

The Sufficiency of Scripture for Life and Godliness 2 Peter 1:1-4

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George Meisinger*

[*Editor's note: George Meisinger is dean of *Chafer Theological Seminary*, as well as teaching in the Old and New Testament departments. He received a B.A. from Biola University, a Th.M. in Old Testament Literature and Exegesis from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a D.Min. in Biblical Studies from Western Seminary. He also pastors Grace Church in Huntington Beach, California.]

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.¹

Introduction

In the first four verses of 2 Peter, the deity of Christ receives remarkable emphasis. Peter wants us to know that because Jesus Christ is God, He is able to give us a brim full experience of life. The Lord gives whatever we need to flourish as Christians beginning with our position in Christ.²

- In Christ we have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30).
- We stand perfected and complete in Christ before God forever (Colossians 2:10; Hebrews 10:14).

¹ Biblical quotations are from the New King James Version.

² For an outstanding development of our position in Christ, see Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* 3:234–266, “The Riches of Divine Grace.”

- We possess every spiritual blessing in Christ and the Father fully accepts us in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:3, 5).

Beside these positional benefits, God directly supplies our needs by giving us revelation. This serves as an infallible means to “restore our souls” (Psalm 19:7a), to give us skill for living (“wisdom”—*מִתְּכִימָת פִּתִּי*, 19:7b), to fill our hearts with joy (19:8a), and to enlighten our eyes—granting insight for the whys and hows of *living* (19:8b).

As though that were not enough, God’s grace is sufficient for every situation, including the toughest ones life hurls our way (2 Corinthians 12:9). As one commentator put it

To possess the Lord Jesus Christ is to have every spiritual resource. All strength, wisdom, comfort, joy, peace, meaning, value, purpose, hope and fulfillment in life now and forever is bound up in Him. Christianity is an all-sufficient relationship with an all-sufficient Christ.³

Let’s see how Peter presents this wonderful truth.

Peter’s Hello

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1a),

“Simon” was his Aramaic name before he met the Lord. “Peter” is his Greek name (Πετρος, *petros*), that is, a piece of rock. There is no implication in his new name that Peter would be perfect. Why is that? Because *after* he received his name change:

- He lost his faith when walking on water.
- He fell asleep in Gethsemane when he should have prayed.
- He denied the Lord three times.
- Paul sharply rebuked him for legalistic hypocrisy.

Yet Peter’s name change shows that God had a plan for his life, and that the Lord would give him what he needed to mature as a Christian. Though his name changed, Peter remained a man; he did not become a superman. If the Lord wanted to use supermen, He could employ angels. The Lord uses men, women, young people who are born-again and growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Yet these people still possess problems, peculiarities, and limitations for which the grace of God is adequate.

By calling himself a “*servant*” (δουλος, a slave), he sets himself in contrast to the false teachers who arrogantly deny “*the Lord who bought them*” (2:1).

³ John MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), pp. 18–19.

As an “*apostle*” God commissioned Peter to evangelize and pioneer churches, especially among the Jewish people. When Peter says that he is an apostle “*of Jesus Christ*” (genitive of possession), he denotes ownership. Christ owns him. Peter’s perspective is that he did not belong to himself (cp. 1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

Now, as the next clause implies, Peter’s commission involved writing part of Scripture (two out of the 66 canonical books).

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us (2 Peter 1:1b)

“*Like precious faith*” denotes that the faith Peter’s readers obtained was equal in value or privilege to the faith the apostles possessed. The Greeks used the word “like” (ἰσότημον, *isotimon*) of foreigners to whom a city gave equal privileges of citizenship--they had the same rights, responsibilities and privileges of the native born.⁴ The point here is that Peter’s readers have the same privileges as the apostles. The apostles are not a “cut-above” in this regard.

That privilege is “*faith*.” But what does it mean to obtain faith? The active voice of “obtain” shows that they were not passive in obtaining faith, as many Calvinists maintain, but that they took initiative to obtain faith. Thus, Peter does not here say that God gave to them a subjective ability to believe. The benefit they took initiative to obtain was “faith,” in the sense the body of sound doctrine taught and written by the apostles. Peter’s readers obtained a great benefit: divine revelation.⁵ So it is for you and me. The “faith” or body of sound doctrine we have obtained in Scripture is as precious for us as it was for the Apostles. Notice who gave revelation to us:

By the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1c):

⁴ Walvoord, John F. and Zuck, Roy B., editors. *Bible Knowledge Commentary* (BKC) (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983; 2:863.

⁵ Many commentators take “faith” to denote a faith God sovereignly gives a sinner thus enabling him to believe (e.g., Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies: In these Last Days* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973]; p. 16; Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. Jude and the Second Epistle of St. Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965; p. 81). Several things work against that interpretation and support taking “faith” to be the Word of God: (1) “Obtain” is an active voice, not passive. (2) The emphasis of immediate context on “knowledge” (1:2, 3), and “promises” (1:4) as the means to living out our life and godliness as God intends. Peter’s thrust is on the object-content of our faith, not faith itself. (3) Chapter 3:2 speaks of “words” and “commandment” which Peter’s readers share with the apostles (and which have equal value for them as for the apostles).

“By” or, better, “in the sphere of the righteousness of our God,”⁶ referring not to God’s attitude of righteousness, but His righteous provision; His act of providing faith, the body of sound doctrine.

“Our God and . . . Jesus” is a grammatical nugget, called the Granville Sharp rule, denoting that one Person, not two are in view. Thus, Jesus Christ is both God and Savior. The point is that since Christ is God, He is able to provide the precious faith, or Scripture, for all our needs and to give us a full experience of life.

Peter’s Prayer

Grace and peace be multiplied to you (2 Peter 1:2a)

He prays for on-going, daily, experiential grace and peace in the lives of believers. “Grace” that God would continue to deal with Christians not according to what they deserve, but according to grace in action, undeserved acts of mercy. And he prays that the “Peace” of God that surpasses understanding would be their experience, nor merely a nicely held theory. Note further that Peter prays that grace and peace will not be a mere trickle, but “*Be multiplied*,” which is his prayerful wish for fellow-Christians.⁷

Now whether the Lord answers his prayer depends on one’s response to the foundational truths of 1:2–4. So to what do we look to enter into multiplied grace and peace?

The knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (1:2b),

“*Knowledge*” (ἐπίγνωσις, *epignosis*) refers to the sphere of knowledge God reveals to Christians through the Bible by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. By illumination we mean that the Spirit enlightens “the eyes of our understanding” (Ephesians 1:18), enabling believers to understand what God has already revealed in Scripture. It is in illuminated truth that we must live and move to experience grace and truth.

Further notice that this knowledge is “*of God and of Jesus our Lord*,” which is another Granville Sharp, thus Peter again points out Christ’s deity. Jesus Christ is God. Scripture affirms it repeatedly. For example:

Paul says that all the fullness of God dwells in bodily fashion in Christ, and reveals that the Creator, the One through whom and for whom everything was created is Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:16, 19; 2:9).

⁶ “The full ‘value’ of the faith could only be realized in one sphere--namely, the sphere of divine righteousness, both imputed (credited to them by faith), and experiential (lived out in their lives)” (Zane Hodges, *The Kerugma Message*, 1, 1; May-June 1991; “Exposition of Second Peter;” p. 3).

⁷ For further discussion of “multiplied grace” see the Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, volume 7; Autumn 1994; #13; pp. 37–48. This is a reprint of material from Lewis Sperry Chafer’s book, *Grace: The Glorious Theme*, now out of print.

Christ is the one who sustains all of creation. He is creation's architect, builder, and landlord, and yet He humbled Himself and became a part of His own creation (Colossians 1:17; Philippians 2:5–8).

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Even the demons freely acknowledged that Jesus Christ is the holy One of God, creation's Lord and sovereign (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:41).

Many men, including Christ, have claimed to be God. Anyone can say he is God. It is one thing to say one is deity, and another to produce the character of God in one's life. In Jesus Christ, however, there was fullness of grace and mercy. There were no slip-ups. No failures. No sin--exactly what you expect from God.

Napoleon said

I think I understand something of human nature, and I tell you that all these heroes of antiquity were men and I am a man. But no one was like Him. Jesus Christ was more than man. Jesus Christ is God.⁸

Yet not only was Jesus God, He was a perfect man.

There has never been a more real or genuine man than Jesus of Nazareth. He embraces all the good elements that mark other men and it is not too much to say that there is no element missing which men think desirable in the human character. Not only so, he possesses all these elements in a higher degree than anyone else, and with perfect balance and proportion. There is no weakness, no exaggeration or strain, no strong or weak points as is the case with the rest of mankind. Still more there are certain elements and traits of character which are not found elsewhere such as absolute humility, entire unselfishness, whole hearted willingness to forgive, and the most ... perfect holiness. Nor must we overlook the wonderful blending of contrasts which are to be seen in Jesus Christ: the combination of keenness and integrity; of caution and courage; of tenderness and severity; of sociability and aloofness. Or we may think of the elements of sorrow without moroseness; of joy without lightness; of spirituality without asceticism; of conscientiousness without morbidity; of freedom without license; of earnestness without fanaticism. He was, in every sense, a [perfect] man.⁹

Christ is undiminished deity and perfect humanity with no need for improvement. He lacks nothing. For all of us finite mortals, however, there is room for improvement concerning multiplied grace and peace. None of us has arrived where he would say that

⁸ Quoted by David Roper, in a sermon given at Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, CA, June 25, 1966; p. 2.

⁹ Roper, p. 4.

“Always, in all places, under all circumstances I am brim full of the experience of grace and peace.” Yet God provides for a full experience.

God’s Four-Fold Provision for Increased Grace and Peace¹⁰

Provision #1: God exercised His divine power

As¹¹ His divine power has given to us (1:3a)

Divine power is God’s omnipotence at work for us. The Lord does not keep his energy bottled up in some far away unknown galaxy. He is not a potential or static deity, but active and able.

Furthermore, the verb “*has given*” denotes that what God’s strength gave, He gave as a gift, without payment required. The Lord gave us undeservedly and by omnipotent power what the next phrase identifies. Thus, the Lord’s first provision was to do something for us and to do it with strength.

Provision #2: The Lord granted all things for life and godliness

All things that pertain¹² to life and godliness¹³ (1:3b),

“*All things*” is a magnificent promise echoed in other passages, e.g., Psalm 23:1; Romans 8:32; Philippians 4:19; also Psalm 84:11,

The Lord gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

And the Holy Spirit says not some, not many, not most, but the Lord gave *all* things to us “*that pertain to life and godliness,*” or that we need *for* life and godliness.¹⁴

What is “*life*”? It is spiritual vitality, the capacity to enter into and appreciate and enjoy life as God intends. “Life” is not just the ability to put vapor on a mirror as you breathe! In 1 Thessalonians 3:7–8 Paul says, having been comforted by a good report

¹⁰ Though verses 3–5 are an anacoluthon, the logical connection is: 3–4, = “As (or, since) His divine power has given to us...” and 5–9, = But also (or, and indeed) for this very reason. . . add to you faith. . .” In other words, God’s gracious provision for us (vss. 3–4) is the foundational reason why we should follow through on the exhortation of vss. 5–9 (Hodges, p. 3).

¹¹ “As” is here giving the reason for an action, here the action in vs. 3, “May . . . be multiplied.” That is, because God has provided, the increase of grace and peace may be a wonderful experiential reality in the believer’s life.

¹² “Pertain to” is pros, i.e., “that is needed for.”

¹³ Zane Hodges takes verse 3 to start a new sentence because it is unlikely the usual opening benediction should be extended into a long, elaborate sub-clause like verses 3–4. And it is more likely vss. 3–4 introduce the epistle’s prologue (Kerugma, 1, 2, July-August 1991; p. 3).

¹⁴ Thomas, when commenting on this verse says “Everything for the commencement, continuance, and completion of the Christian life is thus provided” (W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Apostle Peter* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946]); p. 249.

from Timothy, “*now we live.*” To live is to enjoy life, having one’s soul liberated from sorrow, anxiety, loneliness, etc.¹⁵

To live is the newness of life that God promises us in Christ through faith (Romans 6:4; 2 Timothy 1:1), and from which all unbelievers are cut-off (Ephesians 4:18). God causes new life to happen in the life of each believer through His Word (John 6:63, 68; Acts 5:20; Philippians 2:16) and by believers walking in the Word (Romans 8:6).

The life Peter speaks of, he got from Jesus in John 10:10, abundant life, a satisfying life filled with meaning and value in terms of eternity. Note the characteristics of “abundant life” the book of Proverbs reveals:

- Sound wisdom and discretion are “life to your soul” (Proverbs 3:22), resulting in safety, confidence, and stability (3:23–26). That’s health in one’s soul.
- “Life” is having health to one’s flesh (Proverbs 4:22).
- “Life” is having the wisdom to avoid the “snares of death” (Proverbs 13:14).
- “Life” is responding to biblical reproof and instruction, which leads to understanding, then humility, then honor (Proverbs 15:31–33).
- “Life” is a sense of satisfaction coupled with the avoidance of evil circumstances (Proverbs 19:23). Where there is no life, satisfaction is elusive--a bubble that pops when we reach out to seize it.

Yet the life God gives (as summarized from above), through His great and precious promises is a life characterized by

Safety	Confidence
Stability	Protection
Improved health	Understanding
Humility	Honor
Satisfaction	

“Godliness” is godly living, living according to the will of God. It is the kind of obedience that results from walking in the Spirit (Romans 8:4). Since the Lord Himself gives all things powerfully and graciously, the upshot is that we do not need for a genuine experience of life and godliness

the philosophies of the world’s great thinkers,

¹⁵ “This word speaks of life in the sense of one who is possessed of vitality and animation. It is used of the absolute fullness of life, both essential and ethical, which belongs to God” (Wuest, p. 20).

the regulations of tradition,
psychology's help,
psychotherapy's insights,
the divinations of New Age proponents,
or the latest fads and gimmicks of Madison Avenue,

to enjoy life fully and to reap the benefits God gives to those who learn and believe His promises.

All we need to enter into life completely and fulfillingly, and to walk worthily of the grace of God, is in God's Word. The Scripture. The Bible. The Book. That's why Jesus said to a dear, but distracted friend

Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her (Luke 10:41–42).

So if you today say, "I am not satisfied with my life." Diligently pursue the Word of God. It is God's powerful and gracious provision for an authentic experience of life. If you say, "I am not sure what the will of God for my life is," dig in the Scripture. You find the Lord's provision for everything there.

Provision #3: The Lord gave sufficient knowledge

Through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue (1:3c).

God's provision comes "*through the knowledge of Him,*" that is, through our growing knowledge of the mind of Christ, or His revealed Word, the Bible (cp. 2:20; cp. Jn. 17:3).

The Holy Spirit is clear: Full knowledge of the Lord Jesus--who He is and what He provides for us--makes possible the abundant life Jesus promises (John 10:10; cp. Matthew 11:28–30).

And the One we are to come to know is the Lord who "*called us by glory and virtue.*"¹⁶ "*By glory*" is by means of¹⁷ what glorifies God and is in keeping with His

¹⁶ Christ attracts people enslaved by sin (cf. 2:19) by His own moral excellence and the total impact of His glorious Person (BKC 2:864).

¹⁷ A.T. Robertson (ATR), *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 533, says that this is "clearly instrumental, not dative."

glorious person and plan. He also called us by means of His “virtue,”¹⁸ which is God’s personal moral excellence.

To sum up provision #3: God has powerfully and graciously given to us sufficient knowledge to prepare us for a full participation in life and godliness, as well as multiplied grace and peace.

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Provision #4: He gave us promises

By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises (1:4a),

“By which,” i.e., by means of His glory and virtue, He gave “*to us exceedingly great ... promises.*”¹⁹ We listed a few of these promises under “Provision #2” above. God’s promises are “exceedingly great” (relative superlative),²⁰ which denotes the high rank, dignity, and importance God assigns to them. Thus, they should be considered a top priority to which we give careful attention.

“Precious” speaks of what has genuine worth or value, and so should be held with honor and respect. Thus, we should regard the promises like fine china, not Tupperware. Further, the promises “*have been given,*” which is the same verb as in 1:3 and speaks of promises God gave graciously, freely, without cost to us.

Now Peter, after identifying these four wonderful provisions from God, does not stop there. He closes this sub-section by revealing ...

The Purpose of God’s Four-Fold Provision

That through these you may be partakers of the divine nature (1:4b),

That “through these” (great and precious promises) “you may be partakers of the divine nature.” We may translate that through these promises “you may start to become partakers.”²¹

It is important to note that “*you*” means “you believers!” His readers are already sons of God, born-again. They are regenerated. They obtained like precious faith (1:1). They are brethren, called and elect (1:10), and beloved (3:8, 14, 17).

¹⁸ *Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, take it to denote the manifestation of divine power, miracle (p. 105).

¹⁹ For a comprehensive categorization of several hundred of the promises, see the author’s booklet, *Promises and Challenges*.

²⁰ ATR, p. 670.

²¹ Ingressive aorist middle subjunctive of *ginomai*.

Thus to become partakers of the divine nature does not mean Peter's readers need to receive God's nature, in the sense to be justified, or saved from eternal hell. They already possess God's nature, the new nature. Yet as believers they need to begin to appropriate to their experience God's nature.²² They have the promises so that they may turn to their advantage this great spiritual asset already possessed by God's grace.

A "partaker" is one who shares or participates in something. He is not a couch potato or mental flatliner, but gets into the Word and reaps the benefits of study, memorization, reflection, and obedience. He experiences the benefits of the divine nature--a nature God gives to all believers because of their birth into the family of God.

Accordingly, to partake in the "nature" of God is to begin to take-on the natural or intrinsic characteristics of God. That is, to love as God loves, to have joy as God has joy, to know peace as God knows peace, to exercise self-control as God exercises self-control.²³

These are possible because every Christian has a divine seed [nature] imparted to him when born again (1 John 3:9). And Peter speaks practically, of experientially sharing in God's imparted nature, or characteristics.

In other terms, to partake of the divine nature is:

- To be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29).
- To have Christ formed in us (Galatians 4:19).
- To become a partaker of His holiness (Hebrews 10:12).
- Or to realize the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).

We may sum up by saying that to share in the divine nature is to "become more like Christ (cf. Rom. 8:9; Gal. 2:20)."²⁴

Now the final phrase should affect all of us. Why? Because until what Peter says next takes place in our lives, we cannot benefit from the precious and exceedingly great promises. Until this happens we render full knowledge useless and fail to experience grace and peace. Until we distance ourselves from corruption, we will be "have-nots," mere spectators, while others enjoy abundant life.

Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (1:4c).

²² "The promises thus introduce us to fellowship with God, whereby we are made partakers of His Divine life... . This is the culmination of redemption: union and communion with God (1 John 1:3)" (Thomas, pp. 250–51).

²³ "Our nature is changed to divine by the moral power of hope and faith kindled in us by the promises" (Mayor, p. 87).

²⁴ BKC 2:865.

“*Having escaped*” precedes the action of the main clause, which is “*become partakers of the divine nature.*” In other words, we must first escape, then we may begin the life-long process of partaking. Briefly, we escape (a) by confession and (b) daily acts of repentance. That is, consistent escape is (a) by acknowledging sin to God and (b) making decisions not to cave-in to temptation, which we do by “knowing, reckoning, presenting,” while walking in the Spirit (Romans 6–8).

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Conclusion

C. S. Lewis said

Men down through the ages when they have needed courage might cry out “Billy Budd, help me!” and nothing very significant happens. Or if they need wisdom they might cry out “William Shakespeare, help me!” and nothing very significant happens. But down through the centuries men in times of deep and desperate need have cried out “Lord Jesus, help me!” and they have found he never fails.²⁵

Why did Lewis say that about Christ? Because the Lord gives us in Scripture everything we need for life and godliness.

To wrap up this unveiling of God’s provision for multiplied grace and peace, what do we have? God has given to us by omnipotence power and grace everything for life and godliness, and for participation in the divine nature. When we do so--being a doer as well as hearer of the Word--the future for us becomes very bright indeed: fruitfulness (1:8) and abundant reward in eternity (1:11)

Now it is the vision of *CTS* to provide training for gifted and called men who believe in the sufficiency of the Word. It has become fashionable in recent decades for some theological schools to add counseling courses to their curriculums that are as much or more rooted in psychology and psychotherapy than sound theology. Apparently they believe that psychological therapy will add something to the sufficiency of Scripture, perhaps accomplishing as much good as preachers and teachers solely rooted in exegesis and biblical doctrine. *CTS* believes that that Bible *is* sufficient. Christians need nothing else to secure all things that pertain to life and godliness.

CTS aims to instill in our students a deep-seated conviction of the adequacy of the Word, and the importance of mastering the exegetical tools to the best of each man’s ability. Why? Because we deeply believe that the Word alone is able to transform people by the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2).

Satan has always tried to entice believer’s minds away from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3). *CTS* returns to the simplicity of faith alone in Christ alone for eternal life and forgiveness. We also return to the simplicity of taking God at His Word

²⁵ Roper, p. 7.

and making Scripture the lone and sufficient means of knowledge and ministry for life and godliness.

One contemporary writer tells the story of two brothers who inherited a vast fortune in Chicago. It was enough to sustain them for the rest of their lives in affluence. They, however, died in squalor, not using what was theirs and, instead, lived like packrats who collected virtually tons of rubbish. This writer then said:

Too many Christians live their spiritual lives that way. Disregarding the bountiful riches of an inheritance that cannot be defiled (1 Peter 1:4), they scour the wreckage of worldly wisdom, collecting litter. As if the riches of God's grace (Ephesians 1:7) were not enough, as if "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3) were not sufficient, they try to supplement the resources that are theirs in Christ. They spend their lives pointlessly accumulating sensational experiences, novel teachings, clever gurus, or whatever else they can find to add to their hoard of spiritual experiences. Practically all of it is utterly worthless. Yet some people pack themselves so full of these diversions they can't find the door to the truth that would set them free. They forfeit treasure for trash.²⁶

We concur, believing that God's Word, with its precious and exceedingly great promises, is sufficient for life and godliness. The Bible is our treasure.

26 26. MacArthur, p. 39.