



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Peter 1:1-4

“God’s Great Gift for the Days of Apostasy”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] We thank Thee Lord for the word of God which has been given to us to build us up in our most holy faith. And we thank Thee for the exhortation of the Apostle Peter to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee that through the Scriptures we may have this hope and we pray that tonight as we study in the opening chapter of the second epistle that Peter wrote that this may be our experience, that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. We commit the hour to Thee. In his name and for his sake. Amen.

[Message] We are beginning tonight a study of 2 Peter and the title for the messages as a whole, the theme of the entire series is a theological exposition of 2 Peter and we are going to consider 2 Peter in the light of ancient and modern heresies. So we’ll be looking at both the ancient heresies and their relationship to 2 Peter historically. And then we want to look at the things that Peter has to say as they pertain to the heresies that are about us today in 1975. I am sure that Peter, if he were able to speak to us, would tell us that there were many heresies that were abroad in his day and he not only spoke about those that were abroad in his day but he also prophesied of ones that were to come in the future. And I am sure that all of us who keep up with things that are happening in

the professing church of Jesus Christ also realize that there are abroad a great number of different types of heresies. And many of these are being nurtured right in the bosom of the professing church of Jesus Christ.

2 Peter, then, is a track for our times and it is a forthright apostolic admonition against apostasy, not only in doctrine but also in life. We have an illustration of this in what is transpiring in both the Presbyterian church and in the Anglican church. Some of you who may have grown up in the Presbyterian church and may be acquainted with it, as I grew up in the Presbyterian church and as I am acquainted with it by virtue of that fact, may realize it that there are some very interesting things that have been happening in that church.

In fact, about three years ago due to the growth in apostasy in the Presbyterian church in the United States the Southern Presbyterian church there took place a splint in that denomination. And today we have the Presbyterian church in America, a new denomination not entirely located in the south but largely in the South, and a denomination that already has approximately four hundred churches in its church. The basic reasons for the division that existed between the two that have come to pass and that exists now between the two churches are doctrinal differences. And there are also some practical ones too.

As is usually the case when a church split occurs there is a great deal of bitterness, a great deal of acrimony, and a there probably has been a great deal in the split between these two groups within that church. Well, I think that basically that issue was a doctrinal issue. In last year’s *Presbyterian Journal* there was a note on The Editor’s Desk in the editorials, which he entitles across The Editor’s Desk, and in it he refers to a report that one of the reporters of the Richmond Times Dispatch reached after listening to an exposition of the Declaration of Faith the new declaration which is possibly going to be adopted by the old church. And in explaining some of the difference between this new declaration and the ancient Westminster Confession of Faith, which had been the doctrinal

standards of the church, this reporter who had listened to a meeting in which the chairman of the drafting committee of the declaration spoke wrote finally in the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, “Fundamentalist thought holds that man is not in a state of salvation without accepting Jesus as the Son of God, what makes the confessional statement unique in Christianity is that it recognizes that someone can be in a state of grace without having to seek salvation through Jesus.” That was a most interesting comment by a reporter who listened to chairman of the committee explain the new Declaration of Faith. So you can see that if that is true, and many feel that it is true, that in that new Declaration of Faith there is no acknowledgement of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the savior of mankind.

So all of those texts of the Bible that say, “For I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh under the Father but by me,” are no longer valid for those who hold such a declaration. Statements such as, “I am the light of the world,” and, “I am the door, by me if any man enter in he shall be saved and shall go in and out in fine pasture,” again, all of those texts in which the Lord Jesus proclaims himself as the exclusive savior of mankind no longer have relevance to the doctrinal standards of that church.

Now if you read *Time* magazine, this week in *Time* magazine there is also an interesting article in the religion section of the magazine. And this one concerns not the Presbyterian church but the Episcopalian church and it is a rather lengthy article devoted to the change in the prayer book that is in process of being made, and looks as if it may be approved by the Episcopalian church. And probably in 1979 they will have their first holy complete new or first holy new liturgy for U.S. Anglicans or Episcopalians. There’s some very interesting things in this report which the reporter for Time Magazine has given.

He says, for example, “The role of religion in society has altered drastically since 17th Century England, and man’s relationship to God has refined and mellowed.” Now this is the *Time* magazine reporter expressing his own theology. He says that the

relationship between God and man has refined and mellowed since the 17th Century.

That’s a very interesting statement, I’d like to have an exposition of how the relationship between man and God has refined and mellowed since the 17th Century.

But he goes on to point out that in this new liturgy we have references which suggest that the Anglican church is toning down its belief in a final judgment. For example it says, “in the Lord’s Prayer, ‘And lead us not into temptation,’ is rendered flatly as, ‘Save us from the time of trial.’ In the Nicene Creed, ‘Maker of all things visible and invisible,’ becomes, ‘Maker of all things seen and unseen,’ a considerable existential and somatic change.” I don’t really understand what’s the difference between visible and invisible and seen and unseen but the Times reporter seems to find a great deal of change in the two, that escapes me. But he goes on to say, “In the commendation part of the burial service in both rights,” that is, in both expressions of the liturgy, “the phrase, ‘At whose coming in glorious majesty to judge the world,’ is omitted, minimizing the implications of final judgment.” In other words, we may not any longer expect that there shall be a final judgment. And for some of you young people it is interesting to notice, too, that in the marriage service, which also of course is undergoing change, that no mention is made any longer of the ancient admonition, “Those whom God hath joined together let no one put asunder.” That is eliminated, evidently, because it’s not too relevant to modern society.

The marriage service is very interesting because on the page of the article in which these changes are made there is a comparison of the ancient words in the old marriage ceremony and the new words in the new marriage ceremony. For example, in the old you have the verse, “With this ring I thee wed.” In the new, “I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow.” And then, “Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all me, we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness which we from time to time most grievously committed by thought, word, and deed,” evidently the relationship between God and man was not so mellow and not so refined in

those days, and now in the marriage ceremony that part simply reads, “Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed.” Well, that says essentially the same thing.

But now listen to some of these, instead of, “He descended into hell,” we have, “He descended to the dead.” Now that is a very distinct difference. We no longer have the idea of a descent into hell where one is punished for sin, but rather simply descent to the dead where you may have fellowship with the dead. Then instead of, “He shall convert my soul,” the ceremony reads, “He revives my soul,” because, after all, if the soul is not completely dead then it’s simply means revival. But if it is dead, or if it is out of touch with God, it needs conversion. And then finally, “Save me O God, for the waters are come in even to my soul,” now becomes, “Save me O God, for the waters have risen up to my neck.” [Laughter] Now waters that have risen up to the neck are not necessarily fatal, of course, but those that have come in even to my soul mean that we have drowned. So you can see there is a distinct tendency to play down all of those ancient doctrines about the uniqueness of the saviorhood of Jesus Christ and the definiteness of eternal punishment if we do not come to him. After all, you have to leave the congregation with some shreds of respectability when you preach to them. And they are anxious, evidently, to do that.

We look now at 2 Peter chapter 1 and I want to read the first four verses which are our text for tonight,

“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, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: By are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises: that by these ye might be

partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

Peter’s epistle arose out of the struggle with heresy in the churches of Asia Minor. So far as we can tell from the study of the background of this epistle the heresy with which Peter had to deal was a form of Gnosticism in its early stages. Scholars like to speak of an insipient gnostici, Gnosticism in one of its primitive forms. What were the basic tenets of Gnosticism? If we are to understand the New Testament I think it is important that we understand some of these basic tenets of this ancient heresy.

The Gnostics had some peculiar views about God and about man. The basic idea of Gnosticism, I think, if you were looking for a basic idea would be that this universe in which we live is a dualistic universe; a universe with two eternal principles in it. From the beginning of time the Gnostics said there has always been spirit and matter. Spirit is essentially an absolute good. Matter is essentially flawed and evil and imperfect, and out of this flawed matter the world was created.

Now God, the one true God of the New Testament, is pure spirit. After all, the Lord Jesus said, “God is spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.” The Gnostics believe that God was pure spirit and because he was pure spirit he could not possibly touch or even handle that which was flawed and evil. So he could not have any direct contact with matter.

Well how was creation effected, then, if God is so holy and so pure that he cannot touch or have contact with creation, how is it possible for us to affirm a God who creates? Well God, according to the Gnostics, had emanated from himself, come out from himself, a series of aeons or angelic beings. These aeons are emanations, came out of, proceeded out of, God in a long series. Each one a little bit less holy than the one before him. The first aeon, the first angelic being, who proceeded out of God, the first emanation was a very holy emanation but a little less holy than God. And finally after a long series of

emanations, one after the other, the first out of God, the next out of the first aeon and so on, finally there came an aeon and an emanation that was evil enough to be responsible for the creation of the universe. And so this distant and secondary god is the god who is responsible for the creation of the universe.

So we have according to Gnosticism, then, a god who is responsible for the creation, a wicked god. And the God who is pure spirit, the Father in heaven, he is the good God. Now this ancient, this old god, was, as the emanations proceeded from God, these emanations became more ignorant of the truth, of the true God. They also became more hostile to the true God so that finally when the aeon came forth that was responsible for the creation of the world, that aeon, that angelic being, that god, was an ignorant god, a hostile god, and an evil god.

The Gnostics, some of them at least, identified this second god, this evil god, with the God of the Old Testament whereas the pure God, the holy God, the God who was pure spirit was identified with the God of the New Testament. So they regarded the God of the Old Testament as quite ignorant of the true God, hostile to the true God, and different from the God of the New Testament. So the God of creation is different from the God of revelation and redemption.

Now on the other hand, Christianity of course believes in an only God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To Christianity there is only one God in creation, there is only one God in redemption, there is only one God in providence. And so Christianity and Gnosticism are diametrically opposed at this point. And incidentally in modern theology one finds these ancient Gnostic philosophies reviving. Christian Science is nothing more than ancient Gnosticism. A new name but essentially the doctrines of Christian Science are the doctrines of ancient Gnosticism and the doctrines of unity. Kansas City Christian Science, according to some, is the same kind of thing.

Now furthermore, the Gnostics had other doctrines. They believed that in order for a man to be redeemed he must traverse the course of the aeons back to God. He

must begin with the lowest of the aeons, or emanations, and move on back till ultimately he comes to know the true God. Now in order to do this one must know certain esoteric recondite knowledge which only the Gnostics possessed. So they claim to have the knowledge of the true God. They spoke about knowledge, that’s why they’re called Gnostics. They claim to have the true knowledge.

Now we’re going to see as we read through 2 Peter that he lays a great deal of stress on having true knowledge. So evidently he was exposed, he knew his readers were exposed to forms of heresy that anticipate the Gnostic heresies of the 2 Century. The Gnostics divided men into two types of people. There were those who were spiritual pneumatikoi, and then there were those who were psychikoi or natural. And incidentally you recognize, of course, immediately the likeness to the Apostle Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 and 3 in which he says there are natural men and Paul explains that these natural men are men who do not understand the revelation of God. Jude says they are men who don’t have the Holy Spirit. So the natural man is the unsaved man.

The pneumatikoi, according to Paul, were the mature men. Now the Gnostics used this distinction but they think of men as only divided into the two classes. And furthermore they believe that these pneumatikoi, the followers of these spiritual men, they were so spiritually and intellectually equipped that they could become as good as Jesus, so the Gnostics thought. Irenaeus when he speaks about them he says, “Some of them believed that some of them could become even better than the Lord Jesus and could attain direct union with God,” if you were a pneumatikoi, one of the pneumatikoi.

Now the psychikoi, they were ordinary people. They were people like you out here in the audience. And they had physical life but their pneuma was quite undeveloped and they were incapable of ever making the intellectual effort and of gaining the intellectual wisdom which would enable them to climb the long road to God. So the pneumatikoi were a kind of small and select minority. To use biblical language,

they were the elect. And the rest of the people, the psychikoi, were just the natural folk who unfortunately could never attain to the knowledge that the Gnostics had.

Now those who were interested, however, and who wanted to become like the Gnostics, knowledgeable in divine things, join the movement, listened to their esoteric and recondite secret teaching, and as they learned it thought that by possessing this teaching they were able to ascend the scale and ultimately come to the knowledge of God, and they were smart and very intelligent. These are the basic tenets of Gnosticism.

Peter’s answer, you can sense immediately, is going to be true knowledge is not found in the false doctrine of the Gnostics. True knowledge is found in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Will you notice what he says right here in the opening of this particular epistle,

“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.”

This is where the true Gnosticism lies. If we really want to know truth we must be related to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I want you to notice the numbers of times that the apostle uses the term knowledge. Will you look at the 3rd verse? “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” Will you notice the 6th verse? “And to knowledge.” Also in the 5th verse, knowledge. Then in the 6th verse, knowledge. Then in the 8th verse, “For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Then in the 16th verse, “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And the 20th verse, “Knowing this first.” In other words, Peter is claiming that true knowledge exists in the knowledge of the Christian revelation found in the Lord Jesus.

In these opening four verses which we have read for our Scripture reading Peter reminds his readers of three important gifts of God after he has saluted them in his salutation. So let’s look now at the salutation and the gift of faith. The coming rebukes that Peter is going to give lead him first to identify himself and present his credentials. For after all, if you’re going to rebuke someone you should establish the grounds for your right to rebuke and that is what he does, he says, “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle.”

The term servant, of course, stresses his solidarity with his readers. I am a servant, I am not attempting lord it over you, I am a servant. But at the same time he reminds himself that he is - he reminds them that he is an apostle. So he has a relationship to the Lord. He is sent by the Lord but at the same time he is a servant for them.

Then he says that he is addressing his epistle to those who have obtained like precious faith with us. Now there are two possible interpretations of this expression. He could be saying, “Like precious faith with us Jews.” So he could be saying, “You are primarily gentiles but you have obtained like precious faith with us Jews.”

Now he does use a term that he uses over in Acts chapter 11, in verse 18, when he does seem to be drawing this contrast between the Jews and the Gentiles. If you’ll take your New Testaments and turn over to Acts chapter 11, and verse 18, you will see what I’m speaking about. Now Peter is giving an account in the 11th chapter of how he had preached the gospel in the house of Cornelius and in the midst of his description of what has transpired he tells them that when he preached the gospel in the house of Cornelius the Holy Spirit came upon them as he did upon the apostles and others on the day of Pentecost in the beginning. And he concludes with, “Forasmuch then as God gave

them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?”

Now notice that expression, “The like gift.” Now the word that is used here is the same idea that is found right over here in 2 Peter chapter 1 where he says, “To them that have obtained like precious faith.” So Peter has said he gave them the same give or the like gift as he did unto us, here he says, “Those who have obtained like precious faith with us,” is he not saying, some have said, is he not saying here, then, “You have the same kind of faith, you gentiles, that we Jews have?”

Now that’s a possible interpretation. But as you read through 2 Peter you’ll discover that he rarely if ever draws any contrast between the Jews and the gentiles throughout the remainder of the epistle. So that interpretation while it does have some appeal probably is not to be preferred. He probably is not speaking about the distinction between gentile and Jew, but rather the distinction between the ordinary Christian and the apostles. So he is saying then, it seems to me, “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them who have obtained the same faith that we apostles have. Now you are no different. You have the same relationship to God that we apostles have because you have the identical faith that we have.

Now he stresses in his first epistle the significance of faith because he says in 1st Peter chapter 1, and verse 8, “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” And over in John chapter 20, and verse 29, the Lord Jesus speaks about the blessedness of those who have not seen and yet have believed, comparing their blessedness with the blessedness of the apostles who saw and believed.

So it seems to me then that what Peter is saying is simply this, that you who have believed in the Lord Jesus have obtained the same faith that we apostles have received. So here is a blessed equality for the poorest level faith who ever crept into heaven, as Mr. Spurgeon liked to say. It means simply that the simplest Christian who has believed in

the Lord Jesus Christ has the same faith that the great Apostle Peter had as well as the rest of the apostles.

So I am addressing my letter, then, the apostle says, to those who have obtained the same precious faith that we have. I have with me the New International Version. And the New International Version, that is a version that I worked on part of myself with a number of other men, but in this second verse of this particular epistle upon which I did not work, incidentally, the translators here have said, “Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.” That’s very clear and right to the point. You have received a faith that is as precious as the faith of the apostles.

Our text in the Authorized Version, I don’t know how many of you are looking at the Authorized Version but I have it before me, in the Authorized Version my text reads, “Who have obtained like precious faith.” This word translated “obtained” is the Greek word *lambano*. *Lambano* is a word that means “to receive” and it was used of the reception of something by lot or by the divine will. Well when someone receives something by lot that’s a gift. And so the great stress of this word, “Obtained like precious faith,” or received, I don’t know what your text has, received is upon the fact that it is a gracious gift.

So here, then, is a text that states right in the beginning that faith is a gift of God. “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received the same precious faith that we have.” Faith is a gift of God. Faith is not something that we work up ourselves. Faith is something that God grants to us. We cannot believe of ourselves. We do not have the power to believe of ourselves. There does not exist within the deadness of the human heart, and the rebellion of the human heart, and the corruption of the human heart, and the wickedness of the human heart in spite of the more refined and mellowed relationship that exists between ourselves and the Lord in 1976. There does not exist in the human heart any power by which it may lay hold of

God of itself. You see, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring a man to faith in Christ. For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. This whole by grace through faith salvation is the gift of God so that it is all a product of the working of God the Holy Spirit.

So if you have been enlightened so that you have come to understand the Lord Jesus as the savior of men and as the one who gives eternal life and you’ve received that life then you shouldn’t thank God for the salvation and yourself for the faith but you should thank him for the salvation and for the faith by which you relied upon that which Jesus Christ had done. Faith is the act of man. I am not saying that faith is not the act of man. Faith is the act of man. But the key point is from whence does the faith come? Does it come from myself or does it come from God who initiates it within my heart? And of course the latter is the scriptural truth. And if it is true that he initiates the faith in my heart then the act of faith which I myself commit or which takes place within my heart, Orphea used to call it a mental movement, that act of faith is mine but it comes from God.

Now if this is true then salvation is of grace. If it is not true then we should stop speaking about salvation being totally of grace. Because in that case salvation would be from what Christ has done and what I add to it. My faith in the Lord Jesus. This is why from the time of Augustine down through the time of the Reformation into the present time there has been a small remnant in Christianity who have sought to proclaim the true grace of God and deliver the saints from the Semi-Pelagianism of faith being a work of man which we contribute to our salvation. That is of the greatest importance.

Now you who’ve heard me preach often you know how deeply I feel about this. And the reason I feel so deeply about it is because the grace of God in our salvation is at stake. And if it is not holy of grace it is not of grace. It is a works salvation. Oh, not quite as much a works salvation as some other works salvations, but nevertheless it is essentially a work salvation if we provide of ourselves anything. So we must stress that

and I must say of you, I love every one of you but if you are not clear on this point you are not clear on the doctrine of salvation. I hope you don’t mind my rebuking you a little bit if you fall in the company of the Semi-Pelagians.

I want you, when you get to heaven -- and I don’t know whether you are going to get to heaven if you don’t understand salvation is by grace -- but I want you when you get to heaven to have fellowship with the saints. I want you to be able to get along with Augustine and get along with Calvin and get along with Luther and get along with Peter and Paul. If you get up there and you don’t have their doctrine you’re not going to be happy there [Laughter]. So I want you to be happy there.

Now Peter goes on to say that this like precious faith is through the righteousness of God and our savior Jesus Christ. Now when he says, “God and our Savior Jesus Christ,” it would be nice if you did have another rendering here because our text in the Authorized Version is not accurate. I must confess I had a great deal of fun when a few years back, fifteen or twenty years ago, the Revised Standard Version came out and a lot of Bible teachers around the country who were naturally upset over another version being published that they thought was published by a group of liberals and therefore they went through it looking for manifestations of liberalism and they found some because there are quite a few in the Revised Standard Version. And they began to attack it and finally Dr. Barnhouse wrote an article in *Eternity Magazine* entitled “I Have Read the Revised Standard Version” because it was obvious a lot of these critics had never even bothered to read it, they had gone through it looking for a few little pet mistakes that they were sure that the translators had made, and they did make a few. But they also clarified a couple of texts which are not clear in the Authorized Version.

In the Authorized Version, for example, we read here, “To them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ and that could be understood to mean there are two different people here. There is God and then there is our savior Jesus Christ. But the Revised Standard Version

translators translated it correctly, “Through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Only one person and this one person is called, “Our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

This New International Version has, “To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Again, you see, only one person. So the one person who is referred to here is, “Our God and Savior Jesus Christ,” one person. The Greek text demands that there be just one person who is our God and our savior Jesus Christ.

Now of course to know that God is our Lord Jesus Christ or our Lord Jesus Christ is our God and savior does not save any man. A man can know this doctrine as a doctrine and not be saved. He can affirm the facts of the gospel and not be saved because salvation comes not from simply the knowledge intellectually of the facts of the gospel, though that’s necessary. But it comes from reliance upon the truths that are expressed by the facts of the gospel.

Now Peter says, “They have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ,” and then he says, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and Jesus our Lord.” Now this is a polemical thrust. He is now attempting to stir up these believers to notice the heresy of the Gnostics about them. And so he talks about through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. He wants them to know that grace and peace do not come by the bogus knowledge of the heretics but grace and peace come through true knowledge of Jesus Christ. And by the way, no one ever gains the favor of God through false doctrine and no one ever gains a sense of peace through false doctrine. You may have a kind of false peace for awhile but you never will have the true peace with God until you have the right doctrine.

So he says, “May grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” This is why I do not think that we can ever expect Christians to find any deep satisfaction in the charismatic movement because there is no truth in

their peculiar doctrines and sooner or later it will be seen to be what it is, bogus knowledge.

Some of you were here not long ago, I don’t remember exactly when I referred to this, but you may have remembered that I made reference to a very famous Russian. This Russian man was named, probably many of you have heard of him, Gregory Alexandrovich Potemkin. He lived from 1739 to 1791. He has quite an interesting story, he lived in the time of Catherine the Great. He was a brilliant statesman according to many men, and he was quite a field marshal. He conquered a number of new territories, he created new armies, he built up the Russian fleet, and he expanded the country’s borders. Many of his achievements are achievements that caused Catherine to be labeled Catherine the Great, for many of them were ultimately his.

But he had a fatal flaw in his character and it was that he over exaggerated nearly everything that he did and this quirk is supposed to have reached its peak when he began to boast to Catherine about the building that he had done in the outlying regions of Russia. He told her these things that he had accomplished and he painted such a lavish and beautiful picture of the villages and cities that he had been responsible for building up that she determined that she was going to go take a look at them. And then, of course, things became very difficult. He hastened out of the city as fast as he could, he went as fast to the south as he possibly could, he gathered as many men together as he could, and he built up an entire city in a very short time.

Now this is all according to the story about Potemkin. And then when Catherine came she was paraded down the streets of one of the cities which was constructed very much like a Hollywood stage prop and evidently he had people there and she went down very rapidly and didn’t notice that it was not a real city at all. And after that there arose the expression, “Potemkin Village.” A Potemkin Village is a village in which is all façade, in which there is no reality. Incidentally that story is also greatly exaggerated. He was an eccentric man but there is no real historical proof that he ever did that. But nevertheless

the figure of speech of Potemkin Village has come into our language expressing that which is supposed to be something but it’s really nothing. And in my opinion, if I may just pass an opinion, the charismatic movement is one giant Potemkin Village and we are going to see as time passes that it does not satisfy those who are most deeply involved in it. True salvation comes through the knowledge of our God and of Jesus our Lord, as Peter says.

Now the first gift is, then, the gift of faith. We want to look now at the gift of life and godliness. The gift of faith is great but I presume that most of us would agree that the gift of life and godliness is, if anything, even greater. These verses, verses 3 and 4, are linked with the last part of verse 2. Grace and peace are multiplied in knowing him because God has given us all we need. Notice he says that he has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. Eternal life and true piety are the mighty gifts of God. If a man is to know Jesus Christ as his Savior and to possess salvation and he is to have the knowledge that is true knowledge, this knowledge is to express itself in piety.

Now as we shall see in this epistle the reverse is true of those who don’t have the true knowledge. Those who don’t have the true knowledge will sooner or later manifest the fact that they don’t have the true knowledge in the ungodliness of their lives. So we who are Christians and make a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus we have a responsibility. God gives us new life and that new life must manifest itself in holiness of life. If there is no manifestation of a changed life we have no reason to think that we have the salvation that is referred to in the word of God. I’m not denying the doctrine of eternal security, I believe that more strongly than most of you, I think. Now you can debate with me afterwards and say no you don’t, that’s fine, I welcome that. But I want you to know that there is no such thing in the Bible as comfort for the ungodly. The man who has true faith in Jesus Christ manifests that faith in a transformed life. That doesn’t mean he cannot fall. David fell. Others have fallen. But in the life of a genuine believer there is a transformation. I’m not speaking about that which we talk about, I’m not

talking about getting up on a platform and telling about your experience. I am talking about that which through the years is a growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

So he has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. I think that’s something that we all should pray about. Get down by the side of our beds and ask God to manifest in our lives and through our lives. The godliness and the piety, it’s a good word, piety. That is characteristic of the saints of God. He says that this comes through the knowledge of him who has called us by his glory and virtue. Now that calling by his knowledge and virtue, or perhaps to his knowledge and virtue, is a reference to the saving work of the Lord Jesus.

Well let’s look finally, of course we must hurry, at the gift of the promises which is given for us in verse 4. He says in verse 4, “By which.” That is, by the glory and the excellence that he’s just referred to. We have been called by glory and virtue. What does he refer to when he says we have been called by glory and virtue? Well I think he’s talking about that which is the manifestation of the glory of God and that which is the manifestation of the excellence of God. What is the great manifestation of the glory and excellence of God? What is the supreme manifestation of the glory and excellence of God?

Why surely you must answer that the great manifestation of the glory and excellence of God is the saving intervention and incarnation and suffering of our Lord our savior Jesus Christ. It is in the work of our Lord Jesus in becoming our savior, in carrying out his saving ministry, and finally dying as a penal satisfaction on the cross at Calvary that we see the supreme glory and excellence of God. And it’s a marvelous glory and a marvelous excellence to realize that God has devised this magnificent plan of salvation to reach sinners such as you and I are. Magnificent. We have been called by this manifestation of his glory and virtue and through these things he states, “By which things are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises.” Some things are great and

not precious like large rocks. Some things are precious and are not great, like jewels. But what we have here are promises that are both great and precious.

What are they? What are these promises? Well I guess it would be wrong to attempt to identify them because they include all of the promises that have to do with redemption. Let me mention a few that are mentioned in the context here. There is, first of all, the word of God in verses 19 through 21. That’s one of the greatest of all the works of God, the giving of the word of God to his saints. And then there is the forgiveness of sins that he mentions in the 9th verse. Forgiveness of sins, one of another of the greatest of the promises of God. All of our sins have been paid for by the Lord Jesus Christ when he cried out, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me,” he, under the judgment of God, bore the sins of sinners. And mine were there. And I have forgiveness of sins. Just as when the children of Israel left Egypt and came finally to the Red Sea and then went through the Red Sea and when Pharaoh and his hosts attempted to follow they were drowned in the Red Sea, so the enemies of the saints of God have been drowned in the blood of the cross at Calvary and the forgiveness of sins is the result.

He also speaks about the future hope of the coming in kingdom of Christ in the 11th verse, “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” So we have the word of God, we have the forgiveness of sins, we have a future hope. Many other of these blessings are referred to in these exceedingly great and precious promises.

And then he says, “That by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” Isn’t that striking? Partakers of the divine nature. This is the in for which the promises are given. This is what the jewels are for. They have been given to us that we might be partakers of the divine nature. Now what does that mean? Does that mean that we are going to become gods? That we are partakers of the divine nature, does that really mean that? The philosophers are taught that. Some of the others of the heretics have thought that. They have said that as a result of salvation we become gods. That’s not true. Even

Calvin said that what this means is that these promises have been given to us to deify us. There are not many things that Calvin was so wrong on as this. Hate to mention it because I like Calvin. But this just proves that he was human like everyone else.

Now he goes on to explain and he does not mean in the context that we become gods, but he uses the expression which is very misleading. What do you think it means? Do you really think it means that we become gods? No. There is only one God. You who’ve been studying systematic theology with me you ought to have been saying all along, “No, no, no!”

Now we studied the attributes a long time ago and the attributes are the properties of God. And I divided the attributes into the in communicable attributes and the communicable attributes. The incommunicable attributes are those attributes that belong, it seems, to God alone. Now there are certain aspects of these that do touch us but these are attributes that particularly belong to God, self existence. He’s the only being in the universe who has self existence. Every one of us has our existence from him. He’s the only independent person. Everybody else is dependent. Now we don’t have time to expound the attributes. If you’re interested there is a series of fifteen messages on the attributes that are available in the taped ministry. Simplicity, unity, spirituality, infinity. Now if you’re sitting out in the audience and you don’t remember what all of these things mean, you better review. Immensity, and omnipresence, eternity, immutability, these are things that belong to God. And as you can see, most of these things belong only to God. Only God is immutable. Only God is eternal. Only God is infinite. Only he is perfectly one. Only he possesses simplicity, not parts.

Then there are communicable attributes. These attributes which we especially seem to possess as individuals who are created in the image of God. Knowledge, in God’s case, of course, he has all knowledge. But we have some knowledge, at least some of us. Wisdom, these are mental or intellectual attributes. Power and will, these are volitional attributes of God. Goodness, holiness, righteousness, these are moral attributes

of God. These attributes are communicable. They are senses in which we share in these things.

Now these are also the properties of the divine nature. So when Peter states here that through these we might be partakers of the divine nature he refers especially not to the fact that we share in God’s essence which only Father, Son, and Spirit share. But we share in the relative attributes of God; his glory, his love, his purity, his holiness in measure, just as we’ve been speaking about here. In other words, our sharing in the divine nature has reference to the communicable attributes of God. That type of thing rather than the other. That’s why it’s necessary for us if we are to know the Scriptures we must also know theology so that we might become partakers of the divine nature. There is a sense in which we do, there is a sense in which we don’t.

Then he adds, finally, “Having escaped.” Now in the original text that participle is in the aorist tense and it suggests a definitive act that is true of all believers. Every single believer in the Lord Jesus has escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Now that is why a moment ago I said that every true believer in Jesus Christ must manifest the results of what has transpired in his heart, for he has escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. If the life after profession of faith is nothing but a life of lust and unholiness and sin it is the evidence that the act of becoming a Christian has not yet taken place, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. So as a Christian, my dear friend, the vows of God are upon you. You are God’s priest, you are to act as such. You are God’s saint or holy one, you are to act as such. You have God’s choicest gifts of life and godliness, these are to be seen in your life. May your life display the grace of God that has so wonderfully wrought its salvation in you.

Our time’s up. Next week we want to see what Peter means by making your calling and election sure. I thought that God did all of the work of electing, how is it possible for me to make my calling and election sure? Let’s bow in prayer...

“God’s Great Gift for the Days of Apostasy” by S. Lewis Johnson
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[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]