

## 2 Peter 1:1-2 Parity

**Humans do a lot of looking up and looking down: we look up at people and feel worse, down at people to feel better. We naturally create hierarchies, even churches do this – but the gospel abolishes them and 2 Peter 1:1-2 shows us this.**

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In 2 Peter 1:1-2, Peter says that any and every Christian has a faith of equal standing with his. Given all the amazing things he did, this sounds unbelievable. He uses a number of pairings in this little section to begin to make his case. He calls himself “Simeon Peter”, combining his original Jewish name, and the Greek (Gentile) form of the name Jesus gave him. He greets them with what become a common Christian phrase: “grace and peace”, combining the Greek/Roman way of saying hello with the ways Jews greeted each other. He says that God’s “righteousness”, His fairness, has done this, explaining it with the phrase “**obtained a faith of equal standing.**”

### Obtained

The NIV translates this as “received” and I think that’s helpful for emphasising how little this had to do with us! Peter experienced this himself when Jesus called him (John 1:41, Matthew 4:19, John 15:16) but there is more to it than that. Peter refers to Jesus here as “our... Saviour”, a title used in Roman culture for a god who had blessed the people somehow, or an emperor or general who had won a great battle that brought peace and prosperity to others. So Peter is saying that Jesus did the choosing and the saving, both of which we did nothing to achieve. This gives us no room for boasting, for feeling superior to anyone else; it should also prevent us from feeling less than anyone either because everyone needs Jesus to do this.

### Faith

In the course of his time with Jesus, Peter went from thinking that Jesus was a teacher worth following, to believing that He was the Messiah, the Christ, the divinely-anointed Saviour. That belief meant he saw something that not everyone saw, and put the full weight of his life in trust on it (Matthew 19:27, John 6:68-69). That’s the faith that saves us: trusting in who Jesus is and what He has done for us. Peter follows Jesus in commending the faith of those who haven’t physically seen Jesus (John 20:29, 1 Peter 1:7-8).

God gave Peter a vision that showed him that this salvation was for anyone from any background, and that there could be no divisions between them, and faith was the proof of this (Acts 10:43, 15:7-9). Salvation is not about ethnic background; faith is not about merit, or effort. Whether you were an eyewitness of the resurrection, or 2,000 years later your mum told you about it; whether you have a

glorious Jewish heritage or a shady history you'd rather no-one knew about - we're all saved in the same way: through faith alone.

## **Equal standing**

The Greek word here was used to describe people who were foreigners but had become citizens of a country or empire and thus now had all the same rights and privileges as those born there. It's the logical conclusion of us receiving something rather than earning it, and of believing in Jesus rather than saving ourselves. We are all equal because Jesus has given each of us the same salvation by the same means.

When we get worried about hierarchies, inferiority or superiority complexes, we usually try to fix things by pulling everyone down to the same level. But Peter's point isn't that we're all rubbish but that all believers have been elevated by Jesus to the same heavenly rank (1 Peter 2:9). You could sit around a table with a thousand incredible Christians from around the world and across the centuries, and none of them would have a faith of greater value than yours. None of them would matter more to God than you.

If you have attended everything during our Week of Prayer, and prayed loads by yourself too; or if you haven't done a single thing about it, your faith is of the same value. If lockdown caused you to drop out of everything to do with church, whether it's all been too much or it's just been an excuse for you not to bother, your faith is of the same value as someone who is here and at small group and doing everything else every week. Whether you have been doing everything you can to protect others from possible virus transmission, or you've been acting like a super-spreader, your faith is of the same value.

Peter will have a lot to say about how we should live in the rest of this letter: it's vitally important because it proves the presence of saving faith. Some people will grow more, achieve more, love more than others, but he teaches us this in the context of reminding us of our equally-precious shared faith, given to us by God.

Recipients of this grace must make sure that we don't just enjoy this for ourselves but think this way about all believers. The ones you think are crazy, the ones you think are compromised, the ones who wind you up or have let you down. The easiest thing to do is look down on them but when those temptations come, why not instead of letting angry and frustrated thoughts fester in you, you pray 2 Peter 1:1-2 over those people? I think that will help you get God's perspective on them, and help you to forgive and care for them.

One day, we will sit with all believers. A wedding feast is one of the main images used in the Bible to describe eternal life. Whether our faith came with our dying breath or at the start of decades of selfless service, we will be at the feast together. Some may have more stories to tell, may even have received greater reward from God for what they did, but our eyes won't be on each other. All eyes will be on Jesus, the bridegroom who has brought each and every one of us to be with Him by the

same means of His precious blood. We will praise Him and eat with Him together in joyful unity forever.

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### **Questions for whole group discussion:**

- Who would you love to have a meal with? (Answers don't have to be Christian heroes like the ones Luke listed)
- Why do you think humans create hierarchies, look up and down at people?
- How is what Luke suggested not just a case of being nice to people around you?

### **Personal questions for smaller groups:**

- What lies do you tell yourself that are challenged by the gospel message of 2 Peter 1:1-2? These might be feelings of superiority or inferiority, or something else completely.
- Peter talks about grace and peace being "multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." This knowledge isn't just facts but experienced. How have you found your faith in Jesus is strengthened by this kind of knowledge?
- Is there someone in particular, or a group of people, who you find yourself looking down on? Feel free to give your reasons but then it's time to confess and repent, and pray these verses for them.