

A FAITH NEVER FORGOTTEN

by David H. Roper

When I was a boy we lived in north Texas and I spent a good deal of time on a farm. I was in the 4H club, and one of my projects was raising Angora goats. We always had two or three goats around the house which we fed on bottles because, for one reason or another, their mothers had not accepted them. I grew quite fond of one goat in particular. His name was Angie, and we had him around for two or three years. I used to get down on my hands and knees and we'd play a game that goats play-we'd butt each other around. One day, after we hadn't played this game for a while and he'd gotten quite a bit bigger. I challenged him to a duel. He backed off about three paces, he cocked his head, and he let me have it right on top of my head (which might explain my affliction, although I'm not sure!) A few minutes later when the fog cleared, I discovered that I had learned a new principle which, briefly, is this: you don't fight goats on the goats' level; you don't fight them on their own terms. I often think of this little story when I think about life.

That's what we've been talking about this past week-how to approach life and Live it as it is intended to be lived. I think this little story illustrates that you don't approach life purely in terms of a human life, It was never intended to be lived that way. We think that all we need to solve all the problems of life is one human personality. But life was never intended to be lived on those terms. Only God can live a human life. Now that sounds paradoxical, but that is exactly the way we were created. When man was originally created he was plugged into the source of life itself, the source of power, and all life was intended to be lived on that level, by drawing upon the resources of God. When man fell, from that point on he tried to live solely on a human level, on the terms of men. And he discovered that something was wrong. He couldn't solve the problems he had to face. That is why today there are so many frustrated, tired, bored, uneasy people who are living meaningless, purposeless lives.

I picked up a quotation from a book by Ashley Montague on immortality this past week. It is a poem that goes like this:

From too much love of living,
From stress and fear set free.
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no one lives forever,
That dead men rise up, never,
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere out to sea.

What a note of pathos! Nothing to live for, no resources for facing either life or death. The best that he can hope for is oblivion.

Now God never intended for man to live this way. The Scriptures are very clear that man was intended to reign in life. He was given the resource for triumphing in life and, of course, this resource is God himself. What Peter, along with all the other writers of Scripture, is doing is showing us how to establish and maintain that contact with the source of life in order that we might live life as it was intended to be lived.

Let's just review briefly what Peter has said in the first four verses, because this is basic to our understanding of what follows. Peter says that he was called into association with

Jesus Christ. This is always Christ's method-to call men to be with him, to live with him. Peter says that when the

apostles first saw Christ they evaluated him in purely human terms, and came to the conclusion that he was a remarkable man. But after they had seen something of his life, at short range, they realized that he was more than just a man, that he was more than one great man in a line of succession of other men. He was unique. He was God. But more than that, he was a man living in dependence upon God, as man was intended to live, Peter saw that Jesus was the Author of life, that he had, in the words of Peter himself, "*the words of eternal life*." As they watched Christ they saw how *man* was intended to live, but they also saw that Christ was God in the flesh. They realized that they had been called into an intimate, personal relationship with the God of all creation, and that they could know him in a personal way.

Then Peter says that. because of this knowledge, two things were granted to them. First, through Jesus' power all things were given to them that relate to life and godliness, i.e., everything that they needed to solve the problems of life was on tap, available to them; and second, he says that these promises, all fulfilled in Christ, were given to the apostles. They wrote them down in the form of Scripture that we, by becoming partakers of the divine nature, can escape the corruption that is in the world through lust; i.e., we can have the same relationship with Jesus Christ that the apostles had. Although we do not know him in the flesh as they did, we can have the same personal relationship and, therefore, have all that we need to escape the disintegrating processes that are in the world.

The emphasis of verses 1 through 4 is on Christ's part-on what he has committed himself to do, and on the fact that by faith in the promises of God we can become partakers of the divine nature: while the emphasis in verses 5 through 7 is on our response to his part. This is our responsibility. Revelation demands some sort of response. We can either spurn it or we can embrace it, but we cannot be neutral about it. So Peter, in these three verses, tells us what our response should be. Knowing that we have the very life of Jesus Christ himself dwelling in us and available to us, what should be our response?

For this very reason [i.e., because we have become partakers of the divine nature] **make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.**

Now we want to examine these characteristics which Peter says we are to assume, but before we do, I want to make a couple of brief comments that I think will help us in understanding something of what is involved. One has to do with the relationship between our part and God's part. There is always a great deal of uneasiness here, I sense, in my own thinking and in the thinking of others. What does God do in his program for our lives, and what do we do? Well, the Scriptures are very clear that God is sovereign, that nothing gets by him without notice, that nothing happens that is beyond his control. And yet, on the other hand, the Scriptures say that we are responsible. So what are the limits of his responsibility, and what are the limits of ours?

There are some little statements that we often use to explain how these two relate and I'm not sure that they are helpful. One is the statement, which you hear so frequently, that God helps those who help themselves. This idea, of course, is found nowhere in the Scriptures. In fact, it is wide of the mark. Or people say, "We work as though it all depends upon us, and we pray as though it all depends upon Christ." Even that is wide of the mark. We have to accept what the Scriptures *actually* say about God's responsibility and ours and, although it may be difficult to understand how the two relate, we can go no farther than what the Scriptures themselves say.

Now let me read some statements to you that are found in the New Testament. First, some statements that have to do with God's responsibility. Paul says in Ephesians 1:11,12,

In him [Christ], **according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.**

The point that Patti is making is that God has his way in the world, that he accomplishes everything according to the counsel of his will. He is absolutely sovereign, and he has chosen us in order that we might live to the praise of

his glory. That is, there is no doubt as to the outcome, as God sees it. We are going to live to his glory. We are going to manifest in our lives the character that he wants us to have. There is no question about it.

Paul says in Philippians 1.16,

And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

God doesn't do things half way; he never stops short of completion. He will not allow any of us to have our own way in this matter; he will bring us to completion.

In Romans 8:29, Paul says,

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the Image or his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

What God is looking for is a host of people just like Jesus Christ, and he has called us to this. It is a certain thing.

Finally, in I Thessalonians 5:23, 24 Paul writes,

May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Now that is an amazing verse. It simply means that what God has called us to he is going to accomplish in every life. This means that if God is sovereign over the ultimate direction of our lives, then he has something to say about the details of our lives as well. He is not only working in general, but he is working specifically to produce in every life the quality of life that he is looking for-God-likeness.

On the other hand, the Scriptures say that we are responsible, that God enlists us in the process, that he does not work apart from the human will. Jesus Christ says, "*Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst** after righteousness . . .*" In his first epistle Peter says to *desire* the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby. Hebrews says that we are to *labor* to enter into that rest. Paul says that we *wrestle* against principalities and powers, the rulers in high places. He says that we are to *fight* the good fight of faith, we are to lay hold of eternal life. Here in II Peter 1 we are told to *bend every effort* to supplement our faith with virtue and these other characteristics. You see, God does not bypass the human will. He does not operate apart from our own desires and efforts.

In the first chapter of James we find an interesting statement which I think ties these two ideas together.

But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

The point seems to be that, as the human will moves toward the proper objective as we determine that we want to reflect in our life the character of Jesus Christ himself-as we move in this direction, James says, "*we are blessed in our doing.*" That is, we have all of the resources of God available to move us along this direction. You see, God is looking for people who sincerely want him to fill their lives and flood them.

Now the second comment I want to make concerns this word "supplement:" which is found in verse 5.1 did a little reading this past week in a book by William Barclay about II Peter. Dr. Barclay is an outstanding Greek scholar and he made the comment that this particular word is, perhaps, one of the most picturesque words in the New Testament because it means, literally, "to outfit a chorus." The Greeks were famous for their plays and dramas.

These great productions were usually staged in a town like Athens, and as a part of one of these dramas there would be a large chorus- sometimes as many as 400 or 500 voices. Now the expense to enlist, train, and maintain an organization like this would be tremendous. The traveling companies which produced these dramas wouldn't have the means to supply all that was necessary for such a chorus, so some public-spirited man in each town would willingly undertake to sponsor the chorus from his own means. He would enlist them, train them, and he would see to it that they had all that was necessary for the production. The word "supplement," therefore, connotes lavishness. It means to lavishly and willingly pour out everything that is necessary for a noble performance. It is not half-hearted effort. It involves the total personality, directed with a will toward producing in our lives all that God wants to be there.

This, I think, is the test of our call. As Peter says later in this same section, in verse 10,

Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election.

God operates on our will to move us to walk in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. The real test of whether or not we belong to him is our willingness to be all that God wants us to be.

Now let's begin with this list of virtues and talk a bit about each one. The first is faith, and, of course, everything starts here. Paul says that without faith it is impossible to please God, and that the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith because the just shall live by faith. Faith is the conviction that what Christ says is true, the utter certainty that we can commit ourselves to his promises and launch ourselves on his demands. He is telling us the truth and we can bank our very lives upon it.

Some time ago I got a letter from my draft board. This is always a little frightening, so I tore it open and, to my surprise, they said that I was available to be recalled because I had a critical MOS (whatever that was), and that they were transferring me into another control group. The thing that shocked me was that, to the best of my memory, I wasn't in the Army any more. My term of service had expired. So I went back in my records and rummaged around in my files. I found an old crumpled-up piece of paper, at the bottom of which I discovered a little notation to the effect that my ETS (Expiration Term of Service) was already passed. Was I ever happy! I wrote a very nice letter to my draft board (because that's the kind of letter you write your draft board), and I said, "On the authority of form (whatever it was) it is my understanding that I no longer have any Reserve obligation, that I'm free." And on the basis of that information they sent me my discharge papers. Now the whole point is that I had something which was an authority that I could invoke which gave me freedom.

The same thing is true, Peter is saying, about the Scriptures which are given to us. He follows this argument all through the book: we have an authority--something we can base our life on, something that is dependable, that never fails--and we can trust it. This is the basis of all Christian experience. We have already been promised all that God wants us to have. It is already there available to us. It is just a matter of our claiming it by faith and moving forward.

Secondly, Peter says, to faith we must add virtue. We talked a little about this word last week. This word conveys the idea of moral energy, of manhood. I like to think of it as "spiritual tone." In athletics an expression which is often used is "muscle tone." I majored in Physical Education in college. I was no athlete, but I've always been interested in athletics. In our physiology classes they told us that all of the training an athlete goes through is designed to produce just the right kind of muscle tone. On one extreme there is the individual who is completely out of shape, whose muscles are flabby, and they are unresponsive. At the other extreme is the athlete who is overtrained, tense, and uncoordinated. But just right is the athlete who has correct muscle tone, i.e., whose muscles are responsive and can move properly on command. This is what Peter is talking about, spiritual tone--the quality of life which enables immediate response when God speaks: the desire to be obedient at a moment's notice, to move with swiftness in whatever direction the Spirit asks us to move. I like to think of this in conjunction with Romans 6, in which Paul talks about yielding our members as instruments of righteousness unto God. The same word is used again in Romans 12, *'Present your bodies a living sacrifice.'* It expresses the idea of standing at

attention, being ready and available—a kind of spiritual tone that makes us move immediately at the voice of God.

The third characteristic is knowledge, insight, the practical understanding of spiritual principles. Now I sense that the order is very important here, because God only gives knowledge, insight into spiritual principles, to people who want to move, to obey. God never gives out truth indiscriminately. To use Christ's very strong expression, God does not cast pearls before swine. He does not ladle out truth just so we can know it. He gives it to us in order that we may obey. He starts with a willing, toned-up heart and he gives enough truth to move us to the next phase—not too much, but just enough. And when we are obedient to the truth we have, then he gives us more truth. But if we are disobedient, the process stalls, and there is no more truth forthcoming. I am coming to see, in my own life and in the experience of others I know, that this is a basic spiritual principle. As long as we have spiritual tone, as long as we are ready to move, God will give us truth and there will be growth in grace. But the moment there is disobedience and we resist the authority of Jesus Christ in a given area, then the springs dry up, the Scriptures become dry and dull and lifeless to us. And if we persist in disobedience the Scriptures say there is the danger of losing our faith. But if we go back to the point of departure, to the very issue that we faced once but evaded, if we are obedient to that, then the process begins to move again and we are given additional truth, more to live on, to be obedient to.

The fourth characteristic is self-control—the ability to take a grip on one's self. Proverbs says, "*A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.*"

That is, he's open on all fronts to attacks. He has no barriers at all to attacks of the enemy. What Peter is getting at is that every passion, every desire should be under the perfect control and mastery of Jesus Christ so that our passions, our desires, are not our masters, not our tyrants, but our servants.

C.S. Lewis, in his little book, "The Great Divorce," tells the story of a bus load of people who came to heaven to observe. And as they got off the bus there was one young man, a passenger, who met one of the "light ones," a sort of a tour guide. The young man had a huge red lizard on his shoulder. As they got off the bus it was obvious that the lizard and the young man were arguing with one another. The lizard wanted to go back home immediately but the young man wanted to see what was there. As the story develops you discover that there is great animosity between this lizard and the young man, but the young man can't do anything about it. He knows that the lizard will destroy him, in fact is bent on his destruction, but he is under its influence. It keeps whispering suggestive little things in his ear and he cringes and doesn't want to do them, but he does them anyway because he is under the control of the lizard. The "light one" says, "Let me destroy the lizard for you," and a great struggle takes place between the lizard and the young man, until finally, with a great deal of personal anguish, the young man gives up his right to the lizard. The "light one" takes it, throws it to the ground and breaks its back. And the moment it touches the ground it is transformed into a great white horse. The young man jumps on its back and rides away. Of course the picture is so clear. When we give every thought, every action, every passion, every desire to Jesus Christ, and allow him to break them beneath his feet, then they become great forces for good in our lives.

The fifth characteristic is steadfastness, endurance, patience, or the ability to remain under pressure. It is the brave, courageous acceptance of everything that life can bring to us, and the transmuting of the worst event into progress. The Book of Hebrews says that for the joy that was set before him Christ endured the cross. He remained under the burden of the cross, despising the shame, seeing that this was an instrument in God's hands and that this was all part of God's program for his life. This is another of these great characteristics, the ability to sense that everything that comes into our lives is designed by God to produce the character of Jesus Christ in us. We all experience this pressure in our lives, the periods of darkness, the tunnel experiences. And yet part of what God expects is that we recognize this is simply his hand working in our lives, preparing us, shaping us to be the kind of man that he wants us to be.

There was a recent article in the Sunday School Times by Dr. Raymond Edmond, entitled, "Advice When in the Tunnel." He made some interesting comments about how trains operate and the attitudes of their passengers when the trains are in tunnels. He pointed out, first of all, that tunnels are always on the main line. You never find a siding in a tunnel. So, he says, when the pressures come, the periods of darkness, recognize that this is all a part of

the plan, that you're still on the track, that you're moving in the right direction. Secondly, he says, recognize that you're making progress, because they always build tunnels in the mountains. You never find tunnels in the valley. Just know that this is a part of God's working in your life, that progress is being made thereby and this is something that is just necessary in order to yield further progress. Third, he says, recognize that tunnels always come to an end. When you're in them things seem bleak and dark, they seem interminable, but there is always an end. He says, "Don't stall out in the tunnel; just keep moving on." Now this is what Peter is talking about--endurance, the ability to keep moving, to keep walking in obedience no matter how we may feel, no matter what our emotions or circumstances may tell us.

The sixth principle is godliness, i.e., the capacity to react to every circumstance as God would react. This was the great mark of Christ's life--he always acted as you would expect God to act. He was totally Godlike in every situation. I wonder if circumstances trigger this sort of response in us, or are our reactions, to use James' expression, "*earthly; sensual devilish?*" Do people evoke from us a godlike response? Do we respond in the same spirit of grace and holiness that would be true of God? What an exciting prospect!--called to be like God to reflect God's likeness to the world.

The seventh is brotherly affection. There is a kind of false spirituality that can separate us from others, wherein the claims of others become intrusions into our lives and we become insensitive to their weaknesses and foibles. But Peter says that we should have a genuine concern for the weaknesses of others, a desire to move in and help, a willingness to bear the burdens of others.

And eighth, Peter talks about love, the same kind of love that God has for us--just as inclusive, just as wide, the kind of love that loves those who are unlovely; the kind of love that, in the words of Scripture, God has for the unjust the forward, the rebellious; the kind of love that doesn't discriminate but always seeks the best for others.

This is exactly what the Scriptures promise. That is, if our desire is to love people, if we begin to move in this direction and ask God for the love that he has for men and women, we'll have it. He will supply it. He is the Author of love. There is no other way to get it.

Now all of these promises are marks of progress. To faith we add virtue, to virtue knowledge and understanding of principles, to knowledge self-control and then steadfastness or endurance, godliness, brotherly affection and finally, love.

In verses 8 and 9 Peter shows us some alternatives to progress. He says that if we are not making progress, if we are not acquiring these characteristics, we've become ineffective and unfruitful and we are blind and shortsighted. We have forgotten what God has called us from, the old life with all of its selfish desires, and what he has called us to, a life of obedience, a life that is already secured. He has promised to move us along until we possess the character of Jesus Christ himself.

In verses 10 and 11 Peter concludes by saying,

Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We have no guarantee of our call unless there is moral progress in our lives. The doctrine of election does not say that we are secure no matter what we do. It says that God has secured the total process, not only calling us to himself, but seeing to it that we are going to be the kind of people that he wants us to be. And the real test is the degree to which we want what God wants for us. Are we willing to cooperate with him? Are we willing to move in the direction he wants us to? Peter is not talking about perfection, but a willingness to move toward perfection. I heard recently of a little boy who fell out of bed in the middle of the night. His mother went to pick him up and asked what happened. He said, "I guess I was too close to the getting-in place." We need to inquire into our own lives. What progress have we made? How much farther along are we, in terms of these character traits, than we were when we first came to Jesus Christ? Are we willing to allow him to confirm us to his image,

and are we beading all the energy of our will in that direction? If we do that then we know that we belong to him. We know that we have the faith that never forgets.

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II Peter 1:5-12

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