

Sermon series on 2 Peter: “ A Perambulation through (2) Peter”

Sermon No. 6. Date: 16th October 2016

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Readings: 2 Thes. 1: 3-12; 2 Peter 1: 3-11

Title: “The Relational Dimension of our Faith”

We continue our sermons on 2 Peter, written by Peter to combat false teaching from within the church.

Now, how does Peter go about that? He checks the foundations of their faith. He wants to make sure that these Christians (and therefore you and me) are grounded in the truth. How are we protected from error? How do we identify false teaching? By knowing the truth. By being grounded in truths of the Christian faith.

This faith, says Peter is a “*precious faith*” – we looked at that a couple of weeks ago. A faith that is beyond price, a faith that is more valuable than even life itself – this priceless, precious, precious faith. God has given us “*everything we need for life and godliness*” (2 Peter 1:5). It is all of Him and all from Him, including , even and especially, this “*precious faith*”. But we need to understand that this faith is never regarded as something “static” or something that you have got and you make sure you hold on to it – end up being over protective of it and never exercise it. Peter and other New Testament writers make clear that our faith is to be active and dynamic. A living faith. That is what excited Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians. “*We ought always to thank God for one another, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing*” (1:3). Theirs was not a static, lifeless faith. Their faith was growing; their faith was deepening, and, as a result of that, things were being inevitably added to their faith – love for one another.

So Peter here is saying the same thing....you have this precious faith, now, he says, “*Make every effort to add to your faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love*”. In other words,

this precious faith is living and active. It is powerful and effective, but you and I have a part to play. I like to think of this faith as our spiritual “muscle” given to us by God. We are called to use it; we are exhorted over and over again to exercise it. As we do so, these things follow...they are added to our faith. So, this week we look at the last three virtues. godliness, brotherly kindness, love. “The Relational Dimension of our Faith” - The title of this sermon. If you missed the other sermons in this series, can I encourage you to look them up on our website.

The Relational Dimension of our Faith:

1. Godliness:

The Christian faith is not a religion. I really hate it when people say to me “you must have been very religious to want to go into the Church”. No! I am not “religious”. I do what I do because of a relationship I have with God, through Jesus Christ. I responded to his call on my life out of gratitude for what He has done for me. “Religion” to me says “do” – Christianity says “done”. The Christian faith is not a religion ; it is a relationship. A relationship with God, a relationship with other Christians, and even a relationship with unbelievers. It is all about relationships – that is why Peter puts our relationship to God first. Peter has just been talking about self-control and perseverance. Now he wants to guard against the temptation of patting yourself on the back, and thinking what a good boy I am – look how self-controlled I am – look how I can keep going under the severest of trials. If we worship, as it were, our self-discipline, we have missed the point completely. If we do that, we are not being “godly”.

We are not focussing on Him. Godliness has to come first – before I think of my relationship to others. I must make sure that my motivation is pure – not to draw attention to myself, but that in all I do I want to honour Him. That in all I do I want to bring glory to His name.....to praise His holy name.

That is our aim.....that is our priority.....that is our motivation. Having got that right, having put Him first, we can then move on to:

2. Brotherly Kindness:

What Peter is referring to here is for Christians to love one another....to be patient with one another.

What a need there is for “brotherly kindness” in the church! We would all, I am sure agree with that, but how difficult we find it to put it into practice!

Why is that? Why is it that we find it so hard to “love one another”? Why is it that we find it so hard to be patient with, or make allowances for, our brothers and sisters in Christ? Why are we more tolerant of those who are not Christians? The answer has to be that we expect more of those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ, so, when someone in the Church hurts us or fails us, or does not live up to our expectations, we feel the pain and hurt more acutely. “How could they do that, how could they behave in that way and call themselves Christians”, we end up saying – and then we write them off. Christians so often are intolerant of each other.....impatient with each other.

In my early Christian days, there was a fellow student at Oak Hill Theological College, who went round with a badge pinned to his sweater, it read: “Be patient with me”. God has not finished with me yet”. I have always remembered that. We are all of us a “work in progress”. We are not yet the finished article. We want to be more Christ like and we are more Christ like than we were before we became Christian, but we have not “arrived” yet. There is more to be done! Be patient with me! God has not finished with me yet.

“Brotherly kindness” – such a need for it in the church, something I pray will be shown in abundance in this little church. A fellowship that is becoming more and more precious to all of us here. Join me in praying for that regularly – please. Pray the Lord would protect us from the works of the enemy who will want to come in and destroy the fellowship. Mind you, sometimes, Satan does not have to do very much. We do the work for him. Pray for protection from ourselves. Pray for more patience! Pray for more tolerance!

Finally.....the third virtue in the relational dimension to our faith:

3. Love :

How do we relate to those outside the church? How do we relate to those who do not believe? How do we relate to those who are choosing lifestyles that are contrary to the Word of God?

We love them. We have to have a heart which loves the sinner but hates the sin. We try and see the soul in sinners....we try and look beyond their sin and see their need. We try to love them as Jesus loves them, as we remember how Jesus loved us before we came to know Him.

In other words, we don't get all "huffy and puffy". We don't get all uptight and judgemental when we see people caught up in sin.

Whenever I read the newspaper or watch the news on television, and if I find myself getting all judgemental and self-righteous, I think of my life before I came to Christ – all sorts of things come to mind of which I am now deeply ashamed. So how dare I point the finger! Remember – every time you point the finger, there are three more pointing back at you! Very humbling to remember that. God did not write me off. He did not wash his hands of me. He was patient with me. Gracious towards me. That's how I need to be in my relationship with unbelievers.

As Peter puts it later in this same epistle *"He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance"* (2 Peter vs 3 and 6). If that is how God views and acts towards those who do not know Him, if He can love like that, then that is how, as Christians, we are to love.

Peter`s exhortation started with our faith - *"make every effort to add to your faith"*. We start with faith and we end with love.

Let me close by quoting something from Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones in his sermons on 2 Peter: "In the Christian life you start with faith and you always end with love. Without faith you do nothing, but given faith and the practising of the faith, you must inevitably end with love, for God Himself is love".

May the Lord enable us to stimulate our faith, that these seven virtues may be manifested in our lives to His honour and glory.