*Simon Peter, a servant, and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith as equally valued as ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. Thus, He has given us, through these things, His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust and may become participants of the divine nature.* 2 Peter 1:1-4

*“A disciple is not above the teacher nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are two sparrows not sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. “Everyone, therefore, who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in Heaven, but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in Heaven. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household. “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.* Matthew 10:24-39

*A pastor came home and saw a group of the neighborhood children gathered around the front steps. He asked what it was they were doing.*

*"We're playing church" - one of the kids said.*

*The puzzled pastor inquired a bit more and asked what they do outside then.*

*"Well,” - another kid said - “we've already sung, prayed, and listened to the sermon. Now, we're all outside smoking."*

Now I Belong to Jesus.

1. *“The servant and the apostle of Jesus Christ”* – there are two important words in Peter’s opening of his letter. He calls himself: *“a servant”* and *“an apostle.”* The word *“servant”* however, in the days when this letter was written indicated a “slave” rather than a modern equivalent of the word *“servant.”* The meaning of the Greek word *“dulos,”* for this is the word translated as *“a servant,”* indicated, in the first century when this letter was written, not a position of an employee, but a position of *“a slave.”*

2. Today, the word *“slave”* has a very negative meaning, and slavery certainly was and still is wrong, but for millennia it was implemented by nearly every culture and tradition all over the world. I am not trying to defend slavery, but simply explain that it was not unique to a certain era, a certain country, culture, or tradition. It was a part of the reality of life. In the context of the Scriptures and the message Peter conveys here, we must see the particular type of relationship that existed between the master and the slave. The reason why in the English Bible (as well as in many other versions) the word *“slave”* has been translated as *“the servant,”* is simple, slave has no voice and free will but must follow the orders of the master.

3. Servant on the other hand is a person who is employed by someone and is free to accept the employment or not, as well as has a freedom to choose quitting the employment at any time. Slave does not have that luxury, slave is a *“subject,”* not even considered a *“person.”* Slave is totally dependent on the owner and does not have any freedom of doing anything on its own. I believe that Peter, (as well as Paul) call himself a *“slave”* to choose and accept his total dependence on his *“master,” with one exception. He does it of his own free will.*  For Peter, to be a *“servant”* of Jesus means to offer himself wholly and fully, with his soul, his body, and his spirit in the service of the Lord. He reminds us that we too belong to Jesus and must offer our absolute obedience to Him. This is probably the most difficult option humanity can accept. As a species, humans do not want to be obedient to anyone but themselves. Yet, the Bible shows us that as the prophets of the Old Testament rejoiced in calling themselves to be the *“slaves of Yahweh,”* so does Peter and so does Paul. The point Peter makes is that he wants us to be like he is. This is, however, possible only if we possess faith of equal standing to his, when he writes: *“to those who have received a faith as equally honorable as ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ”* (v.1).

4. *“The equally valued faith,”* Peter writes about, means that nobody who truly believes in Jesus Christ is less important and means less then Peter, the disciple and the Apostle of Jesus did. In Jesus we are all equal. Paul too will say the same while writing to Galatians 3:28: *“There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”* Peter wants all of us to see the same equality here and since he calls himself the *“servant – the slave”* of Jesus, we can, and we ought to do this also. We indeed, all of us, are the slaves, the servants of the Lord. But as Jesus said, this bondage is not in a form of suffering or punishment, but it is a *“sweet union.”* Peter’s words suggest that being a slave of Jesus does not carry any negative connotations, especially considering that at the same time he speaks of him being an *“apostle”* to. To be an *“apostle”* of Jesus, whom Peter indicates we are too, means to be, in modern terms, an *“ambassador”* of Jesus, His representative. Can anyone possess any higher honor that to be the *“representative*” of the Son of God? Being a special envoy is hardly a negative description of one’s function and yet, being a *“slave of Jesus”* indicates exactly that.

5. Peter continues: *“May grace and peace be yours in abundance.”* There is no more beautiful prayer offered for others then the one which Peter offers in this letter: *“Peace and grace.”* Furthermore this *“peace and grace”* are to be extended lavishly. True believers do not need anything else to be assured that the Lord is with them. And Peter’s wishes this to all those to whom Jesus Christ is indeed the Lord and Savior. This assurance comes through his knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ but what this knowledge is and where does it come from? Some scholars argue that this *“knowledge”* indicates the philosophical and theological trend popular in the first and second century and known as *“gnosis”* (knowledge), which would indicate the acceptance of Christ through the *“intellectual means”* and unfortunately, in our times this concept once again becomes more and more popular among Christian scholars. Today, for many people Jesus is the founder of a religion, but He is not regarded to be a reality. Peter wants to clear this issue and he says that we need to know Jesus Christ, not the religion known today as Christianity. The real knowledge of God and of Christ is found only in a close relationship with Jesus, and as Christians we must know Christ and not the religion as doctrinized by the teachings of the Church. The religion is a consequence of our knowledge of Jesus, not the other way around. The knowledge of religion allows us to follow the rules but not to be influenced by them.

6. Only through the real knowledge of Christ instilled by faith, not through the intellectual dissertations, we may offer a real worship and a real service to the Lord. As His followers we have been granted His divine powers granted to us through and with His peace and grace, and these allow us to live a life of godliness, it is a life of a believer made anew in Christ. It is the life of a Christian in whom Christ lives. Without the knowledge of Christ it is impossible to live such a new life. To such life Jesus calls all of us. The sufferings of Christians in the hands of the Roman Empire may not be understood intellectually, no matter how much historical, actual knowledge of the events we may possess. Without faith, without Christ’s inspiration we do not understand how their suffering might be considered a blessing or a life full of peace and grace. And yet, even in the midst of all the atrocities, true believers focused on the life of patience, integrity, and compassion. Peter calls this a *“gift of God.”* Only because of the power of Jesus the Early, persecuted Church to whom Peter addressed this letter could not only survive but spread the Gospel. In Peters view, they were all the apostles of Jesus Christ.

7. Jesus gave us precious and great promises. These promises are the heart of our faith. One of these promises we read in Matthew 10:32 *“Everyone, therefore, who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in Heaven.”* This promise assures us of that what is most important for every Christian. Because of Jesus’ promises we may look into the eternal life, the spiritual life, one that cannot be explained in an intellectual fashion. That life may and must be experienced through faith. Jesus promised this to His disciples and consequently to all of those who will follow Him and who will acknowledge Him as their *“Master.”* This is what Jesus promised us, His Church. So, we may become the partakers of His divine nature. At every *“celebration of life”* service for a Christian I offer, I include the words of understanding of what happens in our baptism: *“When we were was baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into His death and in this baptism buried with Him sharing His death, so that just as He was raised from the dead by the glorious power of God, we might be too.”* This is what we believe.

8. Peter says that to experience Christ and the knowledge of Him is not a mechanical process in which we imitate Jesus, but it means that we need to indwell (*to exist as an inner activating spirit, force, or principle*) in Christ. It is not only Peter who say this. Apostle Paul, in Galatians 2:20 say: *“it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.”* The knowledge of Christ indicates the ultimate goal the fellowship offers. It means to be *“born to a new life,”* to be *“risen with Christ.”* It is a necessary transition. It tells us that we must escape the corruption of this world created by a human passion and desire. It means we must leave the old ways and begin life in the new ways. The dominance of the human nature must be ousted. We indeed must be a *“new creation”* filled with the spirit of God in everything we do. This all comes only through faith.