the Word; we live by the Word; we are guided by the Word.

Question: *When you read the stories of the Bible, what benefit do you gain? Does every Bible story and even the passages of Old Testament sacrifice have something significant to teach to Christian believers? Explain.*

Wrap Up

No believer can survive in an age of faithlessness apart from God’s precious promises. Through Him and His trustworthiness, our lives experience purity, an otherwise impossible accomplishment. His Word is stable and sure, a solid platform upon which our faith is built.