

Confirm Your Call

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] Please be seated. I encourage you to open the Pew Bibles again at page 987. Today we're beginning a short sermon series from the second letter of Peter today and the next two Sundays, each of the three Sundays in total for the three chapters of 2 Peter.

And let's pray now that God will teach us. Lord God, we gather around your word and we do pray that you'll teach us, write your word in our hearts that we may believe it and obey it and bear the fruit of righteousness in our lives for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Well, imagine you go out to your letterbox during the week and open it up, expecting to find a stack of bills. And there amongst the bills, because they're always there, the bills, you find a wedding invitation.

That's nice. And there it is. You open it up. And for argument's sake, let's make it up from Lisa and Phil and June 23rd and Holy Trinity Doncaster.

And you're invited to a wedding of this made-up person, Lisa and Phil. And you think, well, that's great, because a free feed is always welcome, isn't it? And wedding reception is usually quite a good free feed.

[1 : 1 9] But it's more, this is a very unusual wedding invitation. It must be a slightly unusual couple, I imagine. But they're not only inviting you to the wedding and the reception and the free feed, but they are giving you the clothes to wear to the wedding as a gift to you.

And you think, wow, I'm given the suit that I'm going to wear. It's some gift. The problem is that when you try it on, you realise that it's actually a little bit small.

And you think, I've now got three months to fit into these clothes. And you think, well, this is a difficult time of year for dieting and exercising.

I actually find all times of year difficult for dieting and exercising. I mean, there's too many hot cross buns around and Easter eggs are on the way and so on. But you've got to work hard in order to fit into those clothes for the wedding.

God's gospel goal is godliness. Godliness. Good little slogan to remember. It's why Jesus came and died, why he rose from the dead, why he ascended. The goal of the gospel of God is our godliness.

[2 : 3 8] Not merely our forgiveness, which so often we think, Jesus came to die so that I'm forgiven and life will just continue on. The goal of the gospel is godliness. And the clothes of godliness are to be like Christ in his character.

The obedience of faith. Being like God. Sharing in the divine nature of God himself. They're the clothes of godliness. But unlike the silly wedding illustration I just gave, where all my effort has to be put into trying to struggle into the clothes in time for this wedding that's coming, God not only gives us the clothes of godliness to wear, but the power also to wear them.

You see, the power of the gospel of God is not simply the power to forgive us our sins. It is also the power for everything needed for life and godliness.

The same gospel power. So that's what Peter writes in verse 3. Jesus' divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness.

And notice completely in passing how Peter makes it clear that Jesus is divine in saying this. The his refers back to Jesus in the previous verse. So don't be fooled by those novels and films and so on these days that claim that it's Jesus' divinity, something made up hundreds of years later.

[4 : 0 8] It's not. It's there in the early parts of the New Testament. The same power of the gospel to forgive is extended to us, providing everything needed for life and godliness.

And so we think that we can sit back and put on the clothes at our leisure and life is comfortable. Well, that's a mistake.

You see, the grace and power of the gospel, not only to forgive but to give us everything needed for life and godliness, carries with it the obligation to expend our effort.

Yes, it's a bit like the effort needed to fit into the clothes that you've just been given that are a bit too small for the wedding that's coming up in three months' time. The difference is the power to actually expend the effort is given to us in the gospel.

So that we work hard, but at the same time relying not only on our own strength, but actually relying on the power given to us in the gospel itself from God. It's a very fine and important balance to get right.

[5 : 16] You see, at one extreme would be the thinking that God's given us all we need, I'll sit back and just enjoy it. At the other extreme is that I've got to work hard to actually gain my salvation and all my effort is what counts.

That's the wrong extreme. The other way, the gospel sets us in the middle, where yes, we have to exert effort, but all the power is given as a gift from God in the gospel.

Everything needed for life and godliness, the power for that is actually given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ through his death on the cross. What the balance then is, is that our election or choice by God, our salvation given to us by God is absolutely secure.

God's gift will not be revoked. It's ours. He's given us the power to reach the goal of the gospel, that is, godliness, sharing in the divine nature.

We appropriate that power by using all our effort, as we'll see in this passage today. How do we do that? Peter goes on in verse 3 to say that Jesus' divine power has been given to us with everything needed for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness, thus he's given us through these things his precious and very great promises so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust and may become participants of the divine nature.

[6 : 50] That is sharing the character of godliness with God. This power is appropriated to us through the scriptures that are given to us, through the knowledge, as verse 3 says, and through the very great promises, as verse 4 says.

Now I don't mind the odd carrot as part of my salad or meal. I don't particularly get excited by carrots, I must say. I don't walk down the aisle in the Safeway or Coles that's now closed and sort of my nose twitch when I walk past the carrots.

I'm not that excited by them, but they're okay. I don't mind. It sometimes seems odd to me that it's a proverbial carrot that's meant to get me excited as though a carrot's held in front of me and I keep thinking, well, I'm not really a donkey or a rabbit.

I'll cope with a carrot, but it's not that exciting. I sometimes think our proverbs should be roast lamb or a hot curry or maybe even better, a lemon tart. That's more the thing.

Peter here is referring to the lemon tart of God's promises. That is, the promises, the very great promises that he mentions in verse 4 are the promises of heaven and the return of Jesus, the promise of glory and joy and perfection, the promise of the end of evil, the end of suffering, pain, sin and crying and death.

[8 : 09] They are great promises. That's the lemon tart that he puts in front of us to motivate and inspire us and to keep us going in the Christian life. And the promise of Jesus' return is part and parcel of that.

It should stir us up with excitement. It'll be like our nose twitching with expectation and eager anticipation of the joys of heaven and the return of Jesus which will bring that about.

How does that work in practice? In verse 4, Peter says that these very great promises, through them we may escape from the corruption that's in the world because of lust.

By keeping our eyes fixed on these lemon tart of the future promises of God, we won't be waylaid, distracted and tempted into the fleeting pleasures of this world.

What looks to be a lemon tart but is really a sort of no-name brand cheap variety that's pretty tasteless and bland. It might look alright for a minute but it's not the proper thing.

[9 : 21] This is exactly what Jesus demonstrated when he was in the wilderness for 40 days. How did he resist the temptations of the world and its corruption? By holding fast to the promises of scripture which he quoted back to the devil three times.

Yes, it takes effort, you see. It takes effort for us to know the scriptures, to know the promises, to keep them before our eyes but therein lies the power to resist temptation and to grow in godliness.

So therefore, in practice, when the fleeting pleasures of sin present themselves before us, hold the greater promises of God in front of our eyes.

When the fleeting pleasures of our world are there, look to the solid joys promised in the scriptures of God. When the transient treasure of earth appears to us enticing, look rather to the lasting treasure of heaven.

When superficial attractions of our world allure us, look to the inner beauty and glory of eternal righteousness. There is, of course, great gain in godliness with contentment as we read elsewhere in the New Testament.

[10:43] See, what Peter is alerting us to here is the power of the scriptures through the knowledge and promises of God in verses 3 and 4 to help us withstand and resist the temptations of our world.

Keeping the lemon tart of God's promises firmly before us will enable us to keep in that direction and not be distracted by the fleeting, transient pleasures and treasures of earth.

Peter now puts it positively. He's saying there how to avoid the corruption of the world as he puts it in verse 4. But now, just putting it simply positively, he says in verses 5 to 7, For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love.

Now, this is not meant to be a scale of godliness or righteousness. We're not meant to look at this list and its sequence and think, well, I've got up to the level of endurance. I'm not yet up to mutual affection and so on.

That's not quite how we read the list. Lists like this in the ancient world, the beginning and the end are important, and the categories within are not necessarily in a specifically logical order.

[12:08] The point of the list is keep growing in godliness. Keep growing in love. The list begins with faith and it ends with the crowning Christian virtue of love.

And en route are all the various significant and essential character traits which Christians ought to demonstrate in their lives. Note that godliness stems from faith.

That's the first of the list at the beginning of verse 5. It's our trust or faith in the promises of God that will actually lead to the fruit of godliness in our lives.

That as we trust the lamentable of God's promises, we will begin to demonstrate endurance, self-control, perseverance, goodness, godliness, mutual affection, and love.

That is, trusting God's promises actually has an ethical, moral impact on our daily living. It's not just pie in the sky when you die. It actually affects us now and daily that our character will be honed and shaped through our trust in the promises of God.

[13:22] And that's where, of course, the power for godliness and life comes from. Paul puts it in Romans 1 that the goal of the gospel is the obedience of faith.

That's actually what Peter's talking about here, in effect. That obedience, godliness, love, etc. flows from our faith in the powerful promises of God.

It begs the question then, not only to the original readers, but to each of us, where is our fruit? Where is our gospel productivity?

If we're to imagine ourselves as trees, are we simply laden with mutual affection for fellow Christians? Or are we harbouring resentment or pride or dislike of others?

I mean, look around you and think, have I got mutual affection for my brothers and sisters in Christ here? Each and every one, not just selected individuals, the ones who are easy to show mutual affection for, but those who are difficult, those whom I've had disagreements with in the past or whatever.

[14:28] Are we actually laden, dripping with the fruit of love for our neighbour? Even the neighbour who wakes us up with loud music at 1am or old cranky cars that wake you up at 6am in the driveway.

Are we dripping with the fruit of love for such neighbours? We ought to be. Sadly, not always are we. Are we bearing the fruit of self-control with our time, our energy, our food, other things that we do?

Or are we so totally ill-disciplined that we sit down to watch 10 minutes of TV and get up four hours later? As we walk down the aisles at Coles or Safeway, do we end up with more chocolate biscuits than we anticipated buying, etc.?

Is self-control part of the fruit of our life? Sometimes you see our knowledge of the gospel can be unproductive and unfruitful. Peter says in verse 8, having gone through that list, if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, the goal of the gospel is not just head knowledge that we know what Jesus has done for us. The goal of the gospel is practical, ethical and moral.

[15:51] It is godliness. So we ought to be growing in all of those things in verses 5 to 7. And that will keep us and ensure that our knowledge is not unfruitful or unproductive.

For there are people for whom their knowledge is unproductive. They might be sermon sponges who might read the scriptures and listen to the sermons but actually never put any of it into practice. Their life doesn't change. There are people who have attended church for years sometimes but whose lives seem to be fairly barren of the fruit of godliness that's listed in these verses.

There are church leaders who may be devoid of the fruit of love or mutual affection and so on.

There is rebuke implicit here and challenge to us to see that our lives are actually laden with this fruit of godliness listed in verses 5 to 7.

And where there is a lack of such fruit then the words that follow in verse 9 are very sobering.

Anyone who lacks these things is nearsighted blind and forgetful of the cleansing of past sins.

[17:07] Three things nearsighted blind forgetful Well I'm nearsighted physically one of my dreads when I occasionally do go swimming is that once I take my glasses off I don't see very far ahead of me and so I have to be very careful am I actually swimming in the right lane and is there anybody swimming towards me that I'm going to collide with and actually when I get into the pool I have to be very careful because I can't see to the end of the pool when I take my glasses off.

It's a bit like when I get a haircut and they always I don't even know why they ask you but they ask you is it okay I can't see a thing. Take your glasses off to get a haircut I have no idea what they've done really.

Well spiritual nearsightedness is what's being spoken about here and it's actually a very opposite description of those who are lacking gospel fruit. You see if the promises of God lead us to godliness then the lamentable promises is to be before our eyes but if we're not actually demonstrating the fruit of godliness then we are so spiritually nearsighted that the promises that await us are not even in our vision.

That's what Peter has in mind here. He wants us not to be spiritually nearsighted that is living for today. He wants us to have a focus that looks ahead to the promises of God that await us the eternal joy and glory and perfection of heaven when the Lord Jesus comes.

That's what He wants to motivate us that does motivate us when our focus is on it. But for those who are not bearing the fruit of godliness their spiritual nearsightedness means Jesus' return is something they don't even consider.

[18:49] The glories of heaven don't think much of that. Not only nearsighted but He uses then the word blind probably now referring to the present not the future. They are blind to the lack of fruit in their life.

They are blind to the sins they commit. They are blind to their participation in the corruption of this world. And then the third thing is to be forgetful of the past cleansing for sins.

Most of us know someone or have known people who suffer from dementia and we see the sadness of their mind beginning to lose its memory. I remember when Leon Morris began to show signs of dementia some years ago feeling how sad it was that such a sharp theological mind a person who had lectured been a theological college principal written 50 books on the New Testament began to forget what he'd written began to forget who people were got to the point where he'd forgotten who his wife was and then to the point where any people were or even who he was I think in the end.

But even sadder and far more distressing is spiritual dementia. That is the forgetfulness of past cleansing from sin. It may not be forgetfulness in the sense I've forgotten what Jesus did or anything like that.

Not at the cognitive level but at the practical moral level. You see when we don't bear the fruit of godliness in our lives when we're not growing in that list of things in verse 5 to 7 then we're actually demonstrating a forgetfulness of Jesus' death on the cross for us.

[20:31] Worse than that we're actually showing contempt and disdain for it. We're saying I'm ignorant I reject the goal of the gospel the goal of the cross of Christ.

He died in vain for me because godliness is not my pursuit. that's a terrible place to end up in. Nearsighted blind and spiritually forgetful but yet how easy it is to forget.

Not as I say forget cognitively I'm sure most of us will never forget Jesus is the person who died on the cross for our sins but practically to forget. We need constant reminders and that's what Peter goes on in this letter to give his readers.

He says in verses 10 and 11 therefore brothers and sisters be all the more eager. The word is actually the same word as verse 5 where it says make every effort that is in effect make every effort to confirm your call and election for if you do this you'll never stumble for in this way entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

Confirm your call and election. Years ago when you travelled overseas you would have to confirm your next flight. It was always a big hassle I found before mobile phones were around because you had to find a phone box and money to ring the airline agency in the foreign country to confirm that you were going to be on such and such a flight and if you didn't do that you might lose your flight.

[22 : 03] Nearly happened to me once in the Middle East. These days thankfully you don't have to do that but the sense of confirm here is not quite like that. It's not as though we have got to do something to confirm with God his choice of us and our salvation.

That's secure. The sense here is that the evidence of godly fruit in our lives confirms in my mind God has chosen me I'm saved by God.

That is the evidence of godliness is not what I rely upon but becomes evidence to confirm God's choice of me. God's salvation of me.

That's the sense of verse 10 here. But where we lack the fruit of godliness then it raises doubts and questions serious and right doubts and questions.

Am I chosen by God? Am I saved by Jesus? I can't be sure when I'm lacking such fruit. The fruit becomes our self-reassuring evidence of God's work of choosing and saving us?

[23 : 11] Where to use every effort. Be all the more eager, verse 10 says, to do this. Again, it raises the question, am I actually expending effort to produce the fruit of righteousness to confirm my call?

Am I taking it for granted? Am I sitting back lazy and complacent as a Christian? I may have been a Christian many, many years. Am I now losing my sense of effort and eagerness and zeal for confirming my call?

Are the fruit that I've borne in the past drying up on my leaves and branches? Are we progressing in self-control, in mutual affection?

Am I putting sin to death? Am I overcoming my bad temper? Am I loving more people more generously? How are you preventing spiritual blindness and near-sightedness and spiritual dementia?

Well, the correction to it is to go back to gospel truth for gospel power. And that's what Peter does in the next paragraph. In verses 12 to 15, in four verses, three times he emphasizes remembering.

[24 : 20] So he says in verse 12, I intend to keep on reminding you of these things. In verse 13, as long as I'm in this body, I'm going to refresh your memory.

And then in verse 15, I will make every effort so that after my departure, you may be able at any time to recall these things. Remember, refresh memory, recall.

That's his emphasis. It's not new stuff here. So it's why we read the scriptures, why we listen to sermons, why we're in Bible study groups, is to keep on remembering the gospel and its goal of godliness.

And as we keep on remembering, we are making sure fixed firmly in our view are the future promises, the lemon tart of the heavenly glory and the return of Jesus.

And thus, we appropriate the power of God, which provides everything we need for life and godliness. Seems that false teachers were in the church at this time.

[25 : 22] We'll see that in two weeks' time in chapter 3. And part of their false teaching was that Jesus is not returning. Peter wants to make sure that the readers are not misled by such false teaching.

And so the next paragraph underscores the certainty of that and the importance of that. For after all, if Jesus is not returning, the lemon tart of the future promises actually disintegrates into something totally unpalatable and hardly motivating or inspiring.

Peter recalls the fact that he, along with James and John, had seen the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain. It's recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke in the Gospels. There he saw Jesus shining brightly on top of the mountain for a time with Elijah and Moses before they disappeared from sight. Jesus, at the same time he was transfigured, Peter, along with the others, heard a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved son with whom I'm well pleased. Words that Peter knew well came from the Old Testament scriptures, from Psalm and also Isaiah.

Peter's experience of the transfiguration of Jesus confirmed for him the truthfulness of Old Testament prophecy. That Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah was fulfilled in Jesus' first coming.

[26 : 40] And so the promise of his second coming, he can be sure, will also take place. That's the logic of this paragraph here. Peter is wanting his readers to know that Old Testament prophecy is not made up.

It's not a myth, it's not a cleverly devised idea to mislead. In fact, Old Testament prophecy, meaning the whole of the Old Testament, looking forward to the Messiah and his return, is actually spoken by God.

It's not a matter of the prophet's own interpretation, it's not their imagination, but rather their writing under inspiration from God. And it's sure and certain, and Peter's experience of the transfiguration has bolstered his confidence because he's seen words of Psalms and Isaiah fulfilled.

And so the promise of the return of Jesus and of heavenly glory, the lamentant of God's promises, is absolutely sure in Peter's sights. And that's what he's saying in verses 16 onwards.

We didn't follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We've been eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honour and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the majestic glory saying, this is my son, my beloved, with whom I'm well pleased.

[27 : 53] We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. And then he goes on in verse 20 to say, first of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own, probably the prophet's interpretation, because no prophecy came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

That is, you can be sure of the Bible's scriptures, the Old Testament's promises, they come from God through a prophet. And his experience of the transfiguration has bolstered his certainty of the ultimate fulfilment of all of God's promises.

So then, in the middle of the world, now here day by day, how do we live? The end of verse 19 he says, you do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Morning star is an Old Testament expression for the Messiah. What Peter is saying is this, the day is coming when Jesus returns and heavenly glory will be fully manifest.

That's an incentive, a lemon tart to look forward to and hold on to. That's the day of the rising dawn of the light of Jesus' kingdom. For now though, in this world, it's a promise.

[29 : 18] It's a lamp to direct us to the full light of that heavenly glory. Hold on to the lamp of God's word, the promises of the gospel. Holding on to it appropriates its power for godliness.

Because like the silly illustration of the wedding, on that final day we'll be clothed in perfect godliness. From here to there, we are to be growing in the godliness that comes from faith in the promises of God.

How do we appropriate that power, that power of Jesus' death? Through the scriptures, through the promises, by trusting them. Not knowing them, but trusting them.

That's Peter's argument in this first chapter of this letter. So when we are to make every effort, as verses 5 and 10 say, to confirm our call to growing godliness, that will necessarily mean making every effort to keep reminding ourselves from the scriptures of the gospel and the promises of God. God's gospel goal is Godliness. God's gospel goal is everything needed for life and godliness.

[30 : 40] It's putting it aside and saying, I don't need it, which is a mistake of fatal folly. God's gospel goal is godliness and God gives power for everything needed for life and godliness.

We appropriate that power by trusting promises. In order to do that, we keep reminding ourselves through the scriptures of the lemon tart of God's promises for Jesus' return and the glory of heaven.

So make every effort to growing godliness, to confirm your call, appropriating the power of God's gospel word.
Amen.