



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 2 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

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Godliness is one of those terms that often sounds really abstract. The best way to understand godliness is simply experiencing Jesus as a way of life. It's not that there is a secular part of me and a sacred part of me. It is a way of life! Jesus penetrates every area of my life. One of the unique things about being a farmer is it's not really a job. It's not a 9:00 to 5:00; you don't punch in and punch out. It is a way of life. If you don't want that, if you can't settle into that, you're never going to make it as a farmer. It's even unique in the sense that the farmhouse sits on the farm. Most of us, when we're done with work, we go home. Think how different that is for a farmer. It's right there; home is right in the middle of the farm because it's a way of life. That's godliness. It's something that's a part of every area of my life. If you have parts of your life that are disconnected from your Christian faith—little private secrets and things—and you kind of have your business way and you have your Jesus way, this is never going to work for you. You have to think about working your way backwards. Why isn't this making sense? Do I lack the perseverance? Do I lack the self-control? Do I lack an understanding of what's true? Do I just not even want this? So you kind of process through the steps and figure out why that is.

...and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. (Ch.1, Vs. 7)

There is the Greek word *phileo*. It's where we get our word Philadelphia. It's a very high form of love; it's kind of a brotherly love, about compassion and kindness to others. The last one is *agape* love, which is the highest, self-sacrificing form of love. I think sometimes we make too much of a distinction between these, but basically the last two represent the harvest. It's kind of the top of the journey—this sacrificial, self-giving love that Jesus said should define His Christ followers. “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you *agape* one another.” Over the last decade or so it has been very interesting how a lot of people, including a lot of Christians, have bought into this idea that you know, truth is overrated and we've gotten kind of carried away, unbalanced, with learning truth and, “That's not all that important; we just need to love one another.” So it's really helpful to see what Peter just said. You virtually cannot love with the love of Christ, unless you're consistent in the previous steps. In other words, love is the final step in the journey. It's the outflow of this life. If you skip the previous steps, you simply have no capacity to love as Christ loved. So it's necessary. That's like the harvest; that's the evidence of the life of Christ in you. You work your way backwards and try to figure out if that isn't there, where the breakdown is.

For if these qualities are yours and increasing, (Vs. 8a)

That language is really important. Yours and increasing, meaning this is something that takes time. This is something you learn. This is something you grow in. Nobody goes to bed one night and this is all true of them the next day. The language implies it's a process, a growth process; so as long as we are moving forward and growing in this,

...yours and increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Vs 8b)

Useless...idle...worthless...unfruitful—this is where I'm getting the farm imagery. Peter is using basically farm imagery to say, "If there is a harvest," which is the idea of being fruitful, "it's because of this process that has been true of you in your Christian life which brings forth a harvest." If these qualities are there, you won't be useless/idle/lazy and you won't be unfruitful, but there will actually be a harvest which has been the goal all along. What is the harvest? "The harvest," he says, "is this knowledge, this experience of this life in Christ." Every one of us has this longing deep in our souls for this relationship with Jesus. There's something within us that wants that and longs for it. The harvest is this relationship with Jesus that is built on truth and these steps that Peter has defined. Where is it in this series of steps where it's probably fallen apart for me? I need to back up and figure that out, in order to move forward.

Verse 9:

For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.

Literally self-blinded—that somewhere along the way you lost sight of who you are in Christ, of what it means to be a partaker of the divine nature, of these precious and magnificent promises. Somewhere you got confused; somewhere you lost your vision, and the result of that is that you have lost your way. You haven't really experienced this life that your soul longs for. Verse 10:

Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;

One of the effects of the false teacher is people get so confused. They believe the lies; then their Christian life is ineffective. They start to get discouraged; there is despair. They start to think of themselves as, "I'm kind of a loser-Christian; this isn't going to work," and they ultimately conclude, "I'm not even sure I'm saved!" There are people every year that walk away because they have become so confused, so hurt, so wounded, so convinced this is never going to work for me, and it never dawns on them that what's happened is they are victims of the false teacher. They heard some religious teaching—maybe it's something from the secular world—but somewhere they've gotten confused and they've lost their way. So what Peter is saying is the best way to combat that is you come back and you reorient your sense of calling—who you are as a child of God, and you begin to walk back through these steps. You have a renewed sense of calling and sense of who I am as a Christian, which is then going to require this passion to pursue this, which then moves to the step of knowledge. "I've got to figure out where I got off, where I

went wrong, what got me so confused,” and begin to sort this out and begin to move through these steps in order to experience the life that I long for.

He says at the end of verse 10, “If you do this, you will never stumble.” Now some commentators have what I would consider a bad habit of going to different places in the New Testament, and wherever a word is used, it has to be used that way everywhere in the New Testament. That’s really a very ineffective way to do Bible study. There are Greek words in the New Testament that are used lots of different ways in lots of different contexts. That’s exactly the way we use our English words. This word basically means to simply stumble or to trip or to fall—to not really continue down the path of our Christian lives. Some would say it’s a reference to losing our salvation, but that would be the opposite of everything that Peter has taught us. Peter has taught us that this is a gift received by faith. He told us in 1 Peter Chapter 1 that by the mercy of God you have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection, in order to obtain an inheritance that’s already reserved in heaven for you. It is so sure it’s already reserved in Heaven because it’s not based on your works or performance; it’s based on the righteousness of Christ. He talks about going through difficult trials and tribulations that will basically purify us and make us ready for the return of Christ when we will experience the fullness of our salvation, the fullness of these precious and magnificent promises. So to say all that and then come along and say, “By the way, if you don’t perform up to par, you’re out,” would be as contradictory as it can be. He is simply saying there are a lot of Christians who are dissatisfied with their Christian lives. They feel like they’re stuck; they’re not moving; they’re not going anywhere. “This isn’t what I thought it was going to be.” We can easily be disappointed in our Christian life. “I thought it was going to be different than this.” But if we were to be honest with ourselves, what we wanted was just to go to bed one night and for everything to happen in the morning, which is like the farmer going to bed one night and expecting to wake up and there’s a crop in the field. It’s unrealistic. It’s not going to happen that way. You have been given everything that you need, but you have to do your part, and you have to assess, “Where’s the breakdown for me? Where is it in this series of steps where it has probably fallen apart for me?” And I need to back up and figure that out in order to move forward.

Verse 11:

for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (Vs. 11)

Now again, those who think that stumble means you lose your salvation interpret this that if you don’t stumble, then when you die and get to the other side, you’re welcomed into the Kingdom and you have eternal life. Now one of the huge problems with that interpretation is: that’s implying that eternal life and salvation don’t really begin until after you die, and then there’s this mystery, “Am I in or am I out?” That’s clearly not biblical teaching. It starts the moment you trust Christ as Savior. At that moment you become a partaker of the divine nature. I think what this verse is talking about is in that moment, if you have lived consistently with your Christian life on Earth, then when Jesus returns you enter into the fullness of that; it’s just in alignment with what you’ve been living for in this Earth.

The idea of the entrance is an interesting word that made reference to an Olympic champion. When that Olympic champion would come back home to his or her hometown, there was a celebration; there was a party, and there was this special entrance. It was not unusual that they would actually create a new entrance into the city for that person, and that champion would come in and out of the city through that entrance as part of the celebration of their champion. That's the term that Peter is using and carries the idea that when we live out our Christian life in alignment with who we are in Christ—it's what we talked about in 1 Peter—"I'm on the field; I'm bloodied and I'm bruised, and I'm doing my part to be part of the ultimate victory when Jesus comes back." It's the fulfillment of what I was living for. There's this alignment with the ultimate celebration that sets in, and in 1 Peter he said, "That's ultimately what we want."

It's interesting, right at the end of verse 11 is the word supplied again. That's our word chorus that we talked about. That's the music and the pageantry and the costumes—everything that brings the drama to life. Only this time, instead of it being a command, it's passive, which means this is something that God does. So basically the bookends of this discussion are: God has given you everything you need to live out this Christian faith. Now you're commanded to do your part. And you do your part because ultimately, when you enter into the Kingdom, the ultimate part is God's and he will supply the ultimate music, the ultimate costumes, and the ultimate pageantry to bring this pageant to life forever! We have the opportunity to begin that drama now, that will be ultimately fulfilled then! I think that's in essence what Peter is saying—and it's a very common theme throughout the New Testament.

I find this to be a very practical text to try to sort out: "What does it mean to live out this Gospel truth?" Sometimes that can seem so vague. So it's kind of like: Okay, step by step: Is it something you genuinely want? Is there a passion in your soul; is there a fire in your soul that says, "I really do want this?" Is it possible technically to be a farmer, but just be a lousy farmer that never gets a crop? I guess so; I guess it's possible. But why would you do that? If you have a passion to be a farmer, that should be pretty obvious. In the same way, is it possible to just have a ticket to Heaven and that's all there is to it for you? I suppose, but why would you want that? Why would you want that when your soul is longing for something that is possible in Christ? So it starts with that longing, that passion that moves then to a sense of knowledge. You have to understand what's true in order to sort out the lies. There's no way to skip this step and make it to the next step, so there has to be a commitment to knowing and understanding the truth in order to expose the lies, which then moves me to self-control; a sense of discipline. If I now know what's true, then I want to live that way. I need to know what to say, "No," to; I need to know what to say, "Yes," to, and I need to have a sense of self-control to live out this truth. Is that going to be easy? No, it's actually going to be really hard. That's why I need perseverance. I need courage. This is going to be a fight. I'm going to live contrary to the values and lies of the culture. This produces a godliness. Jesus penetrates every area of my life. No secrets...no pockets...no shadows...no public life and private life. This has to penetrate every area of my life, and that begins to manifest itself in a phileo and agape form of love, which is ultimately what people see...which is ultimately the harvest...which is how people would identify me as a follower of Jesus—a very helpful list to think about where I'm at in my Christian life. God has

done His part, but I have to be willing to do my part. That's what it means to live out this magnificent Gospel truth.

Arnie: Bryan from that seed of faith to harvest of fruit, it's so encouraging to see how you grow through this process and that's a lifelong process, isn't it?

Bryan: Yeah, it absolutely is. Peter says it's yours and increasing, which is a really good reminder that it's a lifelong process. It doesn't happen overnight. And we've already talked about this, but you know sometimes the small farmer works really hard and becomes a bigger farmer, and those things don't just happen, but it's a process. There's no shortcuts. You work hard. There are no shortcuts, but there are certainly people that grow faster than other people, because of their hunger, their desire, their diligence, and that just comes down to how much you want it, how much you want to grow and learn and understand.

Cara: After hearing this message today, it seems like God understands that there's going to be times when we sin and stumble, but He does provide a way for us to get back up on our feet again.

Bryan: Absolutely. So there are going to be times when we mess up and we stumble and it isn't even limited to sin. It can just be limited to things we believe that aren't true, that discourage us, cause us to worry or to make a mess of things. So it can be disappointing. I can feel like loser Christian. But the problem is we haven't understood the truth and believed it so we don't live like it. And we get back to these steps that are necessary, in order to get back on track and live out what is still true of us in Christ.

Arnie: So Bryan, what do you think are the most harmful false teachings of today?

Bryan: Yeah, so that's a really great question. I would say they all root back to Genesis Three. This is at the root of all this and that is, "I can be my own god. Life would be better with me in charge." Therefore I'm determined to create my own significance and value, which comes back to my own performance, which turns life into a competition and a comparison. So those are the lies that then every other lie flows out of. So rather than getting it real confusing, it comes back to that core belief is, do I believe God is God and I surrender? Or do I believe life would be better with me in charge? And then it leads to a whole series of unfortunate beliefs.

Cara: You hear a lot about love these days. A lot of people today, so Christians and non-Christians, that are actually working really hard to love others, but you made a really important point that love without the truth of the Gospel is not really love at all. Can you just talk a little bit more about that?

Bryan: Yeah. So it becomes a very selfish pursuit of trying to find something that will satisfy me, and that's a strange definition of love. So biblically, there is kind of a movement in the church that we don't need so much emphasis on the truth. We just need to love each other. But according to Peter, it starts with an understanding of truth and builds to where the fruit is actually the love that flows out of that. So you skip the front steps, you have no chance of getting to what people actually want. And that is, biblical love is to think of somebody else as more important than myself. And that's a very mature response.

Arnie: So Second Peter brings out that we want to be purposeful in how we live today, but it's just not for today that we're talking about, is it? This really is to prepare us for the ultimate celebration when Jesus brings us home.

Bryan: Yeah, great point. So it's glimpses today. They're moments, but they're moments that give us a sense of the fulfillment of the promise to come. It should just create more and more dissatisfaction with this life and more and more of a longing for the return of Jesus and the fulfillment of the life He's promised.

Cara: So once more, if you feel like your life is stuck in a rut and you're not living out the hope of Christ, what's a good way to get back on track then, according to Second Peter?

Bryan: Yeah. So again, this passage provides a fairly simple way to measure that. So going back through the process, I have to want it. If I don't want it - that's moral excellence, it's that virtuous life - then the rest isn't going to happen. So do I want it? The next, do I understand it - which is knowledge - do I understand the truth and choose to believe it? And then self-discipline, in order to live that way. So one of the questions that we wrestle with is, am I indulging the flesh? If there are areas of my life that I know are sinful and I'm not dealing with it, then I'm stuck and I'm going to be stuck until I deal with what I know is sin in my life. Moves to perseverance - that's the courage to say, I know this isn't easy, but I'm going to live this way. It's contrary to the world, but I'm going to fight for it. It's kind of like going out for a sport. You have to pay the price if you're going to get on the field and make a contribution. That's just the way it works. And then to experience Christ in every area of life as we talked about, Christ as a way of life, godliness, seven days a week. And then ultimately we experience love. So trying to figure out, "Well, where am I and where's it breaking down?" helps me understand then kind of what I need to do to get moving forward again.