

A Growth That Endures...



A VERSE BY
VERSE
EXPOSITION
OF THE
EPISTLE OF
2ND PETER

The Sufficiency of the Gospel 2 Peter 1:2-3 (716)

The term “**fifth column**” was first used during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) to describe the work of Francisco Franco’s followers in Loyalist Madrid, Spain. Emilio Mola Vidal, a general under Franco said, ‘**I have four columns moving against Madrid, and a fifth will rise up inside the city itself.**’ “**Fifth column**” refers to [subversive] agents operating within the ranks of an enemy to undermine its cause [and solidarity]. Their activities include spying, sabotage, economic subversion, propaganda, agitation, infiltration, and even assassination, terror, and revolt” (*World Book*, Vol. F-7, 2005, p. 96).

Subversive agents of the devil (his own “fifth column”) had infiltrated the churches. Ignorant and arrogant men who obscured, maligned, and twisted the truth of the gospel had gained a hearing in the churches. This introduction of doctrinal error and reckless living was beginning to undermine the stability of the community of faith. Peter writes to counter this deadly influence. His strategy is to establish believers so firmly in the gospel - to familiarize them so thoroughly with the truth - that error (either in doctrine or practice) would be

readily detected and resisted. Indeed, the point of this entire letter is this: growth in the truth of the gospel fortifies the church against the destabilizing influence of error.

Peter's aim is to stabilize Christians. His first step in this stabilization process is to establish in the hearts and minds of these beleaguered saints the fact that the gospel they have received, believed, lived, and shared with others is the genuine, original, authentic apostolic gospel.

In our trips to various air shows over the years David has collected some rather interesting stuff. One is the autograph of Brigadier General Paul Tibbets. Tibbets was the pilot of the Enola Gay, the B-29 that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, effectively ending World War II. We met Tibbets, talked to him for a few minutes, and had him sign a photograph of his crew in front of the Enola Gay. That photo bears an original, authentic, genuine signature of this famous WWII aviator.

The gospel we have received is the authentic apostolic gospel - approved by Jesus Christ, based upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and producing the gracious benefits won on the cross by Jesus Christ.

In verse 2 Peter mentions specifically the gracious benefits of *grace and peace*. **2 Peter 1:1-2** (ESV) *Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: ² May **grace and peace** be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.* Verse 2 is no mere wish. You see, beloved, in sovereign grace God has begun the good work of redemption in each sinner He has effectually called

to Himself. And according to His wisdom, power, and faithfulness God has promised to carry on and complete what He has begun (**Phil. 1:6**). *Grace, peace,* and ten thousand other spiritual benefits are the heritage of all who have received the Lord Jesus as He is offered in the gospel. And it is Peter's prayer, indeed, his and our expectation that *grace and peace will be multiplied*, that these benefits will thrive, as we grow in the true knowledge of Christ.

Indeed, in verse 3 we are given God's pledge, God's confirmation, that He has already made arrangements for and provided everything we need to live the life to which He has called us. **2 Peter 1:3** (ESV) says, *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.*

This introduces the big idea for this sermon: **the gospel is sufficient to sustain your spiritual life. Repeat.** Richard Bauckham says it like this: "Through the knowledge of Christ [God] has given Christians everything necessary for godly life" (*I Peter*, p. 189). The *NASB Study Bible* says, "God has made available all that we need spiritually through our knowledge of Him ... the knowledge possessed by those in apostolic circles was entirely adequate to meet their spiritual needs" (Zondervan, p. 1822). **The gospel is sufficient to sustain your spiritual life.**

In college I was a member of Sigma Nu fraternity. Sigma Nu was founded in October 1868 as the Legion of Honor by three cadets at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI). Like other fraternities Sigma Nu had its share of "mystic goodies" – handshakes, ceremonies, and vows that only the "initiated" could possess and understand.

Beloved, rest your souls. There is no secret knowledge, no private knowledge, no confidential knowledge, or no knowledge understood by the specially initiated alone that is necessary for salvation. There is no unknown teaching that, up to this time, has laid undiscovered that is necessary for salvation. There is no such knowledge that is necessary for your continuation or growth in the faith. The knowledge of Jesus Christ as offered to you in the gospel is altogether sufficient for your salvation. The true knowledge of God as it is in Jesus Christ is entirely sufficient for your sanctification as well. It is not new knowledge that is required for our spiritual well being. It is growth in the apostolic gospel, in *the faith once for all delivered to the saints* (Jude 3). **The gospel is sufficient to sustain your spiritual life.**

Verse 3 begins with **His divine power**. This refers to the power of Jesus Christ (see Matt. 24:30; Mark 5:30; Lu. 4:14, 5:17, 6:19; Rom. 1:4; I Cor. 5:4; II Cor. 12:9). **Hebrews 1:3** says, *And He [Jesus] is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power*. Peter says in **1:16**, *For we did not follow cleverly devised takes when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Beloved, make no mistake. To give spiritual life to sinners dead in trespasses and sin and then to sustain that life requires the power of God Himself. Man is both unwilling and unable to accomplish such a work on his own.

So it is to the praise of the power of God alone that we know His saving mercies. Since the sinner can neither prepare himself for salvation nor can he merit his salvation, it must be freely given by divine power. Since the sinner is naturally opposed to the things of God it must be divine power working irresistibly and freely that bestows grace upon those for whom it is appointed and purchased.

Since the sinner is filled with corruption and guilt it must be by divine power that grace is given to his graceless soul (see A. Nisbet, *1 & 2 Peter*, p. 224).

Why does Peter incorporate the adjective “**divine**”? He does so to affirm that Christ possesses the same power as God; that He is co-equal with the Father. You see, the false teachers deny Christ (**2:1**). They have turned away from the righteousness that is in Christ (**2:21**). They have cast doubt on His return (**3:4**). Peter takes the battle to them right off the bat by affirming a thoroughgoing Trinitarianism. In **verse 2** he says that Jesus is *God, Savior, and Lord*.

Our own confession of faith affirms as much: The Son of God, the second Person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof; yet without sin: being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man (Westminster Confession of Faith, *Of Christ the Mediator*, VIII, II).

And it is this Second Person of the Trinity who **has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness**. What does Peter mean by **life and godliness**? Here we have the first example of a literary device characteristic of II Peter. Peter makes frequent use of what is known as **hendiadys**. Hendiadys is the expression of a single idea using two independent words connected by “and” instead of the usual combination of an independent word and its modifier.

Let's say you had been out in a bone cracking Texas winter wind. You walked into the Cracker Barrel at Bowen and I-20. A roaring fire was burning in that big fireplace in the dining room. You might say, "It is *nicely warm* in here." More than likely you would say, "Boy, it's *nice and warm* in here." With the two words "nice" and "warm" you would have used a hendiadys.

Life and godliness refer to a life of godliness or a godly life. Godliness is used in **1:6, 7** and **3:11**. **3:11** says, *since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and **godliness***. By the way, *holy conduct and godliness* is another example of hendiadys. This godliness is obedience to the will of God in outward manner and disposition as well as in the thoughts and intents of the heart. It is obedience to the will of God in your life in the world and in you life and ministry among the people of God. It is obedience to the will of God in service to your neighbor as well as in the service of worship to God.

Everything required to sustain such a life **has been granted to us**. "Us" refers to the readers, to you and to me; all who have received Christ as he is offered in the gospel. This is like someone opening up the last will and testament of a benevolent and generous father; a father who over his lifetime had rejoiced in giving his children and grandchildren good gifts. **All things** or **everything** speaks to an adequacy of supply. Sometimes we denigrate the word adequate. That's really not fair. Adequate means that all our needs are met.

The gospel is sufficient to sustain your spiritual life. "There will always be people who want to supplement the work of Christ with extra teaching, and convince us that we are living less than Christian lives, while their particular form of teaching is the ingredient missing from traditional Christianity. It takes

different forms: Christ plus healing, Christ plus success, Christ plus prosperity, Christ plus counseling, Christ plus an overwhelming experience. Anxious Christians may spend many years going through these, searching for an assurance that is already theirs in Christ” (Lucas and Green, p. 48). The sacrifice of Christ is sufficient to turn back the wrath of God and to satisfy His justice. The righteousness of Christ is sufficient to withstand the accusations and to satisfy the demands of the Law. The obedience of Christ is sufficient to please the Father. The blood of Christ is sufficient to cleanse every sin. Surely, **the gospel is sufficient to sustain your spiritual life.**

How do such blessings flow to us? How should we be the recipients of divine beneficence? Why should God look with such favor on a sinner like me? It comes **through the knowledge of Him.** “The fundamental Christian knowledge gained in conversion” (Bauckham, p. 178). John Calvin says of this phrase, “for the knowledge of God is the beginning of life and the first entrance into godliness” (*II Peter*). Scottish minister, Alexander Nisbet, writes this: “The very first beginnings of grace are wrought in the heart, by making a sinner drink in the knowledge of Christ: the law indeed prepares for this work by discovering sin and deserved wrath and terrifying the conscience, but the Gospel which holds out Christ the Savior from sin and wrath, having in Him the fullness of grace, and a heart to let it out freely upon graceless sinners, is the Spirit’s instrument of working grace: for as the Apostle wished grace to thrive in the former verse through the knowledge of Christ, so here he says, it is given at first through the knowledge of Him” (*1 & 2 Peter*, p. 225).

And here is the great condescension of God. We do not come to know God by figuring Him our ourselves. We do not discover Him through morality, self-

improvement, meditation, service, introspection, or anything of the sort. Indeed, God “makes Himself known to us by the gospel” (Calvin).

Not only is our God the One who reveals Himself but in sovereign grace has called us through the gospel to a saving knowledge of Himself. He is the God **who called us**. God’s purpose in election is eternally prior to calling (**Rom. 8:29-30a**). Calling is a summons (**Rom. 8:30; I Cor. 1:9; II Tim. 1:8-9**). This call is distinct from what we designate as a general call made to the whole human race to repent and believe the Gospel (**Acts 2:36-38, 3:19, 20:20-21**). Effectual calling is the sure drawing of the elect unto salvation. In this the Holy Spirit convinces us of sin, He persuades and enables us to receive Christ by faith. **John 6:44** ... “*No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him*”

Why would Peter refer so to God? Why highlight this aspect of His gracious redemptive work? The One who mercifully and powerfully calls us to life is also faithful to provide for and maintain that life? Repeat. And this He does through the gospel.

And He calls us **to his own glory and excellence**. This is our destiny. This is the eternal purpose for which we are called. Calvin puts it like this: “the effect of calling in the elect, is to restore to them the glorious image of God, and to renew them in holiness and righteousness” (*II Peter*).

On this date two hundred years ago, January 30, 1805, Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery has settled in for the winter among the Mandan Indians of North Dakota. From January 1803 until their departure in May 1804 the Captains prepared for their epic journey to the Pacific. Historian Stephen Ambrose writes,

“[Thomas] Jefferson would set the objectives, but it was Captain Lewis who would get the expedition there and back. The responsibility was his for deciding the size of the expedition, how it would proceed up the Missouri River, what it would need to cross the Rocky Mountains and descend the Columbia to the Pacific Ocean and return. Once the expedition left St. Louis, Lewis would be stuck with the decisions he had made during the planning process. How many men? With what skills? How big a boat? What design? What type of rifle? How much powder and lead? How many cooking pots? What tools? How much dry or salted rations could be carried? What medicines, in what quantity? What scientific instruments? What books? How many fishing hooks? How much salt? Tobacco? Whiskey? Lewis and Jefferson talked through January and February and on into March, trying to imagine what the trip was going to be like, so that they could be certain of what would be needed” (*Undaunted Courage*, pp. 81, 84).

Dear Christian, with God there are no such uncertainties. There are no contingencies. In the gospel is everything we need for our spiritual maintenance and development. Indeed, **the gospel is altogether sufficient for your spiritual growth.**

Benediction (I Thessalonians 5:23-24, 28)

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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The Fifth Column

The introduction of doctrinal error and reckless living was beginning to undermine the stability of the community of faith.

The point of this entire letter is this:

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| <p>_____ in the truth of the gospel _____ the church against the _____ influence of error.</p> |
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Peter's aim is to _____ Christians.

The gospel we have received is the authentic apostolic gospel - _____
by Jesus Christ, based upon the _____ of Jesus Christ, and
producing the gracious benefits won on the cross by Jesus Christ.

Indeed, in verse 3 we are given God's _____, God's confirmation,
that He has already made arrangements for and _____ everything
we need to live the life to which He has called us.

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the gospel is _____ to _____ your spiritual life.

The knowledge of Jesus Christ as offered to you in the gospel is altogether sufficient for your _____. The true knowledge of God as it is in Jesus Christ is entirely sufficient for your _____ as well.

His divine power ... To _____ spiritual life to sinners dead in trespasses and sin and then to _____ that life requires the power of God Himself.

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