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CAN YOU BECOME LIKE GOD? (2 Peter 1:1-4)

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In the ancient pagan world leaders were sometimes elevated to the position of gods and worshipped in their lifetimes. In the ruins of roman cities, like Ephesus, you will find temples erected to emperors. Of course, these rulers did not have any divine powers as evidenced by the fact that some of them were assassinated. In the Hindu religion some religious leaders called gurus are worshipped as gods. People give them gifts and even offer sacrifices to them to obtain favors. Why would people believe this? Can a human being become a god? Or can a person become like God? Well, according to the Bible, believers can take on divine nature.

It was a desire to be like God that caused Eve to give in to the temptation of Satan and eat of the forbidden fruit. Satan said to her: ***“In the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”***.¹ Eve wanted to be like God but she followed the wrong advice. In fact, a person can share in the divine nature as Peter explains in his second epistle.

2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ; 2 grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises in order that by them you might become a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in this world by lust.

In these verses Peter describes four resources we have that enable us to share in the divine nature, that is, to become like Jesus Christ.

ACCESS TO GOD

The first resource we have is access to God. In verse 1 Peter explains the basis of this access. He starts by identifying himself as a bond servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ. An Apostle is one who is sent forth, a messenger. It was a high calling and there were only twelve apostles; yet Peter emphasizes he servant hood more than his apostleship. This is an illustration of what Jesus taught when He said, “But the greatest of you shall be your servant”.² Peter had learned his lesson well. We need to keep this lesson before us also.

No matter how important a position we attain, we are always to see ourselves as servants to others. Probably the worse sin in which a believer can indulge is pride.

Peter addresses his letter to “those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours.” What faith is this? Are all faiths the same? Many people think so. Perhaps you have heard people say that we are all worshipping the same God in different ways. But the God of the universe is not that tolerant. In fact, He is very exclusive when it comes to what is the right faith as the following verses demonstrate:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father, but through Me”.³

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved”.⁴

In the epistle to the Galatians Paul strongly condemned anyone who would preach any other gospel. Peter’s faith is the one true faith and his letter is addressed to those who possess this same faith. In the last part of verse 1 Peter states that this truth is “by righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” The Wycliffe Bible Commentary on the New Testament has this comment about God’s righteousness:

“This is the foundation of the entire ethical universe. It is not a theoretical and juridical righteousness only, but a warm, loving, providential righteousness embracing God’s entire redemptive plan”.⁵

Our own righteousness can never save us, can never give us eternal life. It is only in the righteousness of God that faith is possible. When we put our trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, the righteousness of God is imputed to us (2 Cor. 5:21). As a result we become children of God and have access to Him through prayer (Heb. 4:15,16). Our new relationship with God provides us with three other resources by which we can share in the divine nature.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

In verse 2 Peter uses a common Christian greeting of the first century – grace and truth. Peter sees these coming from a knowledge of God and Jesus Christ. Knowledge is the main theme of this Epistle and Peter uses the word

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knowledge or know 16 times in it. Peter wrote this letter to combat a false teaching which would later be called Gnosticism. Followers of this teaching held a bewildering array of views; but common among all these views was the idea that pitted God who is a spirit against material creation which was viewed as evil. Salvation was understood as an escape from the body, not by faith in Christ or even good works, but by special or secret “knowledge”. The Gnostics were seeking a special knowledge available to only a few; but what they needed was the true knowledge which comes from God. The Greek word translated “knowledge” in verse 2 is *epignosis* which means a special kind of knowledge, a kind that is complete. In the Amplified New Testament this knowledge is described as full, personal, precise, and correct. This is not just head knowledge although that is important, but it is also heart knowledge. And it is readily available to God’s children.

DIVINE POWER

In verse 3 Peter goes on to give us the third resource that will enable us to partake of the divine nature – God’s power. Peter says that this power enables us to “have all things”. Notice Peter’s repeated references to all things in verses 8, 12, and 13 in 1 Peter 1. God’s power enables us to have everything we need to face the vicissitudes and trials of life. It also provides everything we need to defend ourselves against false doctrine, no matter how reasonable it might seem on the surface. Paul identifies this divine power as “the power of His resurrection”.⁶ What does His power do for us? It produces a miracle – a miracle of inner transformation that results in a change of outward behavior. This miracle starts at salvation and continues until we leave this earth.

Paul also relates this resource to knowledge. Again the same Greek word is used here as in verse 2. We can have this divine power when we really “know” Jesus Christ. Knowledge means knowing Christ intimately and not just knowing about Him.

PRECIOUS PROMISES

When we come to verse 4, we see the fourth resource that God provides for our spiritual growth – His promises. Notice the transition from verse 3 at the beginning of verse 4, “for by these”. That is, we receive these promises by the glory and excellence of Christ. So by this God grants us precious and magnificent promises. The Greek word translated “promises” is not the usual term indicating a private agreement, but a word implying an emphatic

and public announcement. So these are promises to anyone who has become a child of God and they are backed by a sovereign God who cannot lie. In one sense these promises refer to the abundant and eternal life promised to all believers. But it also refers to the numerous offers of divine provision found in the Scriptures.

The result of these four resources – access to God, knowledge of God, divine power, and God’s promises – is that we become sharers in the nature and life of God. What does this mean? No, we don’t become little gods; but we do become a new creation (1 Cor. 5:17). At the end of verse 4 Peter says:

“Having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust”.

He is referring to the old sinful nature which controls the unsaved person’s life. When a person gets saved, he escapes from the bondage of sin (Rom. 6:5-11); and he begins to become like our Savior. He begins to display Christ’s attributes in his life. What are these attributes? They are the fruit of the Spirit:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law”.⁷

To be a partaker of the divine nature is to put on those qualities that characterize God’s relationship with us.

CONCLUSION

Salvation is just the beginning of a lifelong spiritual journey to become like Jesus Christ in our words, thoughts, and actions. It is a challenging journey, but God has provided the resources we need. We have access to his throne through prayer, we have knowledge of his Word available, we have his power in our lives through the Holy Spirit, and we have the promises in the Bible that we can claim. God tells us that we can share in the divine nature. Let us believe this and strive toward this goal in our Christian lives.

¹Genesis 3:5

²Matthew 23:11

³John 14:6

⁴Acts 4:12

⁵Wycliffe Bible Commentary on the New Testament, 1971, page 990

⁶Philippians 3:40

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⁷Galatians 5:22-23