

# Explore the Bible: Building our Faith

August 30, 2016

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Sept. 18 focuses on 1 Peter 2:1-10.*

Many of us commonly pay for goods or services with a debit card or credit card. We either swipe the card or insert it in a chip reader. What happens next, invisible to the naked eye, is nothing short of fascinating.

One kind of e-reader or another takes the information on our card and sends it to a satellite thousands of miles in outer space. The satellite then sends it back to earth to the appropriate computer, located thousands of miles from where we are standing, which in turn reads it and sends it back.

The process is then reversed as the information goes from earth to the satellite and back to earth to the reader in which we first placed the card, telling the vendor our purchase is approved. All this happens at the speed of light, faster than cashiers could make change from physical money.

That's the nature of financial transactions these days. It all happens out of sight and in a place we cannot see. Unfortunately, it is easy to think of the nature of salvation in the way.

## **Gift, not transaction**

A person attends a worship service in which the gospel is preached. He or she believes a transaction of faith for grace is made in his or her heart. The individual makes a profession of faith, and the minister announces the person has been saved.

An event of eternal significance has occurred that no one can see. It's as if,

at the speed of light, a person sent faith to heaven and heaven responded just as quickly with saving grace.

Of course, grace is not a transaction. Salvation is the free gift of God through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23). Even the capacity to receive salvation is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9).

### **Truth and consequences**

Peter more fully develops what salvation looks like, how the transformed soul gives visible witness to what has happened in the heart visible only to God. In other words, when saving grace does its work, there is more happening than an eternal transaction recorded on some kind of digital ledger in heaven. There are earthly, proactive, intentional, existential consequences.

As we participate with God in God's saving work, we are responsible for working out our own salvation (Philippians 2:12) by working at replacing unredeemed human responses with Christlike responses to the human condition.

With this particular text, it's helpful to read the last verses first. That is where Peter makes the case that we, as redeemed children of God, have become part of God's royal family. This is language the first-century Jewish or Palestinian mind would have more easily grasped, but the meaning still comes through.

### **Under construction**

In particular, in verses 7-10, Peter lays out God's ultimate purpose. In Christ, God started the construction of a totally new and redeemed eternal kingdom. Peter uses metaphors that depict a temple under construction and the development of the royal family who will occupy and serve out of it.

Jesus Christ is the eternal cornerstone, the first laid, the source of ultimate stability. In his death, burial and resurrection, the kingdom of God is becoming on earth what it is, always has been and always will be in eternity. In his redemptive work, Christ has brought those of us who were once only strangers wandering the land into the bloodline of the most royal of all people.

### **Power to bless the weak and empower the powerless**

We often marvel at how the most common person in the United States can become president of the United States. Perhaps this is as much celebrated in the life of Abraham Lincoln, born in the backwater of American wilderness and yet ultimately holding the highest office in the land.

We also celebrate Lincoln because, like few others, saw his power as an instrument to serve others, not just enrich himself. So it is with the heavenly priesthood. In this royalty, all power bestowed on royalty is for the sole purpose of blessing and empowering the weakest and most powerless.

Having laid this groundwork, we can now return to the first verses in the text. In that portion, Peter commands that believers work—intentionally, intellectually and spiritually—at recognizing that which is spiritually immature and replacing it with the more spiritual attributes befitting our new standing in God's family.

Salvation is not a transaction that takes place in heaven on God's holy ledger. It is an all-encompassing. Both heaven and earth are merged into one as we become the eternal people of God treading this earthly place until all of God's royalty is reunited in our new and forever eternal temple.

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