

Partakers of the Divine Nature

SERMON

By

Everett C. DeVelde

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TEXT: 2 Peter 1:1-4

PROP: If we have obtained a faith of equal standing with the apostles and if all things that pertain to life and godliness have been granted to us and if we have been granted the precious and very great promises of Christ, it follows that we we will be partakers of the divine nature. It follows that we will progress in regaining the knowledge, righteousness and holiness implicit in the image of God lost as the result of Adam's first transgression. Let us therefore see to ourselves that we truly love the Lord and seek to do his will.

2 Peter 1:1-4

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.

Make Your Calling and Election Sure

3 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, **4** by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Peter probably wrote his second epistle shortly before he died at the hands of Caesar Nero. As with all the apostles Peter met a violent death. The early church historian, Eusebius, describes Nero as a monster of depravity who because of his perverse and extraordinary madness, engaged in the senseless destruction of innumerable lives including those of his immediate family. Paul was beheaded by Nero but Peter he crucified head downwards. Near the end of his life Peter addressed himself to various heresies that troubled the church. The gospel, he tells us, is the only antidote to heresy being like a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. The gospel is that prophetic word to which we all do well to pay attention because it comes to

us, not by the will of man, but from men who spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:19-21)

Peter wrote, "-- *To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:*" (2 Peter 1:1, ESV) In his first epistle he addressed himself to the elect exiles of the dispersion. He wrote to those who God caused to be born again to a living hope. Those to whom he wrote were the only ones who would be able to endure for Christ's sake the persecutions and suffering they were about to face. Who but God's elect people could withstand the fiery trials that come upon them to test them? Who but God's people would obey the gospel of God and suffer according to God's will entrusting their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good? Will people with the pagan mindset of the age in which we live be sober-minded and watchful? Will they stand firm in their faith when Satan like a roaring lion prowls around them seeking to devour them? Not at all! As we have seen even this last week as Halloween was observed, Satan and his kingdom were willingly embraced by most as they pandered to the occult and evil world of the devil.

Peter once again spoke to those who belong to the Lord by his grace. He spoke to those whose faith had an equal standing with his own. Peter was a man of great faith yet we who have little faith by comparison enjoy the same standing with God. How can this be? Peter was a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ yet we who are unworthy servants at best and not apostles have a standing with God that is equal to that of Peter. Do we love the Lord Jesus Christ as deeply and ardently as Peter? I think not! Are we as passionate for Christ and his kingdom as the great apostle? No we are not, yet our standing with God is the same as his. How is this possible? It is possible because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to both Peter and us. The righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ is seen by God as if it was our own righteousness. Though our faith is different in degree from that of one like Peter we are saved by it just as much as Peter was saved by his. Our sins are pardoned on the same basis that Peter's sins were pardoned, the blood of Christ.

**Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.**

**Bold shall I stand in Thy great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved from these I am,
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.**

**Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
Which, at the Mercyseat of God,
Forever doth for sinners plead,
For me, e'en for my soul was shed.**

**Lord, I believe were sinners more
Than sands upon the ocean shore,
Thou hast for all a ransom paid,
For all a full atonement made.**

Look again at verse one of the text in 2 Peter chapter 1. Observe the link between faith and righteousness. Notice that our faith finds its source in the righteousness of Christ. We obtain a faith of equal standing with the apostles by the righteousness of Christ. That is to say we obtain faith based in his righteousness. If Christ were sinful our faith in him would be groundless. We may just as well believe in a totem pole or a carved stone for all it would obtain for us. Faith and righteousness are inseparable. We will never find true faith unattended by true godliness. On the other hand, we will never discover a truly holy life which has for its root and foundation a living faith based on the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many claim they have faith in Christ but they continue to live ungodly lives and in that case their faith is vain. In that case they are yet in their sins. James writes,

James 2:14-17 (ESV)

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Many concern themselves with the increase of their faith and forget holiness. Their doctrine may be orthodox and they may even claim to be "reformed" but the day will come when God will condemn those who hold the truth in unrighteousness, and use the doctrine of Christ to encourage their lusts. There are others who have sought after holiness of life, but have denied the faith with their liberal doctrines. These are comparable to the Pharisees of old, of whom Jesus said, they were "whitewashed tombs;" They look beautiful on the outside, but inwardly, because living faith is not there, they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Jesus continues, "*So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*" (Matthew 23:28, ESV) Many are conservative politically and socially but they worship demons and false gods. Many live clean lives, considerate and helpful but they are humanists believing their humanitarian works will benefit mankind. No doubt many have indeed been helped and healed by

philanthropy and the skill of great doctors and surgeons but without faith in the true and living God together with true righteousness their philanthropies and healing skills are all in vain. To erect a house of faith on the sands of unrighteousness is to erect a building that will inevitably fall apart and be destroyed. Conversely, to expect sands of ungodliness to support a house of faith is to meet with complete failure. True faith and true righteous are inseparable. One cannot exist without the other. Again James writes,

James 2:21-26 (ESV)

²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"— and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

When God causes us to be born again to a living hope he also grants to us, "*-- all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,*" (2 Peter 1:3, ESV) Peter is telling us that the pursuit of holiness is the inevitable result of regeneration. Our justification is an act of God just as our sanctification is the work of God's Holy Spirit. Faith and holiness are inseparable because both are the work of God in us. We who truly believe in Jesus Christ are said by Paul to be the workmanship of God, "*-- created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" (Ephesians 2:10, ESV) Therefore, as the result of God's sovereign work in our lives we are made partakers of the divine nature and as Peter goes on to say, we have escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Adam and Eve were created in the image of God but we know that God is spirit and not flesh and blood. Our first parents did not look like God in a physical way because God is not physical in any sense. He reveals himself in Scripture using human terms that we can understand because we are physical and live in a physical universe. What we know of God therefore is by way of analogy. Van Til puts it this way, "It is just because God is an eternal and self-contained being while we are his temporal creatures that we cannot ever hope to comprehend his being. But this absolute incomprehensibility of God, just because it is based upon God's absolute rationality, is not inconsistent with the genuine rational character of our knowledge. On the contrary, our knowledge is rational because God is ultimately rational. At the same time, God is incomprehensible to us because he is ultimately rational. It is not because God is irrational that we cannot comprehend him; it is

because God is rational, and in the nature of the case, ultimately rational, that we cannot comprehend him. It is not because God is darkness that he is incomprehensible to us, but it is because he is light, and, in the nature of the case, absolute light. God dwells in a light that no man can approach unto. We are not blind because of the light of God; it is only in God's light that we see light.¹

Moses wanted to see the glory of God but he was told that he could not see the face of God and live. However, God was pleased to reveal his glory to Moses by analogy. Moses was shown the moral goodness of God, his covenant name Yahweh, and his sovereignty seen in the statement, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." Moses therefore saw the glory of God by the analogy of his goodness, his name, and his sovereignty all of which we can understand for they are part of our human experience. God's moral goodness is defined and expressed in his law. We know what carved images are and we are familiar with exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

What a blasphemous thing Aaron did when he fashioned a golden calf and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." He told Israel that feasting before the calf was an act of worshipping Yahweh. In like manner it is our own sinful nature to liken God to human things. We can't see him as he is so we try to express his divine nature with carved images and painted pictures. The name of God is most holy but we often defile and defame the name of God when we damn people and objects around us to hell. Who but Yahweh God can damn anything to hell? Therefore cursing someone in this way necessarily involves the true and living God. We must not defile his name by using it carelessly or irreverently, but we often deny the sovereignty of God with our faulty and unbiblical theology.

All of this is to say that being partakers of the divine nature does not make us gods. To be a partaker of the divine nature of God means that we begin to regain the image of God lost by Adam's first sin. When God causes us to be born again we are said by Paul to put on a new self which is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Furthermore Paul says that our new self is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. In this way the Holy Spirit brings us to be more and more like Yahweh Jesus. The divine power that grants to us all things pertaining to life and godliness is the power of Jesus Christ and the divine nature of which we are made to be partakers is the divine nature of Yahweh the Messiah.

¹Van Til, C., & Sigward, E. H. (1997). *The works of Cornelius Van Til, 1895-1987* (electronic ed.). New York: Labels Army Co.

The person who believes in Jesus Christ as simply a prophet, as only a great teacher, does not have the faith that will save him. Unitarians who deny the deity of Christ and the existence of the Holy Spirit, are no partakers of the divine nature because the divine nature of which Peter speaks is the divine nature of the Lord Jesus. It does not matter how intelligent they may appear to be nor how cultured their manners nor how patriotic. If they reject Jesus Christ as very God of very God, they will no doubt perish everlasting hell. Our Lord uttered no stronger words when he said "whoever does not believe will be condemned," (Mark 16:16 ESV) and we must not attempt to be more lenient with such people than the Lord himself.

Little allowance can be made for one who receives Jesus the prophet, and rejects him as God. Spurgeon wrote, "If Christ were not God, he was the grossest impostor who ever lived. One of two things, he was either divine or a villain. There is no stopping between the two. I cannot imagine a character more vile than that which would be borne by a man who should lead his followers to adore him as God, without ever putting in a word by way of caveat, to stop their idolatry; nay, who should have spoken in terms so ambiguous, that two thousand years after his death, there should he found millions of persons resting upon him as God. I say, if he were not God, the atrocity of his having palmed himself upon us, his disciples, as God, puts aside altogether from consideration any of the apparent virtues of his life. He was the grossest of all deceivers, if he was not 'very God of very God.' "

Peter was an eyewitness of the majesty of Christ. The name of Jesus the Messiah given by God through Isaiah is, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. Paul quotes the psalmist as saying of Christ, "*And, "You, (Yahweh), laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end."*" (Hebrews 1:10-12, ESV) Of Jesus the Word become flesh, John writes, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" (John 1:1, ESV) Again Paul writes of Jesus, "*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*" (Hebrews 1:3-4, ESV) He that was born of the virgin Mary, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews, is therefore, "The Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen." (Romans 9:5 ESV)

Because we have been converted by God and by his saving grace have escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire, we are unified with Christ. As Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Jesus, so we are said to be in Jesus and Jesus is said to be in us. In this manner we are made to be partakers of the divine nature.

We have seen that faith and righteousness are inseparable but true saving faith requires the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Faith in the Lord Jesus is to no avail if he is not righteous God. Furthermore, faith in Christ apart from personal holiness is no faith at all. If we are not pursuing holiness it means that the Spirit of God is not at work in us because holiness is the mark and goal of sanctification. If we have obtained a faith of equal standing with the apostles and if all things that pertain to life and godliness have been granted to us and if we have been granted the precious and very great promises of Christ, it follows that we become partakers of the divine nature. It follows that we will progress in regaining the knowledge, righteousness and holiness implicit in the image of God lost as the result of Adam's first transgression. Let us therefore see to ourselves that we truly love the Lord and seek to do his will. Let us say with the hymn writer,

**Jesus, I live to thee,
The loveliest and best;
My life in thee, thy life in me,
In thy blest love I rest.**

**Jesus, I die to thee,
Whenever death shall come;
To die in thee is life to me,
In my eternal home.**

**Whether to live or die,
I know not which is best;
To live in thee is bliss to me,
To die is endless rest.**

**Living or dying, Lord,
I ask but to be thine;
My life in thee, thy life in me,
Makes heaven for ever mine.
Amen.**