

EQUAL FAITH ?

Are you good at math? Calculus? Accounting? Or maybe you're calculator-dependent. Interestingly, the little letter of Second Peter opens with word pictures related to arithmetic, making it easy to follow. The first chapter deals with equal faith, multiplied grace, adding to your faith, and not dividing the church. This letter was written to all believers of the day, not a particular local church, but for all. Peter likely wrote it near his death in AD68. He had written his first letter about 30 years after the resurrection of Jesus, with a focus on encouragement for believers during times of trials and persecution from outside the church. This second letter addresses challenges coming from inside the church.

1- OUR EQUAL FAITH. The letter begins "*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.*" This statement immediately challenged people wanting to influence the church with unorthodox ideas, such as early versions of what came to be called Gnosticism, which expresses the idea that ultimate truth could not be learned through rationality and the mind, but rather through mystical intuition or special revelation, giving esoteric knowledge only to a chosen few. Peter flatly rejects such thinking.

Theologian RC Sproul explains how "Gnostics blended Greek philosophy with Oriental mystic dualism with a sprinkling of Christianity." That's pretty much what we call New Age thinking today. But it is not new, but full of old heresies and ideas contrary to what Scripture reveals. The word gnostic comes from the Greek "*gnosis*" referring to knowledge. The related word "*agnostic*" means without knowledge, and is the term we use today for someone who claims to not know whether God exists. Sproul notes the Latin equivalent to agnostic is "*ignoramus*" for someone who does not know. Perhaps enough said!

Peter identifies himself with his Aramaic name Simeon along with the Greek name Peter, which means rock and was given to him by Christ. Peter calls himself a "*doulos*" which refers to a purchased slave, the lowest rung on the social ladder of his day. Peter is a slave of Christ, and was purchased by His blood, as noted in his first letter 1 Peter 1:19-19. Peter is also an apostle of Christ, the highest human rung, being sent as a personal envoy of Jesus. He writes to ordinary believers, who have obtained a "*faith of equal standing with ours.*" This was a powerful blow to Gnostics. It's like people today who may say they accept Jesus but not the church, or Paul, or the New Testament. It merely shows the arrogance of their ignorance, since Jesus commissioned the apostles to write the New Testament for the church.

2- OUR RECEIVED RIGHTEOUSNESS. Peter says they have received faith "*by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.*" It's an echo of Romans 3:22 which says our justification, right standing with God, is given to everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Believers have received faith which is the "*gift of God*" (Ephesians 2:8), precious faith of the same equal value as the apostle's. Nothing is more valuable than this "saving faith" in Christ alone. As Romans 1:16 says, the gospel is "*the power of God to salvation*" and converts all people, Jew, Gentile, male, female, slave, free, from every people group. God's grace is impartial and given to those who believe. It does not come from human effort or even super-human gnostic effort or revelation. Salvation is the gift of God, by grace through faith, to those who are born again from above by the Holy Spirit, to put all their trust in Jesus the Christ.

3- DON'T DIVIDE THE BODY. Peter addresses believers corporately, not individually. To be a Christian is to be in union with Christ and in communion with all fellow believers. Nowhere in Scripture do we see *Lone Ranger* believers faring by themselves outside a local church. Those who claim to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who then divide themselves from the body of believers, are greatly mistaken about what it means to be Christian. Early gnostics thought they didn't need apostles and pastors and teachers because of their "special knowledge," and they were seriously wrong if they thought they could bypass Jesus Christ and go directly to God. Peter ascribes deity to Jesus, "*our God and Savior Jesus Christ*" as does Titus 2:13. It is clear in both Greek and English that Jesus Christ is God, which is also the message of the New Testament. And this echoes Isaiah 45:21, "*there is no other god besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior, there is none besides Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.*" The name Jesus means "Jehovah saves" and His eternal truth never changes. It is the same for all peoples in all times and in all places. Saving faith in the first century is the same as today - only through the Lord Jesus Christ. Add up the evidence, and put your trust only in Him!