

Reflecting on a Verse in 1 Peter

“Though you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9). Let’s meditate a bit on this extraordinary verse.

Peter is surely referring to the words of Jesus that John used to bring his Gospel to a conclusion, writing, **“Then Jesus told him [Thomas], ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’”** (John 20:29). What an amazing God we have! The Son of God set aside His glory and His divine prerogatives (for example, His omnipotence) to take up a human nature, so that only by careful reflection on what this completely normal-appearing human being said and what He did is His true identity known. And God expects us to do that. *And we do it!!* It’s in the Word of God, the Bible, that we encounter this unique Person, Jesus. And we love Him because of who He is and all that He did for us. We encounter the living exalted Jesus, not in person, not face to face, but in the pages of the Bible. And that encounter in the Word is sufficient to establish a transcendent relationship that extends into eternity.

Perhaps you’ve heard, “To know Him is to love Him!” Is that true? Well, first, what does it mean “to know” Him? If knowing Jesus means an awareness of Him, and knowledge of some basic facts, even good theological ones, about Him, that won’t necessarily result in love for Jesus. But if knowing Jesus means wanting to be in personal relationship with Him, wanting to see Him and to be with Him, and even wanting to be like Him, then Yes! To know Him in that respect is to love Him. In Deuteronomy, the people of Israel were commanded to love God on the basis of what God had done for them, on the basis of His self-revelation, on the basis of His having loved them and brought them into a adoptive relationship; God called Israel His “son.” To know God [or substitute Jesus here], to fear God, to trust God, to serve God, to obey God, to be in intimate relationship with God . . . all these are expressions of love.

Love is an act of will. We err in supposing that love is a feeling. We love Jesus by an act of the will. It cannot be a feeling because, hey, we’ve never actually met Him. How can we love someone we don’t actually experience? By an act of the will. Faith is an act of the will too. Faith isn’t an act of the intellect. Faith can’t be merely mental agreement with some proposition, because if that were the case, Satan would be saved. After all, Satan knows that God exists, that Jesus died on the cross, and that forgiveness of sins is available because of that atoning sacrifice. Satan knows all this, but it avails him not at all. What’s the difference? Satan’s willfulness. He is not willing to submit to what God has done in Christ. He is not willing to repent of evil. He is not willing to glorify God by being obedient to Him (although as a created servant being, Satan knows he must obey God, or else). Satan has no love for God, nor for Jesus. He loves himself too much – and he does that *willfully*. Satan doesn’t believe God’s Word, clearly stated in the Bible’s last book, that he’ll be horribly punished for his rebellion. So he continues practicing heinous evil.

“We love [Him] because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). In love, God has revealed to us not only that He’s there, but what He’s like. In love, God has told us why we’re here and how we’re to live. In love, and at great personal sacrifice, God has done everything necessary to fulfill His great plan of redeeming His fallen human creatures. Everything in soteriology from election thru to glorification is done in love. John 3:16 tersely encapsulates all that soteriology, and it takes volumes to unpack it all. It’s all an expression of love. How do we respond? Our response to God’s love cannot be indifference. Nor can it be to reject it for something else. If it is, may God have mercy on us. Our response must – *must* – be to love Him in return. And how not? He is totally lovely. His loveliness is fully on display in the Person of Jesus, the Incarnate Son, who came to fully reveal the Father. God’s love must elicit love in us, because if it doesn’t, we’re simply dead. We’re walking, talking corpses.

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We live in a physical world, one that can be sensed and known. But there exists also an unseen reality, one that can only be known if it’s revealed to us. The Person of Jesus lives on in a resurrected and

exalted state, invisible to us. We know that's true, and we can actually know Him, but that's by faith. That is, by trusting in the words of the living God, the Bible.

Faith is no leap in the dark. It is not hoping in something that may or may not materialize. Neither is it simply an intellectual awareness. It's an obeying of something that God said, a doing of something that stems from believing God's Word. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). This isn't a definition of faith, but it describes it. This verse explains how faith works. Faith is taking as true what God has said or promised and then acting on it. Faith usually looks forward, anticipating what God has said will happen in the future and responding to it by how we think and live. Faith is doing the revealed will of God so that we receive what He has promised (Hebrews 10:36). Faith is embracing and living out truth. Evidently, to God, faith is a real thing; it's not something abstract. We can't see it, but God must be able to see it in us.

Noah was called to build a boat, a really big one, an enormous one. He had no idea what was coming. But he did it! He obeyed the voice of God, and he was blessed. Abraham was called to leave his family and home country and journey to a place that was at the time completely unknown to him. And he did it! He obeyed God's voice, and he went. And he was blessed in so doing. Consider Rahab. She simply heard about the God of Israel, and decided to trust Him rather than the pagan gods of her family and community. And on just the basis of an awareness of the existence and greatness of Israel's God, she risked her life to enable His people, the people of Israel, to be secure. And was she ever blessed for what she did! And on and on thru the Bible. People obey the voice of God or the revelation of God, and they are blessed.

God has not only revealed Himself to us. He's also revealed a lot about how He's constituted this world we live in. We couldn't otherwise know those spiritual truths. Thus Scripture tells us, for example, of the existence of supernatural beings such as angels and demons. They are invisible, but they're there. And a resurrection awaits all of us; this life is not our only existence. We only know that because it's been revealed in Scripture. We need to know these truths to understand reality.

So let's review a bit: (a) Faith has a future component: We're expected to trust God regarding what He says about the otherwise unknowable future. (b) Faith has a personal component: We're to be in a real, personal relationship with the living Jesus. And (c) Faith has a truth component: We're expected to trust what God says in His Word regarding otherwise unknowable truths. What happens to us when we die, for example. Or when we sin. Or what happens when we disobey God's Word. These can be stated as propositions, and we need to embrace them as absolutely true and live our lives based on them.

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Our verse says something else worth thinking about, "you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." *Receiving!* A present participle, i.e., on-going action. We are continually in the process of being saved. Salvation is not an event that occurred at some point in our life when we made "a decision to trust Christ" so that we can continue to live as we had been living. No! Salvation *is* a lifetime of faith and love. It's a worldview that permanently controls our thinking and the choices we make and the values we hold. It's a lifetime of putting to death our sin nature and living instead according to the example of Christ and according to His commands and teachings. It's an intimate relationship with the exalted Christ. It's the experience of being filled and used by the indwelling Holy Spirit. It's a life of "inexpressible joy" because we cherish the supreme blessings that God has waiting for us in the future. It's joy also because we know that the Creator of heaven and earth knows us intimately, loves us, and in perfect wisdom and goodness rules our lives.

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Every verse of Scripture in some way fills us with wonder at the greatness of our Creator God. No greater thrill can anyone have than to reflect on and treasure what the Bible's ultimate Author, the inventor of language, has freely placed in front of us. The Scriptures are given in love. May we lovingly welcome them as if we were welcoming God Himself into our lives.