

□ 9. SPIRITUAL INDEPENDENCE

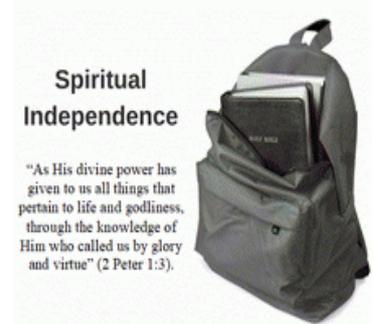
“As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3).

Introduction

What Peter says here is not for a corporate body, but for individual Christians. God has provided every *individual* Christian with all things that pertain to life and godliness.

God has provided each Christian with everything he needs to faithfully serve Him, regardless of what others choose to do. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't work together, but, rather, that we must each bear the responsibility for our own actions in our spiritual lives.

The aim of this lesson is to highlight a few of the responsibilities accompanying our independence, and consider the blessings and burdens of such.



1. Independent in serving God.

- While we have a free will and live as free men, we ought to live at all times as servants of God (1 Peter 2:16).
- God has provided all that we need to live a godly life: instructions (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and commands that we can obey (1 John 5:3; cp. Matthew 11:29-30).
- The blessing of such independence is that we can continue to serve God faithfully, even if others are unfaithful (Matthew 26:33; 2 Timothy 4:16-18). The burden we bear is in taking responsibility for our own actions and not being able to blame others (2 Corinthians 5:10; Ezekiel 18:20).

2. Independent in appealing to God.

- “Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath, the Christian’s native air”¹, and there are many verses exhorting us to this duty (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 4:2; 1 Peter 5:6-7).
- God has provided us with the ability to do this because it is through Christ that we have access to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16; 9:24), and the Spirit also makes intercession for us (Romans 8:26).
- The blessing of this independence in prayer is that we can come boldly to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16) without having to depend upon any human intermediary (cp. 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:1-2). The burden is on us to take the time to devote ourselves to prayer and develop the habit (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We must also learn *how* to pray (Luke 11:1).

3. Independent in studying the scriptures.

- It is impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6), and faith comes by the word of God (Romans 10:17). Some have an erroneous idea of faith – they think that when they hear and believe the gospel, that’s it! They now have faith! But **God expects us to grow in our faith** (2 Corinthians 10:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:3).
- God has provided His word; He revealed it to us (1 Corinthians 2:10-13) in a way that we can understand (2 Corinthians 1:13; Ephesians 3:3-4).
- The blessing in having God’s word is that we have access to everything He wants us to know (Deuteronomy 29:29). The burden is that we have an individual responsibility to study and understand (Ephesians 5:17; 1 Peter 2:2).

¹ From the hymn, “Prayer Is The Soul’s Sincere Desire” by James Montgomery.

4. Independent in standing against opposition.

- One thing very clearly taught in scripture is that each one of us will face opposition: we will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 1:6; 4:12; cp. Acts 14:22), trials and temptations (James 1:2, 12).
- God has provided all that we need to stand: the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18), and God's promise that we cannot be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). If one resists the devil, then he will flee (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9).
- The blessing of independently standing against opposition is that we can still stand even if everyone else falls (2 Timothy 4:16-17). The burden is that we must develop our own courage, steadfastness, and reliance and trust in the Lord (Hebrews 3:14-19; 2 Peter 3:14-18).

Summary

- ☞ We sing the song "I Have Decided To Follow Jesus". The first stanza reads, "I have decided to follow Jesus" and the third stanza reads, "Though none go with me, still I will follow". This accurately portrays the truth that **I** alone must make the decision to follow Jesus independently of others, and that **I** must continue to follow Him even if everyone else should decide to turn back.
- ☞ Each one must, independently, devote himself to serving God, prayer, and study. In all these things there are both blessings to enjoy and burdens to bear.
- ☞ One who devotes himself to serving God will, inevitably, face opposition, but He has provided all that we need to stand. We always have Jesus' promise: "I will never leave you nor forsake you". So we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Applications

- ☞ Come the Day of Judgment, each one of us will stand alone before the Lord to give an account for the deeds done in the flesh. It is essential, then, that we not measure our progress by comparing ourselves with others. We must keep pursuing godliness and holiness with every fibre of our being; even if our own brethren think we are strange (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrews 12:1-2).
- ☞ Let us not forget that it is God Himself that has "*given* to us all things that pertain to life and godliness". Such things we could not obtain ourselves; it is through His "divine power" that we possess them. We were saved by grace and it by His favor that we are able to work out our salvation (Philippians 2:12). This ought to prompt sincere thanksgiving, praise, and worship.
- ☞ Much of the emphasis of this lesson has been on our spiritual "independence". This doesn't mean we should isolate ourselves from our brethren. Indeed, we ought to take every opportunity to meet together (Acts 2:46) to encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13), build up one another (Romans 14:19), provide for one another (1 John 3:17), and provoke one another unto love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).