

**Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse –April 26th 2009**  
**2 Peter 1:1-4**

In recent times the description of someone as a 'godly person' has fallen out of usage probably the last thing we want is a piety that is detached from reality, and narrow in the very worst sense. We have distanced ourselves from the idea of the word piety in a negative sense, but in that we have neglected the call to holiness and godliness, and if we're only concerned about false piousness then we will lose something.

Peter is addressing Christians who in their disillusionment and disappointment have decided that holiness, the fear of the Lord, and judgement may not be so important. After all where is Jesus? Let's consign words like judgement, right and wrong and ethics to a bygone era. God will turn a blind eye to anything.

To counter that attitude, to counter this laziness, Peter writes this farewell speech. He wants to insist that even though the gospel comes by grace and forgiveness, and by the gift of faith and it is free, yet it will demand everything, it is costly. Peter does not allow us to sit loose to the major moral demands.

Jesus' divine power does not give us everything we might like, but everything we need for godliness. True saving faith has this at its centre - a steeliness, an intent to live a godly life. Anything less is not Christian conversion. This is not perfectionism, asserting that we are transformed overnight. No, otherwise we would not need this letter. All our struggling, all our wrestling with God, our fighting of temptation, being anxious to do God's will, this is at the heart of Christianity.

Let's take a practical example - pornography. We live in a culture that says it's no big deal, that it's a form of recreation, a way of relaxing, and we get used to seeing it on TV. This view is not unlike that being promoted at the time of this letter. For Peter this way of talking is crass. A person who has been surfing the net late at night, and comes away feeling ashamed is not someone who is 'uptight' or has 'hang-ups', but is actually evidencing that the Holy Spirit is at work in his life. If you don't feel guilty then that is when you should worry. Peter's advice is not about sin management, but he is answering the question 'how do I overcome?', 'how do I conquer these things. Peter is wanting us to grow in the virtues, into the likeness of God. It is possible so to live, to participate in the divine nature. How?

Peter fixes in verse 3 on the glory and goodness of God. This does not mean some kind of mystical absorption into the divine being, but rather the conviction that we can indeed live this life through having this vision of the glory and goodness. What the Puritans called 'The Expulsive Power of a Higher Affection'. The way to overcome pornography or anger or anything else to which we are addicted is not by avoidance, but by feeding on and celebrating this love of God, such that it expels the other things. And by having such an experience of his glory and goodness through praying, singing, communion, fellowship, walking in the woods, we will encounter afresh the glory and we go away with hope. Harboured lust means limiting our intimacy with God. The love that God offers is so transcendent, so possessing that it expels the power of those other things. So the gamble of faith is 'Is Jesus enough?'

As John Donne says in his poem which begins 'Batter my heart, three-personed God', 'except you enthrall me shall I never be free nor ever chaste expect you ravish me.' This is something of what Peter is saying: that there is something of the sweetness, majesty and goodness of God that comes at our conversion, and we must go on in the divine power, in the glory and goodness of Jesus - not in Christian activity, or endeavour, which will just wear us out - but in participating in the divine nature.