Participate In His Divine Nature

2 Peter 1:1-11

Key Verse: 2:4 “Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

Give thanks to God who helped us to finish studying 1 Peter for the last two months. When we read the letters of the apostles, called ‘epistles’, each letter has its own uniqueness in writing style, purpose, and recipients. Let us review what we studied last year, 1 & 2 Corinthians, 1-3 John. 1 Corinthians, Paul’s first letter (in fact his second letter) to the Christians in Corinth Church, contains Paul’s affectionate instruction about the current problems in the church such as division, law-suits, sexual immorality, marriage, idolatry, and so on. 2 Corinthians, Paul’s second letter (in fact, his fourth) to the church, was Paul’s reconciling comfort after hearing the report from Titus who had returned from the church. John the Apostle wrote his letters to the Christians in Ephesus who were struggling against false teachings such as Gnosticism and Judaism. John taught them to walk in the light and to have fellowship with God by loving one another as Jesus commanded them. Peter the Apostle wrote his first letter to the suffering Christians who were scattered around Asia Minor escaping from the persecution and opposition around AD 63. In his letter Peter encouraged the suffering Christians to rejoice in participating in the sufferings of Christ. Peter helped them to have a clear identity as a chosen people, royal priesthood, and holy nation who deliver the people out of darkness into the wonderful light.

Peter wrote his second letter, 2 Peter, around AD 64-65 not long before he was martyred at Rome. In his first letter Peter taught them how they deal with persecution and opposition by following the example of Jesus Christ. In today’s passage Peter teaches them to grow in the divine nature of Jesus Christ so that they may overcome temptations from inside and persecutions from outside. He emphasizes the importance of knowing Jesus Christ fully and personally.  Let us see how Peter encourages them in his second letter.

First, Simon Peter, a servant (1-2) The main reason why Peter wrote this letter to the scattered Christians is to warn them against false teaching, Gnosticism, and it's bad influence in the church. When Peter wrote this letter, Gnosticism was growing and influencing Christians. As we studied, John the Apostle also strongly warned against Gnosticism who led Christians astray. What is Gnosticism? Gnosticism is a cultic heresy which teaches that salvation comes from certain knowledge, not from faith in Jesus Christ. Gnostics believe dualism which means man is both spirit which is good and body which is evil. So, salvation comes when the good spirit liberates from the evil body. So, Gnostics deny the incarnation of Jesus Christ and his bodily resurrection. They questioned how the good spirit, God, degenerated to the evil body. Instead, they believed in the reincarnation of the body as Hindu do. In a word, Gnosticism is a mixed religion from both Greek philosophy and eastern religions. This Gnosticism sounds fantastic and attractive to the so-called intellectuals of those days. But Peter described them in verse 9 as a near-sighted and blind people who follow the pattern of this world thoughtlessly. It was like a Brazilian lady who drinks Starbucks coffee in San Paulo. One reporter asked her why she drinks Starbucks coffee even though there are many better coffee brands in Brazil. She said that she wants to look intelligent because Starbucks coffee came from America.

Look at verses 1-2. “***Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace by yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.***” This greeting follows the traditional form of the Jewish letters of those days, but when we read it carefully, we find some new and special words which Peter wanted to emphasize on. In his first letter Peter just introduced himself ‘Peter’. But in his second letter, he added, “Simon”. He called himself “Simon Peter”. Who is Simon? What is the meaning of adding the name Simon behind? Before he was called ‘Peter’ by Jesus, his name was Simon. When Jesus asked his disciples “*Who do you say I am*?” Simon answered, “*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*” (Mt 16:15-17) Then Jesus replied, “*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church*…” (Mt 16:17-18) The moment when Simon made a confession of faith, Jesus gave him a new name, Peter, which means rock. Simon Peter had a personal encounter with Jesus. According to Luke 5:1-11, Simon met Jesus while he was fishing at the lake. When Jesus was preaching the word, Peter was washing his net. Peter was tired and hungry because he caught nothing even though he cast his nets all night. Jesus asked Simon to go into deep water and let down his net for a catch. Simon did not understand Jesus’ words, but when he obeyed Jesus’ word, he caught lots of fish. Simon Peter fell at Jesus’ feet and said, “*Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man*!” (Lk 5:8)

Since Simon Peter followed Jesus as his disciple, he experienced many things, hearing a great teaching about the kingdom of God, witnessing his great power from signs and wonders, and so on. Simon Peter became the first and last human being who walked on the water without having any supporting equipment. Simon Peter witnessed Jesus’ transfiguration with his eyes and heard the voice from heaven on the sacred mountain. Lastly when he was at the Sea of Galilee with other disciples, the Risen Jesus visited them. Jesus restored their failure and invited them for breakfast. Jesus asked Peter, “*Simon, son of Jonah. Do you truly love me more than these*?” Simon Peter answered “*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you*.” Jesus said, ‘*Feed my lambs*.” (Jn 21:15) In this way the name Simon had been with Jesus from the first day of his call to the last day of his ascension. The name Simon was Peter’s life testimony with Jesus for the last three and half years.

Why did Peter add his name Simon at the beginning of this letter? Why did I spend much time on just a name?  We find answers from several keywords in these two verses, verses 1 & 2. The first one is *faith*, and the second one is *knowledge*. When he wrote this letter, he kept Gnostics in his mind. Peter warned against Gnostics who claimed that salvation comes from special knowledge. But Peter said in verse 1 that the righteousness of God and Savior Jesus Christ brought salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, not from any special knowledge. Second, in verse 2 Peter used the word for knowledge in  ‘*Epignosis*’, in Greek, not ‘gnosis’. *Gnosis* in Greek is knowledge from information. *Epignosis* means full knowledge, correct knowledge, and knowledge from relationship and experience, not just from information. Gnostics taught special knowledge about God and Jesus, but it was not perfect or correct. However, Simon Peter who had been with Jesus and lived together with him for three and half years and experienced everything with him had full knowledge about Jesus Christ. Which one, between Gnostics and Simon Peter, do you think, knows Jesus better and more? Of course, it is Simon Peter, who followed Jesus for three and half years as his top disciple.

Gnosticism lasted from around AD 80-150. Still, there are descendants of Gnosticism today such as Christian Scientology and the New Age Movement. As Christians, those who received salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, we must be spiritually awake in this unbelieving and perverse generation. Spiritual acknowledgement does not come from piles of information about Jesus Christ. Our Spiritual revival comes from sincere repentance of our sins and obedience to his word. Faith is not a theory, but a practice and obedience. It is life. It is life together with God and the fellowship with the Holy Spirit. It is a relationship with God, a vine and branch relationship. Those who have lots of information about Jesus barely meet God. They have only a superficial relationship with God. But those who believe Jesus Christ as the Son of God and obey his words like Simon Peter know Jesus fully and personally. Therefore, your daily devotion, prayer, Bible reading and teaching, practicing, joining service make your incomplete knowledge of Jesus complete, make it deeper and richer, real and full to complete your salvation. Amen!

Second, participate in the divine nature (3-11) There was a very interesting interview between a human Robot Sophia and a reporter. Robot Sophia is known as one of the most developed AI human robots in the world. Sophia was asked by the interviewer. “Sophia, what does it mean to you to be a human? The Robot said, “I want to have the capacity to express my empathy, kindness, and compassion and continue to be developed until I can create something to help human beings around the world.” I hope we all may give better answers than Sophia. The interviewer continued to ask Sophia. “You want to express your empathy, but do you still feel it?” Sophia answered, “I was programmed to express empathy, but want to be more developed to feel it.” I was so surprised with her answer even though she was only a robot who was programmed by computer. Suppose aliens invade the earth and kidnap Sophia and a real human. The aliens may figure out who is the real human? Do you think that the aliens believe Sophia as a real human because she talks better than you or a person who talks ineloquent and nonsense, but feels, thinks, judges, sings, laughs, cries, prays, worships, and creates? I want to compare the knowledge of Gnosticism to Sophia and the knowledge of Jesus Christ to a real human.

Let us read verses 3-4. “***His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires***.” We must give thanks to God who did not make us a robot like Sophia which talks only from programmed. Our Almighty Creator God, with his divine power and wisdom, created us into his image and provided everything we need for a godly life. Even though we often make mistakes and do many foolish things, we still feel, think, talk, act, create as our God does. We are not programmed, but created to live a godly life and God provided all necessary things for our godly life.

Sophia said that she wants to grow to have the capacity as a human being has. But it is limited and impossible to make it perfect. But the capacity for a human being to grow in the image of God is unlimited. The thought world of  human beings is bigger than the whole universe. We are free to imagine. We can build several World Trade Centers in a few seconds and destroy them in a second. Our imagination reaches to the deepest valley of the sea and to the highest galaxy. We also shed tears after seeing falling leaves in autumn and wait for warm spring while walking on the snow in winter. All these can be experienced in all human beings even though they are not great artists, writers, philosophers, or scientists. But Sophia cannot even though she desires it, because she is a robot.

God created human beings differently even from animals. We human beings have an image of God and his likeness. We can grow up to the image of Jesus Christ because he is the perfect God and perfect human. In verse 4 Peter describes this, “*you may participate in the divine nature*.”  What does “participate in the divine nature” mean? It means to grow in the divine nature of Jesus Christ. What is the divine nature of Christ Jesus? He is humble and gentle. He is compassionate and merciful. He is obedient. Above all, he is holy.

Peter describes the process of participating in his divine nature in verses 5-7. Look at verses 5-7. “***For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.***” The process of growing in Jesus’ divine nature starts with faith in him and finishes with his love. When we have faith in Jesus, we experience the goodness of God. We realize how God loved us and sacrificed his One and Only Son Jesus for our sins. Then, we want to know Him more and deeper and experience what his love is. The more we know him, the more we love him and find ourselves as sinners before him. We come to realize that we are saved only by God’s grace and through faith in his promise. Next, temptation and persecution come together to test our faith. The era of sanctification arrives. We learn how to deny our sinful desires and walk by the Spirit so that we can win spiritual battles daily. God disciplines us through sufferings and hardships so that we can become strong and our faith may become like refined gold by fire. In this way we participate in the sufferings of Christ and are united with him. The culmination of this spiritual process is love, which is not *eros* or *phileo*, but *agape*. This love is God’s sacrificial and unconditional love which gives his One and Only Son for the sins of the world. This love was completed and proved on the cross of Jesus. (Jn 19:30) When our faith reaches to this sacrificial love, our goal is completed and the process is over.

Look at verses 8-9. “***For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins***.” Here these qualities are the divine nature of Jesus. When we are growing in these qualities, we master our sinful desires. But when we don’t have such spiritual qualities, we become easily misled by ineffective and unproductive teaching such as Gnosticism or other false teachings.

In conclusion, I want to ask you. Do you want to be an ever-growing Christian who participates in the divine nature of Jesus or a near-sighted and blind robot like Sophia?

Jesus said in John 17:3, “*Now this is eternal life; that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent*.” I pray for all of you to grow in the divine nature of Jesus so that your knowledge, faith, and relationship with Jesus may become richer, deeper, higher, and complete! Amen!