

How Can We Survive In A Corrupt World?

Series: Living Godly In A Corrupt World

by Ron R. Ritchie

An old friend greeted me at a couples' conference in Mount Hermon last month and said to me, "You're not going to tell me you've been unfaithful too, are you?" I asked him what he meant. He referred to a certain spiritual leader who had been divorced and who was justifying his actions. "Are you going to be unfaithful like him?" he asked.

His question intrigued me. I was preparing to teach a series at the conference on the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90. In his prayer, Moses surveyed his life and observed that man was given a span of 70 years, or, if God decreed, 80 years. He ended his prayer with the petition, ". . . teach us to number our days so that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom." Moses desired to live his life in faithfulness to his Lord and he wanted the Israelites to share that desire. At most, man is given but 25,550 days on this earth. Moses knew that men would have to appear before God and give an account of how they had spent those days. Thus his desire and prayer was that during his time on earth, and later when he stood before God in eternity, he would have a heart filled with wisdom, a faithful heart that had applied God's wisdom to the reality of daily living.

These words of Moses need to be heard by Christians today. Believers who have a creep desire to remain faithful are being encouraged to compromise their faith. Many voices, both from the world and even from within the church, seek to seduce Christians away from the path of righteousness and faithfulness and join them instead on the road that leads to destruction. How can we who want to remain faithful to our Lord survive in a corrupt world? In his second letter, the apostle Peter, writing to Christians in Asia Minor, addresses this very question. Here we will find words of encouragement, a note of warning, and a ring of hope to sustain us until Jesus returns.

On the Day of Pentecost in 33 A.D., Peter, by the power of the Holy Spirit, preached the gospel of the resurrected Lord Jesus to Jews who had come to Jerusalem from Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (modern Turkey). As a result, many of these Jews came to Christ. Upon their return to their homelands they became a new spiritual community. They shared their possessions, ate the Lord's Supper and worshiped together. The apostles Peter and Paul later ministered separately to these new communities of believers. Around 63 or 64 A.D., Peter visited Paul, who was then a political prisoner in Rome. Shortly before the great fire which destroyed the city on July 19, 64 A.D., Peter wrote his first letter to these churches in Asia Minor, warning them of the coming spiritual, political and social persecution they would suffer under the Emperor Nero. The apostle sought to encourage them during the coming season of suffering.

A year later, Peter himself became a political prisoner in Rome. During his imprisonment, the apostle penned his second letter to these Christians, whom he addressed as "aliens." This time the apostle did not refer to pressures and suffering they would face from outside the Christian community; instead he focused on problems which would arise from within their own ranks. The book breaks down into three divisions: first, the apostle stresses the fact that they need to remain faithful and grow spiritually; secondly, they need to be aware of false teachers; and thirdly, they need to be aware of the second coming of Christ and the mockers who would deny that future event.

We can see that nothing has changed during the two thousand years that have passed since Peter wrote this letter. Every Christian struggles with the temptation to unfaithfulness in this corrupt world. Believers are tempted to believe the false teachers who promise freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; and they are tempted to doubt the second coming of Jesus as the voices of the mockers grow louder and louder. The question facing Christians who desire to remain faithful, therefore, is, "How can we survive in a corrupt world?" First, Peter says,

1. Rely on Christ's Divine Power

2 Peter 1:1-3:

Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who has called us by His own glory and excellence.

In his first letter, the former Galilean fisherman used the name Jesus gave him--Peter, a rock. Sitting in prison as he writes his second letter, the apostle is looking back on his life remembering who he was before he met Jesus, back when he was called Simon, the son of Bar--Jonas, a fisher of fish. Such was his occupation until Jesus one day walked by the shores of Lake Galilee and said to him and to his brother Andrew, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." The two brothers immediately dropped their nets and followed him. Peter remembers his youthful arrogance, his impetuous words, "Lord, I am ready to die for you. Lord, you shall never wash my feet." Now, however, he describes himself as a "bond--servant" of Jesus. This word has the idea of one whose will is swallowed up in the will of another, one who has not only been set free from the shackles of sin, but who has been set free to be a slave of Christ.

Once when our pastoral team was ministering in Australia, I became upset over something one evening. I went outside for a walk and asked God for wisdom to deal with the situation. I was leaning against a street sign, and I suddenly looked up to find that it said "Give Way." (That is how they say "Yield" in Australia.) I concluded that God was telling me, "I want your will swallowed up in mine. Go back and continue ministering in my name." That is what we become when we come to Christ--bond servants, as Peter describes himself in this opening verse.

But Peter also refers to himself as an apostle, one sent to declare the good news that changed his own life, the news that Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, risen from the dead. Peter spent the remainder of his life sharing with all who would listen the invitation he extended to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized because of the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

He describes the recipients of his letter as "those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours." These were second generation Christians. They had never seen Jesus; they had never heard him or touched him. They had not seen his glory nor witnessed his death and resurrection, yet they had placed their faith in the belief that Jesus was God incarnate, the Savior of the world. I think they did so because, first, by the power of the Holy Spirit drawing them they "confessed with their mouths and believed in their hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead," and second, as they observed the lives of the first generation Christians, lives which magnified and amplified the life of Christ, they could not deny the reality of what they witnessed.

You and I are Christians today because through the years, faithful generations of Christians have, by the power of Jesus Christ living in them, made visible the indwelling Christ. What a privilege for us in our generation to exhibit Jesus Christ in such a way that young people among us want to submit their lives to him! Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet believe" I have never seen the resurrected Jesus, but I have seen him live in and through the lives of people in this congregation. That is what encourages me to persevere.

Peter continues, ". . . those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours." It's wonderful to travel overseas and meet people from other countries who have "received a faith of the same kind as ours I have witnessed .1 man in Malaysia boys in a school in Nigeria prisoners in Colombia student in Greece, singles in Holland, all exhibit overwhelming evidence of the presence of the resurrected Lord in their lives all received .1 faith "of the same kind as ours." How our heart should be filled with hope as we see this evidence of the spread of the good news!!

Peter adds that they received this faith "by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ." here he is saying that these Christians did not come to know Jesus because of their own righteousness not by good works by going to church, etc. They had the same faith as Peter and his companions, and that faith came by the righteousness of God. God's Justice refuses to make distinctions between Jew and (Gentile, but God offers his mercy and love to all who put their trust in Jesus as God and Savior .

God is righteous He is holy just, faithful and sinless. In the beginning God created man in his image. Man was without sin. He walked in fellowship with God God then made a covenant with man Man's obedience to the terms of the covenant would result in life, but if he disobeyed, death would enter his experience When tempted by Satan, however, man freely chose to disobey God, and this resulted in sin, shame guilt and death This rebellion infected the entire race of man, as Romans declares, "for through one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners." The issue, then, is man's need of salvation from sin, shame, guilt and ultimate death. He was under the wrath of God and unable to save himself.

The good news is that the answer to man's dilemma was Jesus, symbolized in the Old Testament as the innocent and unblemished lamb of God, slain for the sins of man. Jesus took the place of man when he went to the cross. There he experienced the wrath of God for the sins of the whole world. The result of his sacrifice was that his death satisfied the just and righteous demand of God. All who place their faith in him as Lord and Savior are made righteous in the sight of God. As the apostle Paul wrote, "That I may be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Philippians 3:9). One of our former interns, Blythe Swanson, designed a seven-foot stained glass window for my home, depicting a woman wrapped in a long flowing robe.

The inscription on the window is taken from Isaiah 61:10:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul will exult in my God; For he has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness.

We do not come to God clothed in our own righteousness. We are declared righteous because we come to him wrapped in Christ's righteousness and are loved and accepted by God as a result. Knowing this we have a sense of wholeness, of rightness, a sense of worth, a sense that we are precious in God's sight. If we just lived on this basis, what a blessing we would be in our communities!

In verse 2 we have Peter's greeting to the churches in Asia Minor: "grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." Here he says that his desire for them is that grace and peace may grow in them. They had already experienced God's grace by means of their salvation As a result they experienced peace (the "shalom" of God) because they had been justified. Peter prays that the more they grow in the knowledge of God and his Son Jesus Christ, the more they will realize the depth of his grace and peace .

The Greeks in that first century day sought after the knowledge of God in two ways. First, they sought him by philosophical speculation by the power of thought, using their finite minds they tried to discover the infinite God. And second by mystical experience they tried to gain knowledge of God by looking inside themselves. Peter, however, says here that the way to grow in a relationship with God is by growing in knowledge of his Son Jesus To know the Son is to know the Father. And this is not speaking of knowledge on a philosophical or an emotional level, but rather knowledge on a spiritual level. The more we grow on a spiritual level the more we grow in the grace and peace of God and his Son.

For the past 15 years I have observed Bob Roe, one of our elders a man who has suffered much physically. When Bob talks about his relationship with the Lord, how He provides peace and comfort to him in the midst of so many nights of suffering his relationship with Jesus is so close and real that I am sometimes tempted to look around the room to see if Jesus is sitting there listening to him. There is a man who has an intimate relationship with his Savior. For all those years he has been a model for me of one who is growing in grace and peace.

Peter goes on to further encourage these Christians. They were struggling with their faithfulness in a corrupt

world system, they were being harrassed by false teachers and mockers, so he goes on to tell them about what was available to them to help them overcome. Verse 3a: "seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness . . ." This is the key verse of this letter. It should be the key to our lives. When we asked Jesus to become our Lord and Savior, the invisible but ever-present Lord took up residence in our hearts. He then generously granted from that moment in the past right up to the present moment, everything necessary to live life on this earth. His divine power became available to us to encourage, surround, protect and lead us regardless of the immediate circumstances. As he sat in his prison cell, Peter could look back over the last 30 years of his life and recall how Christ's divine power was generously granted him so that he could teach, heal, preach, encourage, shepherd and disciple. Whatever he needed, God's power granted to him the ability to live as God wanted life to be lived.

I think one of the things we need most in our day is to see that this world is passing away. Christians who have strayed into unfaithfulness need very much to hear this. They have failed to look at life from God's point of view, looking at circumstances instead from a materialistic perspective. Thus they cannot rightly evaluate and discern what is going on around them. They are caught up in a very small world, a world which, according to I John, is passing away. What is it that you need? According to Peter, "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness."

The story of Peter's healing the lame man is recorded in Acts 4. When asked by the Sanhedrin, "By what power and in whose name did you heal this man?" the apostle replied, "I healed him in the name of Jesus." The council's reaction is given in Acts 4:13: "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus." For Peter, Jesus was s the source of the "divine power [that] granted everything pertaining to life and godliness." The power of God is available to you in the very next circumstance in which he wants you to make visible the Lord who dwells in your heart.

Not only does God give us power for everything that pertains to life and godliness, he also gives us godliness,. Godliness is thinking God's thoughts after him, reflecting his holy character, repeating after Jesus, "My will is to do the will of my Father," manifesting godliness in a corrupt world. Mother Teresa, who won the Nobel peace prize in 1979 speaking recently at a national Right to Life convention said in part, "If the love of Jesus is in your heart, naturally you will want to give that love to others. Jesus said, 'Love one another as I have loved you.' Help the unwed mother get a good home. Help her to be loved, to be wanted, to feel that someone wants her . . . Do not be afraid to love until it hurts. . ."That is true godliness, granted as a gift from God.

Then Peter speaks of our Lord's divine call. All of this as made possible, he says, "through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." Our Lord's divine power is available to us because of his gracious divine call. These Jews and Gentiles had come to the true knowledge of Jesus the Messiah as they listened to the good new s preached by his apostles, prophets and pastor--teachers Then Jesus by his Spirit called them out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

The more I study the Scriptures, the more I am humbled and amazed by God's divine call. When I came to Christ, I thought I was the one who was mainly involved in that decision and that God was fortunate to get me! After all, I reasoned, I had answered this call. But the Scripture says that I was chosen "before the foundation of the world"--and nobody asked me! This is a profound mystery and a wonderful spiritual paradox.

John Calvin, the great French reformer and theologian (1509-64) has written:

For the knowledge of God is the beginning of life and the first entrance into godliness . . . He [Peter] makes God the author of this knowledge because we never go to him except when called Hence the effectual cause of faith is not the discernment of our minds but the calling of God And he speaks not of the outward calling, only which is in itself ineffectual, but the inward calling effected by the hidden power of the Spirit when God not only sounds in our ears by the voice of man, but draws inwardly our hearts to himself by his own Spirit.

How to Christians who desire to remain faithful to Christ live in a corrupt world? We must rely on Christ's divine power; and second, we must

2. Rely on Christ's Divine Nature

Verses 1-4:

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

"For by these. . ." By his own glory and excellence, the Person of Christ attracts men and women. His power enables them to respond, and then he continues to grant generously moment by moment". . . his precious and magnificent promises." What are some of these promises? One of them, the promise of life, is spoken of in the apostle Paul's sermon at Antioch: "From the offspring of this man [David], according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus" (Acts 13:23). Here are some more of those promises: Following his resurrection from the dead, our Lord said to his disciples: "I am sending forth the promise of my Father upon you." Speaking out against the mockers who denied the second coming of Jesus, Peter in this very letter says, "The Lord is not slow about his promise [of his second coming] as some count slowness but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (II Peter 3 :9) Also in this letter (3:13) the apostle says, " But according to his promise we are looking for new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." The "precious and magnificent promises" are: that God sent his Son to be our Savior and the source of our divine power; when we place our faith in him our sins are forgiven, we have new life in Christ, we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, our hearts are filled with the hope of the second coming and we look forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

Why did God give these " precious and magnificent promises"? "In order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature," Peter says. "Divine nature" was a familiar term in Hellenistic society. The greekes thought in terms of being absorbed into the various deities they worshiped. They reasoned that by so doing their personal identities would dissolve, thus rendering impossible any personal encounter between man and the gods. but in this phrase, "In order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature," Peter is saying something very different. These promises were made to man so that he could become a new creature in Christ, not by works but by the grace of God. Then, having become partakers of the "divine nature," one who has been born again enters the spiritual state of ". . . having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."

The ancient world was haunted by the fear of corruption. The transitoriness, the pointlessness of life oppressed many of their best thinkers as it does many today. Here is how the apostle Paul describes "the corruption that is in the world by lust,." in his letter to the Ephesians:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind,, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Two thousand years later, there is still nothing new under the sun. Here is how Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), the Irish poet, dramatist and critic, described his life as he looked back over the years:

The gods had given me almost everything but I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease . . . tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in search of new sensations. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and therefore what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud from the rooftop. I ceased to be lord over myself. I was no longer the captain

of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace.

What an incredible contrast to the legacy of the apostle Peter to his spiritual children which we have in this letter! Jesus Christ was their means of escape from "the corruption that is in the world by lust." In the words of the apostle Paul, our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Rom. 6:6).

How can we survive in a corrupt world and remain faithful to our wonderful Lord? We must rely on Christ's divine power; and we must rely on Christ's divine nature. Paul summed it all up when he wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ and it is 'no longer I who live but Christ lives in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me (Gal. 2:20).

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